

YALE JUDAICA SERIES

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VOLUME XIII

THE MIDRASH ON PSALMS

(MIDRASH TEHILLIM)

The Midrash on Psalms

(THE FIRST OF TWO VOLUMES)

TRANSLATED FROM THE HEBREW AND ARAMAIC BY

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FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN
SEKRETARIAT DER BIBLIOTHEK

NEW HAVEN

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1959

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Library of Congress catalog card number: 58-6535

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EDITOR'S NOTE

On July 1, 1956, Professor Julian J. Obermann retired as editor of the Yale Judaica Series, while generously retaining his editorial supervision of three volumes which were in the course of preparation. He had just sent to the press the first of these volumes when an illness against which he had been struggling for several years overcame him. He died on October 17.

Perhaps only those intimately familiar with the progress of the Series can fully appreciate the enormous amount of thought and labor as well as the dedicated devotion which Professor Obermann gave to it from the beginning, some fifteen years ago. His careful planning, his insistence on high standards of scholarship, accuracy, and precision, and his unfailing readiness to advise and help contributed largely toward making the Series what it is today. His advice, out of the wealth of his editorial experience, will be sorely missed.

The future volumes of the Series will, it is hoped, continue the tradition established by Professor Obermann.

New Haven
November 1958

L. N.

chant the Psalms,

and

To my wife, Pen, but for whose
faith and love this work might not
have been done

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INTRODUCTION

I.

The Midrashic method of interpreting Scripture is old. Throughout Talmudic literature there is ample evidence that the method existed in Palestine well before the Common Era. Moreover, Palestinian Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Hellenistic Jewish writings, and the New Testament contain abundant material that makes use of this method. An allusion to it may even be found as early as the time of Ezra who, for the benefit of his compatriots returning from Babylonia, reinterpreted parts of Scripture which appeared strange or antiquated to them.¹

Though the method is old, it was not until the second century of the Common Era that the compiling of Midrashim was actually begun, and thereafter it was continued throughout the Talmudic period well into the Middle Ages. But even post-Talmudic Midrashim—which, to be sure, occasionally have local and temporary coloring—are in effect new literary arrangements of old material that goes back to Talmudic times.

It is to this type of later Midrashim that the Midrash on Psalms (Midrash Tehillim) belongs. On the basis of internal evidence, such as a possible allusion to the Moslem caliphate (6.2), a supposed reference to Apulia and Sicily (9.8), and similar instances of local and temporary coloring,² some scholars have concluded that Midrash Tehillim was compiled in Italy and as late as the ninth century. Nevertheless, as in all other Midrashim, the overwhelming body of material in Midrash Tehillim goes back to the Talmudic period.

Like other Midrashic works which are inspired by certain

1. See Neh. 8:8; and introduction to *Mekilta dē-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. Lauterbach, Philadelphia, 1933.

2. See below, p. xxvii. Other instances are a reference to the Goths (25.14); a late Latin word like *locotenentes* (149.1); and an Arabic phrase used to explain a Hebrew word (119.59).

books or passages in Scripture, Midrash Tehillim, as the name implies, is inspired by the Psalms (in Hebrew *Tēhillim*). The Midrash consists of a succession of homilies upon various words or verses in the Psalter and upon related passages throughout Scripture. These homilies in miniature are generally introduced by the phrase Rabbi So-and-so said, or stated, or taught, or commented, or interpreted, or expounded. Sometimes a Rabbi in whose name a homily is reported is said to be transmitting the teaching of another Rabbi; sometimes this other Rabbi may in turn be transmitting the teaching of still another Rabbi. Sometimes these homilies are given in the name of the Masters, the Rabbis, the Sages, or the Amoraim (see Glossary, below) without specifying their names. Finally, some comments are given without any introductory reference to authors, whether specified or unspecified.

Of the teachers whose sayings are reported in Midrash Tehillim, the earliest in point of time are Hillel and Shammai (*ca.* 1st century B.C.E.) whose dicta are quoted on the problem of how much water is required for a ritual bath of purification (17A.1). Next to them in point of time comes R. Johanan ben Zakkai (*fl.* 1st century C.E.), to whom is attributed a ruling concerning the poor man's tithe during a Sabbatical year (25.13). With the exception of a few Rabbis whose country of origin cannot be determined, and with the exception of a few who were both Babylonian and Palestinian, the majority of teachers whom Midrash Tehillim cites by name were Palestinian.³ No authorities of the post-Talmudic period are cited by name.

3. Among the teachers whose country of origin cannot be determined and who are cited by name in MTeh are the following: R. Abijah, R. Aḥa ben Papa, R. Ḥalafta ben Jacob, and R. Huna ben R. Isaac.

Among the teachers of Babylonian birth who settled in Palestine and are cited by name in MTeh are the following: R. Ḥanina [ben Ḥama] of the first generation of Amoraim; R. Abba ben Zabda of the second generation; R. Abba ben Papa, R. Ḥiyya ben Abba, R. Hoshaya, R. Jacob, and R. Zeera of the third generation; and R. Abin and R. Ḥelbo of the fourth generation of Amoraim.

However, the majority of teachers cited by name in MTeh were Palestinian by birth and upbringing, as is evident from the lists which follow. To begin with, MTeh quotes many Tannaim: Rabban Gamaliel II, R. Pappias, R. Eliezer ben Hircanus, R. Joshua ben Ḥananiah, Samuel the Little, and R. Eleazar the Modite

Besides miniature homilies in the name of many Palestinian and some Babylonian Rabbis, Midrash Tehillim also contains numerous accounts of the lives and personalities of these Rabbis. We are told, for example, of Jose ben Joezer's death as a martyr (ca. 161 B.C.E.) and his dramatic last words (11.7); we are told of Shemaiah and Abtalyon (ca. 1st century B.C.E.) who, albeit descendants of Canaanite proselytes, taught Torah to great multitudes (1.18); of R. Zechariah ben hak-Ḳaṣṣab's extraordinary act of self-denial (6.8); of R. Jose the Priest (ca. 90-130 C.E.) and his zeal to study Torah (1.18 and note 81 *ad loc.*); of R. Akiba, R. Ḥanina ben Teradion and the other eight martyrs of Hadrian's persecution (9.13); of R. Meir's (ca. 130-160 C.E.) torment by a wicked infidel (104.27); of R. Simeon ben Yoḥai (ca. 130-160 C.E.) who, in hiding from the Romans, lived for thirteen years in a cave (17.13); of R. Jose ben Ḥalafta's (ca. 130-160 C.E.) wit as a child and his tact as an adult (50.3, 2.11); of R. Joḥanan's (d.

of the second generation (90-130 C.E.); R. Ishmael, R. Akiba, R. Tarfon, R. Jose the Galilean, and Ben Azzai of the younger group of the second generation; R. Meir, R. Jose ben Ḥalafta, R. Judah ben R. Ilai, R. Eleazar ben Shammua, R. Eliezer ben Jacob, R. Eleazar ben R. Jose the Galilean, and R. Joshua ben Karḥa of the third generation (ca. 130-160); R. Phinehas ben Jair, R. Simeon ben Eleazar, and R. Judah the Prince of the fourth generation; and R. Ḥiyya bar Abba, Bar Kappara, and R. Simeon ben Ḥalafta of the fifth generation.

As for later teachers, MTeh quotes R. Yannai, Judah and Hezekiah sons of R. Ḥiyya, R. Jose ben Zimra, R. Simeon ben Jehozadak, R. Joshua ben Levi, and Zabdi ben Levi, who were of the first generation of Palestinian Amoraim; while of their contemporaries in Babylonia MTeh quotes Rab (d. 247) and Samuel (d. 254). It quotes R. Joḥanan bar Nappaha (d. 279), R. Simeon ben Lakish, R. Jose ben Ḥanina, R. Ḥama ben Hanina, and R. Tanḥum ben Hanilai, who were of the second generation of Palestinian Amoraim; while of their contemporaries in Babylonia it quotes R. Huna (d. 297) and R. Judah ben Ezekiel (d. 299). It quotes R. Samuel ben Nahman, R. Levi, R. Eleazar ben Pedat, R. Abbaḥu, R. Ammi, R. Asi, R. Samuel ben R. Isaac, R. Abba bar Kahana, R. Simeon ben Pazzi, and R. Ḥanina ben Papa of the third generation of Palestinian Amoraim; while of their contemporaries in Babylonia it quotes R. Nahman (d. 329). MTeh quotes R. Jeremiah, R. Haggai, R. Helbo, R. Aḥai, R. Ḥanina ben Isaac, R. Yudan, R. Judah ben R. Simon, R. Aibu, and R. Joshua ben Nehemiah of the fourth generation of Palestinian Amoraim; while of their contemporaries in Babylonia it quotes R. Adda ben Ahaba. Finally, MTeh quotes R. Jonah, R. Phinehas the Priest ben Ḥama, R. Berechiah, and R. Tanḥuma of the fifth generation of Palestinian Amoraim.

279 c.e.) self-imposed fasts (17A.19; 103.7); of Samuel ben Abba (d. 254 c.e.), who said that he was as familiar with the paths of heaven as with those of his native town (19.4); of the abundance at the table of R. Judah the Prince, the longevity of R. Joshua ben Kārḥa, and the poverty of R. Simeon ben Ḥalafta (9.7, 92.13, 92.8).

In addition to what Midrash Tehillim tells us about the lives and personalities of sundry Rabbis, it also alludes to events in Jewish Biblical and post-Biblical history and legend. Thus we are told that after the First Temple was destroyed, the princes of Judah were made to walk naked along the edge of the river (137.3); and that when ordered to sing to Nebuchadnezzar the songs of Zion, the Levites mangled their thumbs in order to render themselves incapable of playing their instruments (137.5). We are told of the Greeks' deference to Simon the Just (18.11); and of the saintliness of the sons of Mattathias (30.6); we are told of the preference given to the scanty burnt offerings of the poor rather than to the numerous burnt offerings of the rich Agrippa (*ca.* 10 B.C.E.-44 c.e.) (22.31); we are told of the nephew of Titus who, at the destruction of the Second Temple, boasted with his bloody sword in hand that he had slain God Himself (121.3); and we are told of R. Joshua ben Ḥananiah's successful plea to those who in their grief, after the destruction of the Second Temple, refused to eat meat and drink wine (137.6).

Midrash Tehillim contains frequent references to Rome and the Romans. Remus and Romulus, we are told, were nursed by a she-wolf in milk which God had made ready for them (17.12). We are told a number of things about the Emperor Hadrian, such as his persecution of the Jews in 135 c.e. (16.4, 12.15), his imposition of a capital levy on the Land of Israel (12.1), and his attempt to find out the depth of the Adriatic Sea (93.6). We are told further of Ben Kufya, a Roman who suffered a martyr's death (9.13), of Antoninus, the Roman friend of R. Judah (d. about 217 c.e.), who in the time-to-come will be the first of complete proselytes to be accepted (22.20), and of Diocletian (284-305) who dug the Sea of Emessa (24.6).

2.

The miniature homilies of Midrash Tehillim are, in Buber's edition, based on all but four of the 150 Psalms. In some Psalms, 1 and 4 for instance, homiletical comments are found on almost every word of the Biblical text; in most of the Psalms, however, the comments deal only with certain selected verses; and at times only with the opening and closing verse.

Psalms or sections in Midrash Tehillim generally begin with a quotation from a Psalm. The quotation is usually considered in the light of a citation from another passage in Scripture which in wording or in thought appears to be related to it. Thereupon follow one of two or more interpretations of the citation. It is the last of these interpretations which is intended to illumine, to amplify, or to explain the original quotation. To cite an example: Psalm 52 refers to Doeg's slandering of Ahimelech, the priest of Nob who paid with his life for innocently giving shelter to David. The commentator in the Midrash begins by quoting the first verse of the Psalm *For the leader. Maschil of David; when Doeg came and told Saul: 'David is come to the house of Ahimelech'*; then citing *Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt* (Eccles. 5:5), he suggests that the Psalm is to be read in the light of this verse from Ecclesiastes. Thereupon follow several possible interpretations of the citation *Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt*. It may mean, Suffer not thy mouth to promise rashly that thou wilt give charity, and then not give. It may mean, Suffer not thy mouth to pretend to learning which is not thine. But it may also mean, Suffer not thy mouth to speak slander *which will bring thy flesh into guilt*, that is, cause it to be smitten with leprosy, the disease wherewith Miriam and Doeg were smitten and wherewith all who speak slander are ultimately smitten.

The way in which interpretations in Midrash Tehillim are worked out is of course not that of historical or literary exegesis as generally understood. Rabbinic interpretations, as we have already indicated, are homiletical and nonliteral in character. The inter-

pretations which the Rabbis read into or drew out of a text were in keeping with their view that the Torah reflected all kinds of meaning. They believed that every word in Scripture had "seventy aspects," seventy being symbolic of an infinite number. Their procedure with texts is based upon the belief that the Torah discovers to each good man whatever meaning he is capable of finding in it. Nevertheless, the exponents of Midrash, in the words of Zunz, "wished neither to falsify Scripture nor to deprive it of its natural meaning."⁴ They knew the difference between Midrash, which is the search into inner meaning of texts, and *pēšaṭ*,⁵ which is the presentation of the plain meaning of texts.

Of special interest to the homilists of Midrash Tehillim is the search for inner meaning in the titles of the Psalms (8.1, 9.1, and elsewhere); in acrostics (3.3, 5.5); in anagrams (9.17, 14.3); in methods of interchanging letters of the alphabet (87.6, 90.13); in the numerical values of Hebrew letters (4.3, 19.7, 25.5, 27.4, and elsewhere); in numerical correspondences in series of verses, phrases, words, and events (1.8, 9.14, 18.8, and elsewhere); in *ḳēri* and *ḳētib* (9.7, 11.1, 22.19, and elsewhere); and in full and defective readings in the text of Scripture (9.1, 80.3).

Though most interpretations in Midrash Tehillim are homiletical, searching out inner meanings of words and passages, nevertheless these interpretations occasionally contain material which is of some interest to modern exegetes. Thus, in the manner of a modern exegete, Midrash Tehillim expounds literally the passage in 2 Sam. 17:27 which lists the gifts brought by Barzillai to David (MTeh 3.3). It interprets literally the commination uttered in Ps. 83:14-19 against the ten nations who were enemies of Israel (MTeh 83.3).⁶ Now and then it discusses, in the manner of a modern lexicographer, the root meaning of a word such as *nsk* in

4. See his *Die gottesdienstliche Vorträge der Juden* (2d ed. Frankfurt a. M., 1892), p. 340.

5. Or *mišmā'*, "ordinary sense," from a root meaning "to hear." See MTeh 3.3; and Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, 1956), I, 24-26.

6. Cf. the parallel exposition in A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, Cambridge, 1906.

Ps. 2:6 (JV, "established,") which, according to Midrash Tehillim, may mean "anointed," "melted," or "made great" (MTeh 2.8).⁷ Or it sets down the precise definition of a word, such as the distinction in meaning between *sinnah*, a large shield covering the whole body, and *maḡen*, a buckler (MTeh 1.3).⁸ Or, concerning itself with the exact location of a place, it asserts that Doeg was not an Edomite alien but one of the people of Judah who lived not far from Jerusalem—in Nob and beyond it on the ascent of Adummim—and were therefore known as Edomites (MTeh 52.4). Or it considers the coordination of clauses, such as the series in Ps. 19:8 (MTeh 19.14).

In short, though homiletical interpretation takes up the greater portion of Midrash Tehillim, examples of literal interpretation are scattered throughout the work.

3.

Midrash Tehillim, as is already apparent, is a *mélange* of many things. It speaks almost literally of cabbages and kings, ranging as it does from the radishes and cucumbers served at the table of a Roman ruler, to the prayer which God, the King of kings, directs to Himself (9.7, 76.3); from the two drops of ointment which like two pearls hung upon the beard of Aaron, to Adam's smiting of two stones out of which man-made light first sprang forth (133.1, 92.4); from the foundation pits of the altar, set to swallow up men's sins—pits more ancient and perhaps deeper than the great abyss—to the sacred meaning of the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet (11.12, 25.5); from observations on the frivolity of kissing, to a pithy characterization of four languages—the Roman as best for battle, the Greek for song, the Persian for lamentation, and the Hebrew for prayer (2.12, 31.7).

Like a great river filling up many estuaries in its path, the

7. Cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v.

8. *Ibid.*, s.v.

Midrash on Psalms moves into innumerable areas of human thought and imagination: from angels, each of whom bears graven upon his heart a kind of seal, to the demon called Bitter Destruction—to him of shaggy hair, glaring out of his one eye which is set in the middle of his heart (17.3, 91.3); from blessings, the saying of which releases the earth's fullness to man's use, to the ten curses heaped against Edom (16.1, 83.3); from mountains which came from afar to offer themselves as mountains on which the Torah could be given, to the size of the celestial creatures harnessed to the chariot of God (68.9, 4.3).

All these matters, and many more, ranging from the plain meaning of single words and passages in Scripture to great concepts, such as God and His nature, man, Israel and Torah, sin, suffering, and the marvels of the days of the Messiah—all these come tumbling one upon the other in sequences which people accustomed to western types of writing would regard as neither orderly nor logical. These sequences are determined invariably by a verse from a Psalm or a verse from any other part of Scripture with which the homilist begins, or any other further verse that he has occasion to cite as the homily develops. In other words, the text of Scripture is what matters. It is the text which governs the context, whatever the context be, whether a saw or a story, a proverb or a parable. All that is taught in the Midrash, taught by Rabbis named or unnamed, is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says in one passage and says again in somewhat similar words, under related, comparable, or contrasting circumstances in another passage. The correspondences in words or situations are used by the Rabbis as a means of bringing forth significances or lessons which the reader of Scripture would otherwise not discern.

Thus the significance of the description of God as *Shepherd of Israel* (Ps. 80:2) is disclosed by considering the phrase *Shepherd of Israel* in the light of what another passage in Scripture says under related circumstances. Concerning that other passage, R. Samuel bar Nahmani teaches: The miracle of the necessities of life is greater than the miracle of redemption, for while re-

demption depends upon an angel, as Jacob said, *The angel who hath redeemed me from all evil* (Gen. 48:16), the necessities of life come directly from the hand of the Holy One, blessed be He, as Jacob said, *The God who hath been my Shepherd all my life long unto this day* (*ibid.*, 48:15). And so *Shepherd of Israel* is disclosed as meaning He who provides for the necessities of life and daily performs miracles even greater than the miracle of redemption from intermittent danger.

The reader unfamiliar with Midrash may regard such intense analysis of Scripture as a kind of bibliolatriy. For the Rabbis it was no such thing. For them it was one of the several ways of worshiping God and of comprehending the mystery of His providence. So when the Rabbis come upon the verse *I will be glad and rejoice in Thee* (Ps. 9:3), they are first taken by the phrase *in Thee*, indicated by the Hebrew word *bḵ*. Meditating upon this word the Rabbis make two comments. The first of the comments is based on a theory that besides the plain meaning of a word, an additional meaning is simultaneously conveyed by the numerical value represented in the letters of the word. And so, according to the numerical value of the letters *b* and *ḵ*, the Psalmist, says the commentator, is saying: I will be glad and rejoice in that which is written in an alphabet of twenty-two letters—twenty-two being equal to the sum of *b* (2) and *ḵ* (20)—rejoice, that is, in Thy Torah. This comment is not bibliolatriy in the ordinary sense of that word. For the Rabbis, meditation upon the Torah constitutes man's valiant attempt to understand and to be guided by an aspect of God which He chose to reveal to humankind—by the aspect, that is, of Torah.

Now let us consider the second comment made on the words *I will be glad and rejoice in Thee*, the comment in which these words are taken to mean "I will be glad . . . in Thy deliverance." The juxtaposing of the two comments seems deliberate—seems to imply that the joy and gladness which are given to the man who meditates upon Torah are as great as the joy and gladness vouchsafed to him whom God delivers from fear or sorrow.

A passage such as the one just quoted is readily intelligible

even to those accustomed to other kinds of discourse. Unfortunately, the style of the Rabbis is too often so cryptic that the reader feels he faces a kind of super shorthand.⁹

The Rabbis themselves are not altogether to blame for the occasional bits of cryptography which make the reading of Midrashic texts difficult. The Midrashim were originally full-length sermons delivered by different preachers on different occasions, some on holidays, some on Sabbaths. These discourses were preserved not as collections of sermons but as running commentaries on Scripture. Accordingly, what the disciples of a distinguished preacher may have recorded in great haste at the time the sermon was delivered was later copied into other works and made part of those works without reference to the particular situations which gave verve and full meaning to the original utterance. The world of Midrash may thus be described as a garden of dried flowers. And at times only a combination of love, reverence, and learning can breathe life into leaves and blossoms which to a hasty and unsympathetic eye appear to be dead.

Cryptic as the comments appear now and then to be, the Rabbis' juxtaposing of verses from all parts of Scripture sometimes makes the Midrash appear all the more cryptic. It is true of course that by culling out kindred words and expressions from various parts of Scripture and juxtaposing them the Rabbis were often able to achieve a deeper understanding of the particular text with which they dealt.¹⁰ But this is only a partial explanation of why the Rabbis drew together seemingly unrelated passages from all parts of Scripture. The verse *I say unto the arrogant: "You shall not deal arrogantly"* (Ps. 75:5) provides a specific example in which a verse and a seemingly un-

9. Apropos the baffling character of Midrashic writings, R. Moses of Kobryn (fl. 19th cent.) is reported to have said: "In each generation at least one man is given the means to understand the Zohar; but not even one man in a generation is capable of understanding Midrash, it being closed up, and sealed . . . until the coming of the Messiah." See *'Or Lay-yēlarim*, p. 12, as quoted in S. J. Agnon, *Sefer, sofer, we-sippur* (Jerusalem, 1938), p. 54.

10. See above, p. xviii, and William G. Braude, "The Relevance of Midrash," *Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis*, 65 (1955), 132-142.

related allusion are juxtaposed. This verse, the Rabbis declare in what appears to be an arbitrary way, alludes to Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab. Having brought the two together, the Rabbis in the Midrash go on to observe about her that in one day she knew four great joys: she saw her brother-in-law Moses made king, her husband Aaron made High Priest, her brother Nahshon made prince, and her sons Eleazar and Ithamar made adjutants of the High Priest. But then her two other sons, Nadab and Abihu, went in to make offerings and were devoured by fire, as is said, *And there came forth fire from before the Lord, and devoured them* (Lev. 10:2).¹¹ Evidently the Rabbis made the connection between the verse of the Psalm and Elisheba, mother of Nadab and Abihu, because they thought that she was arrogant, though there seems to be no evidence for this assumption. How then are we to explain such seemingly arbitrary conjunctions, of which there are quite a few in Midrash Tehillim?

L. Rabinowitz, among others, propounds the theory that "there existed at one time in Palestine the custom of reading the Book of Psalms in a triennial cycle on Sabbath afternoons, corresponding to the triennial cycle of the Pentateuch."¹² Now let us assume, and this Rabinowitz endeavors to demonstrate, that the reading of Psalm 75 fell on the Day of Atonement, when the opening verse in the Scriptural lesson dealt with the fiery death of Elisheba's sons, Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:2). A bold and imaginative preacher, meditating on the extraordinary good fortune that befell Elisheba, might fall to speculate on the dangers which inhere in great success and on this particular mother's possible arrogance—an arrogance which mortals, being what they are, should not indulge in.

In his comprehensive exposition of the triennial cycle, Jacob Mann refers to the "union of the three divisions of the Bible" which the preacher always sought to demonstrate to his audience, and suggests a pattern of liturgical readings in Scripture

11. MTeh 75.2.

12. L. Rabinowitz, "Does Midrash Tillim Reflect the Triennial Cycle of Psalms," *JQR*, new ser. 26 (1936), 349 ff.

which goes far toward explaining the apparently unrelated juxtapositions which occur in Midrashic texts. According to Mann, an analysis of the *Aggadath Bereshith* (ed. Buber, Cracow, 1902), revealing as it does the selection of specific Psalms for recitation on given Sabbaths, illustrates the Psalter's close association with the Pentateuch and the Prophets in the Scriptural lessons assigned to Sabbaths in the liturgical year.¹³ The special patterns whereby the Psalter was at one time intertwined with the Pentateuch and the Prophets in the public reading of Scripture cannot now be readily recovered.¹⁴ That they cannot be recovered is a great pity, because the artistry and coherence which probably characterized the original homilies, comments, and expositions are now in part effaced.

4.

One does not expect Midrash Tehillim to have a theological scheme or a historical system of its own, different from those of the standard works of the period. Still, it is worth while to select certain characteristic utterances in Midrash Tehillim in which its views on these matters are set forth.

In theology—in its views of God, of Torah and Israel, of chastisements and sin, of reward and punishment, and of the world-to-come—Midrash Tehillim represents universal and native Jewish tradition: God is the root of the world (6.1). He is one; and His three names, *God, God, the Lord*,¹⁵ mentioned in Ps. 50:1, are in truth one name, as a man may say: "Artisan, builder, and architect." The three names stand for the three attributes of wis-

13. Mann promised in a subsequent volume of his work to summarize this use of the Psalter. See his *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue* (Cincinnati, 1940), pp. 12, 15. Professor Isaiah Sonne of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, who is editing the late Dr. Mann's manuscripts, informs me in a letter that "volume III of Dr. Mann's work does not exist." It is a pity that Mann did not live to finish his great work.

14. Where these patterns probably come together, as they do, according to Mann, in the case of Gen. 14:1 ff. and Psalm 2 (See *The Bible as Read*, p. 111, n. 107a), a comparison of the two passages involved is illuminating.

15. In Hebrew 'El, 'Elohim, 'Adonay.

dom, understanding, and knowledge, by which the world was created (50.1). God remains above all praises wherewith men would exalt Him (19.2, 22.19, 104.2).

The Torah, which existed before Creation (72.6, 90.12, 93.3), was meant for all mankind. And so when revelation came, God's voice divided itself into seven voices, and from the seven voices passed into the seventy languages of the seventy nations (68.6). But the nations would not have the Torah (68.11). Now and then, however, proselytes from the nations accepted the Torah and occupied themselves with it. Such proselytes are equal in worth to the High Priest (1.18, 146.8).

For the people of Israel, the Torah is not a burden but a song (119.41), its commandments a mark of distinction (20.5); the mere study of them can curb temptation (34.2). On the other hand, the neglect of Torah is as grave a wrong as serving other gods (119.4). Preventing its study can lead to the destruction of the world (75.1, 76.4).

Chastisements are often evidences of God's love (12.5, 38.1), and are imposed on the righteous who stand firm under trials (11.4). Indeed, because of Israel's endurance of chastisements, three precious gifts—Torah, the world-to-come, and the Land of Israel—were given to the people of Israel (94.2).

Sin makes a man's strength fail (31.9), and deprives God of His joy in the earth (148.4). But God, whose providence encompasses even a bird's flight (17.13, 75.3), is merciful, stirring up only part of His wrath (78.8), letting Himself be won over by His creatures (4.6). The punishment imposed by God is tempered, for it is not exacted in full (30.4) and never lasts for more than three generations (103.15). But when retribution comes, it is precise (10.3, 8.2). And ultimately, in the world-to-come, the wicked shall know whom they have vexed, while the righteous shall know for whom they have labored (17.14, 22.32).

In God's economy, however, sin, too, has its place. But for the Evil impulse, the world could not endure, since no man would take a wife unto himself or beget children with her (9.1).

We do not know the reward for the fulfillment of the different

precepts (9.2); and such rewards as are given in this world are merely a token (111.2). As for the world-to-come, one can only guess at the rewards prepared there for the righteous (22.32, 9.2). According to one teacher, every good man will have a world to himself, and a garden of Eden to himself (34.2).

Similarly, in its theological conception of history, of events and personalities in the Biblical and post-Biblical periods, Midrash Tehillim reflects universal and native Jewish tradition. For the authors of Midrash Tehillim, historical past, present, and future are rolled up into God's single and all embracing vision of things, a glimpse of which He occasionally vouchsafes to Patriarchs, kings, and Prophets who move through the pages of Scripture. Thus Adam is enabled to see the four kingdoms—Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome—reign and perish; and is shown a descendant of Jesse ruling in the time-to-come (92.12). Abraham is taught by God, and therefore knows the rabbinic regulations concerning the *'erub* (1.13), and is able to keep the entire Torah (112.1).

In a vision of the Torah, the Temple, Gehenna, and the darkness of exile, Abraham is told that violation by his children of Torah's precepts will lead to the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of its expiatory rites; that thereupon his children will have to face the choice of punishment in Gehenna or chastisement under the four kingdoms, and that he is to choose for his children the yoke of the kingdoms (40.4, 52.8). Abraham is assured that in God's own time this yoke will be lifted, the Messiah will enter upon his kingdom, and the kings of the earth will come and bow down to the Messiah (2.3), who will be called after God's own name (21.2), will be given glory and majesty (104.5), and will teach the nations thirty precepts (21.1), but whose power will depend on his righteous judgments (72.5).

Abraham's war against the four kings (Gen. 14)—a prefiguring of Israel's struggle with the four kingdoms—is waged not with shield and buckler but with the help of the Righteous One of the universe who attends his steps. No wonder then that the very dust of the ground which Abraham throws against his ene-

mies turns into javelins and swords, and the stubble into bows and arrows (110.2).

David is no mere warrior king. He rises at midnight to occupy himself with Torah (22.8, 57.4); at all times he longs to be in a house of study (25.4). His chief administrative achievement is neither military nor economic, but the apportionment of watches of priests and Levites in the Temple (1.1, 78.21) to minister to the glory of God. The Kerethites and Pelethites who make up David's personal guard are in truth judicial experts from whose verdict there is no appeal (3.3). And Doeg and Ahithophel, one a courtier and the other a counselor, are, in the imagination of the Rabbis, heads of the Sanhedrin (49.2). Ahaz, who did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God, closes the schools and thereby prevents the study of Torah (2.10). Hezekiah, who did what was right in the sight of the Lord his God, brings to the city of Jerusalem every good teacher he comes upon, every man skilled in the systematic arrangement of traditions (87.5).

In short, history is a manifestation of the will of God working in the lives of those whom He selects to do His will.

5.

The name Midrash Tehillim, which we have been using, occurs first in the *'Aruḳ*, a dictionary of the Talmud compiled in the 11th century by Nathan of Rome (*s.v. sahar*). The work is also referred to by the following titles: *Haggadah dē-Tillim* (*'Aruḳ*, *s.v. parma'*), or *Haggadaṭ Tēhillim* (*ibid.*, *s.v. pišpaš*), or *'Aggadaṭ Tēhillim* (in a comment on Deut. 33:7 by Rashi [1040–1105]); and *Šoher Toḥ* (in a comment on Deut. 4:7 by R. Samuel ben Meir [*ca.* 1085–1174]), a name which has come into use because the Midrash begins with the words *šoher toḥ*, that is, *He that diligently seeketh good* (Prov. 11:29).

The age of Midrash Tehillim can be determined only approximately. It seems that as early as the time of R. Judah I (d. *ca.* 220 C.E.), there existed, in an early form, a collection of homilies

upon the Psalter, known as '*Aggadah dē-Tillim*, for it is reported of R. Ḥiyya that on a certain occasion he found himself so absorbed in the reading of the '*Aggadah dē-Tillim*'¹⁶ that he failed to greet R. Simeon, son of R. Judah I.

In the generation following that of R. Judah and R. Ḥiyya, R. Joshua ben Levi asserted that when he once looked into "a book of '*Aggadah*," he came across discourses upon Pentateuchal personages which contained allusions to the Psalms.¹⁷ Buber and Mann believe that the "book of '*Aggadah*'" which R. Joshua ben Levi looked into was an '*Aggadah* on Psalms.'¹⁸

These are early references to Midrashic collections on the Psalms which may be considered as forerunners of the Midrash Tehillim we have now before us.

As to who put Midrash Tehillim more or less into its present form, two suggestions have been made. Joseph ben Eliezer Has-Sefaradi, who flourished in the 14th century,¹⁹ states as a fact well known that R. Johanan bar Nappaha, who died at Tiberias in 279 C.E., was the editor of Midrash Tehillim. No source for this ascription is given by him.

Aaron Moses Padua,²⁰ who lived in the 19th century, makes R. Simeon son of R. Judah I (fl. 3d century C.E.) the compiler of Midrash Tehillim, using as evidence a passage in which R. Simeon claims to have taught R. Ḥiyya two of the five books of the Psalter, and citing Rashi to the effect that the reference is not to two books of the Psalter but to an '*Aggadah* on the two books.'²¹

Buber, however, thinks that the evidence advanced for either

16. Gen. Rabbah 33:3; P. Kil 9:3, 32b; P. Ket 12:3, 35a. In the latter two passages, R. Ḥiyya is quoted as saying: "I had my eyes fixed upon the '*Aggadah* of the entire Psalter." Apparently the entire Book of Psalms was provided with '*Aggadah* or Midrash, and it was set down in writing.

17. See P. Shab 16:1, 15c; MTeh 22.19 and n. 34; and Sof 16:8.

18. Buber, in the introduction to his edition of MTeh, p. 4; and Jacob Mann in his "Some Midrashic Genizah Fragments," *HUCA*, 14 (1939), 304.

19. In 1335. See his '*Ohel Yosef*, one of three supercommentaries upon Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Pentateuch, published under the title *Margaliyyot Ṭoḥah* (Amsterdam, 1721), fol. 90b, comment on Lev. 1:11.

20. See the introduction to his commentary on MTeh.

21. See B. Ḳid 33a and Rashi *ad loc.*; and B. AZ 19a.

of these ascriptions is insufficient to be regarded as conclusive.²² And so, we must say, as of many other Midrashim, that the identity of the editor or editors is unknown.

As for the place and time in which Midrash Tehillim was edited, one definite suggestion has been made. According to Zunz, the work in its present form, up through Psalm 118, was edited in southern Italy during the latter part of the Gaonic period, sometime in the second half of the 9th century.²³ Proof that the Gaonic period was the time and Italy the place in which this work was edited is to be found, according to Zunz, in the following facts:

(1) Some passages in Midrash Tehillim are traced by Zunz to post-Talmudic works, such as Pesiḳta dē-R. Kahana, Pirḳe dē-R. Eliezer, and Pesiḳta Rabbaṭi, works which, according to Zunz, assumed their final form *ca.* 700, *ca.* 750, and in 845 respectively.²⁴

(2) Certain Hebrew locutions which occur in Midrash Tehillim are taken by Zunz to be of post-Talmudic and Gaonic origin.

(3) An allusion in Midrash Tehillim 6.2 to the dispersion of Israel under the rulership of Ishmael is taken by Zunz as a reference to the Moslem caliphate.

(4) The terms Pulia (*Pwly'*) and Skilia (*Sklylyy'*), which occur in Midrash Tehillim 9.8, are taken by Zunz to mean Apulia and Sicily in Italy.²⁵

In direct disagreement with Zunz, Buber, in the introduction to his edition of Midrash Tehillim (pp. 5-8), asserts an earlier date. With reference to the passages which Zunz claims to have been derived from post-Talmudic works, Buber argues that two of the passages may be later interpolations, and a third passage actually occurs in the second part of Midrash Tehillim concerning which there is general agreement that it was added to the original text by a later compiler.

As for locutions said by Zunz to be of post-Talmudic and

22. See the introduction to his edition of MTeh, p. 4.

23. See his *Vorträge der Juden*, p. 375, and, in the Hebrew translation, Zunz-Albeck, *Had-Dēraṣot Bē-Yiśra'el* (Jerusalem, 5707 [1947]), p. 176.

24. See Zunz-Albeck, *Had-Dēraṣot*, pp. 86, 36, and 118, and n. 18 thereto.

25. See *Vorträge der Juden*, p. 279; and, in the Hebrew translation, *Had-Dēraṣot*, pp. 131, 176, and nn. thereto.

Gaonic origin, Buber argues that some of them are later interpolations, whereas others are in fact older than Zunz supposes.

In considering Zunz' argument from the use of the term "Ishmael," Buber maintains that it does not refer to the Moslem caliphate, which came into existence in the 7th century, but simply to Arabs with whom Jews were in contact as early as the 3d century.²⁸

As for Zunz' argument from the occurrence of the terms "Pulia" and "Skilia," Buber maintains that they do not refer to Apulia and Sicily, but rather to Philippa, in Macedon, and to Seleucia, a name for cities in Syria, in Mesopotamia, and in Palestine.

In conclusion, Buber declares that the work was edited not in the Gaonic period but in the Talmudic period; and not in Italy but in Palestine.

Subsequent research has strengthened Buber's position against Zunz'. Zunz reflects, on the whole, the attitude of scholars of a former generation who believed that the Jewish community in Palestine during the 8th and 9th centuries was barren of literary activity, and so ascribed to Italy any literary work which could not be ascribed to Babylonia. As a result of the Genizah discoveries, this view has been generally discarded by modern historians. Says Mann: "This whole theory of attributing . . . Midrashim to Italy is now antiquated and has to be discarded."²⁷

As already indicated, Zunz treats of Midrash Tehillim on Psalms 119-150 as distinct from the earlier part. He believes that this particular portion of the Midrash was added at a time much later than the 9th century, arguing from the fact that the first edition of Midrash Tehillim (Constantinople, 1512) does not have Psalms 119-150.²⁸ Buber, and before him Padua, suggest that the latter part of the work was added sometime between 1241 and 1340.²⁹

26. See P. Ta 3:4, 66c.

27. See Jacob Mann, "Some Midrashic Genizah Fragments," *HUCA*, 14, 304; and *Tarbis*, 5 (1934), 299.

28. Zunz-Albeck, *Had-Deraṣot*, p. 408, n. 52.

29. See Buber's introduction, pp. 4-5. This specific date was given by Aaron Moses Padua in his introduction. Buber neglected to acknowledge his indebtedness.

In a further attempt to prove that Midrash Tehillim on Psalms 119-150 was a later addition, Zunz cites the fact that the introductory formula, "These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere" (*zehu še'amar haḳ-ḳaṭub*) is replaced by expressions such as "Solomon said" (119.1), "Isaiah said" (118.12), and so on. But Mann does not regard the proof as valid, pointing out that in the Genizah certain excerpts from Midrash Tehillim use expressions like those which Zunz attributes to a later time.

As for Zunz' other argument, namely that the first or Constantinople edition does not contain Midrash on Psalms 119-150, Mann offers the explanation that the publisher of the edition used a manuscript which was incomplete. At one time, Mann argues, Midrash on the entire Psalter existed in two versions: one version, which in its introductory formulas generally made use of the expression "This is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere" (*zehu še'amar haḳ-ḳaṭub*), is still extant on Psalms 1-118; a fragment on Ps. 119 in this version was found by Buber and published in his edition.³⁰ The other version, Mann goes on, in its introductory formulas made use of expressions such as "Solomon said" and "Isaiah said," and is still extant on Psalms 119-150; fragments on Psalms 13-16 and 24-27 in this other version were found in the Genizah and published by Mann himself.³¹ And so, concludes Mann, even Midrash Tehillim on Psalms 119-150 is of earlier origin than Zunz supposes.

Albeck, in opposition to Mann, maintains that the Midrashic fragments found in the Genizah by Mann are themselves of late origin. He argues, moreover, that since the formula "Solomon said" or "Isaiah said" is used in early and late Midrashim alike, the occurrence of such a formula cannot in itself be taken as proof for early or late composition of a given Midrash.³² And so he reaffirms the opinions of Zunz, Padua, and Buber that Midrash Tehillim on Psalms 119-150 was added by a compiler some-

30. See below, Volume 2, pp. 246-53.

31. *HUCA*, 14, 306-319.

32. See Zunz-Albeck, *Had-Dēraṣot*, pp. 408-409, Albeck's addenda enclosed in brackets.

time after final form had been given to Midrash Tehillim on Psalms 1-118.

Albeck also reaffirms Zunz' opinion that Midrash Tehillim on Psalms 1-118 is a later composition made during the latter part of the Gaonic period. But rejecting Zunz' reasons as inconclusive, he offers several of his own. He points out that the manuscripts used by Buber in his edition differ so widely from each other that it is impossible to determine the original form of the Midrash as it emerged from the hand of the editor or editors. In effect, he says, we have only bundles of Midrashim on the Psalms, and it is difficult to recognize a hand which makes for order or system. He endeavors to show that Midrash Tehillim lacks the orderly arrangement characteristic of older Midrashim; and that the composition of its poems, unlike that of older Midrashim, is neither complete nor rounded out.³³

In Buber's edition,³⁴ which forms, for the most part, the basis for my translation, comments and homilies are extant on all but four—96, 97, 98, and 115—of the 150 Psalms. This statement, however, must be amplified, in order to present a more accurate picture of the text of Midrash Tehillim. The first edition (Constantinople, 1512), and all the manuscripts which Buber used for his own edition, cover—with the lacunae noted above—Psalms

33. See Zunz-Albeck, *Had-Dēraṣot*, p. 132 and nn. thereto.

34. In his introduction (pp. 109-115) Buber lists the editions of Midrash Tehillim as follows: Constantinople, 1512; Saloniki, 1515; Venice, 1546; Prague, 1613, with a commentary by Isaac Katz; Amsterdam, 1730; Polonnoye, 1794; Żolkiew, 1800; Lemberg, 1850; Lemberg, 1851 (Pss. 1-41), with a commentary by Ephraim Hurwitz; Stettin, 1861; Warsaw, 1865, with a commentary by Aaron Moses Padua; and Warsaw, 1873 and 1875.

From time to time I consulted the editions of Midrash Tehillim published in Venice, Amsterdam, Żolkiew, Lemberg (1851), Warsaw (1865, PE), and Warsaw (1875, facsimile reprint, 1898), and discovered no substantive differences among the several editions of Midrash Tehillim prior to that of Buber, which was published in 1891.

I also consulted the following publications of fragments of Midrash Tehillim: Midrash Shoḥer Toḥ on Pss. 68-71, 96-99, 119, in *Bet ha-Midrash*, ed. Jellinek (Vienna, 1873), 5, 71-86; Jacob Mann, "Some Midrashic Genizah Fragments," *HUCA*, 14, 309-332; Menahem Arzt, "Peraḳim Mim-midrash Tēhillim" (with annotations by Saul Lieberman), in *The Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1950), Hebrew part, pp. 49-73.

1-118.³⁵ The publisher of the second edition (Saloniki, 1515) drew upon an unknown manuscript for the Midrash on Psalms 119-121 and 138-150, and upon the Yalkuṭ for the Midrash upon the intervening Psalms 122, 124-130, 132-137, there being no Yalkuṭ on Psalms 123 and 131. Thereafter all editions, beginning with that of Venice (1546), continue the pattern set by the Saloniki edition. In 1891 Buber issued a new edition based on eight manuscripts.³⁶ In it he made use of miscellaneous sources—the Pēsiḳta Rabbati, Sifre, Numbers Rabbah, and the Babylonian Talmud—to fill in the Midrash on Psalms 123 and 131.

This sketch of the history of the text which I used for my translation may be taken in small as a history of the growth of Midrash Tehillim. Over a period of perhaps a thousand years—from the 3d century C.E. to the 13th century—Midrash Tehillim has grown by accretion, at the hands of readers who inserted marginal notes as well as editors who added bits of commentary from parallel writings or comments of their own. Midrash Tehillim is thus a compilation with little regard for the original framework—the aforementioned triennial cycle, for example—which may at one time have given the work a greater unity of form and structure.

Because the Midrashim designated as Rabbah or Rabboth retained their link with the Scriptural readings prescribed for synagogue services, their popularity remained undiminished. Not so Midrash Tehillim. Once the triennial cycle with its use of selections from the three parts of Scripture was replaced by the annual cycle which makes use only of the first two parts, the Pentateuch and the Prophets, the role of the Psalms in the public

35. Two of the manuscripts used by Buber, the Parma and the Halberstamm codices, contain a fragment of Ps. 119 (see below, Volume 2, pp. 246-53.).

36. On pp. 82-89 of his introduction, Buber lists them in the following order: (1) Parma, codex 1232; (2) Florence, codex 13; (3) Rome, codex 76; (4) Rome, codex 81; (5) Merzbacher MS; (6) Halberstamm MS; (7) Ginzburg MS; (8) Paris, codex 152. Buber also made use of the annotations by Abraham ben David Provençal of Ferrara in the margins of his copy of the Venice edition of MTeh, later owned by Raphael Kirchheim. Unfortunately, Buber's reputation for accuracy in the handling of manuscripts and texts is not of the best, and his edited text cannot be considered a critical edition.

reading of Scripture was diminished and so too, very likely, the popularity of the Midrash based on them.

But the Psalms have always been and remain to this day the principal book for private devotion and the chief source of the liturgy. Hence any Midrash based on the Psalter deserves attention and study.

6.

In translating Midrash Tehillim I set out to achieve a readable text which would nonetheless remain as faithful as possible to the rhythm and the idioms of the original Hebrew and Aramaic.³⁷ My goal is a translation, not a paraphrase. Throughout I adhere to certain rules likely to assure greater accuracy and faithfulness to the original text. Thus, I endeavor to have every noun, adjective, and verb of the original represented in the translation by a noun, an adjective, or a verb. I paraphrase only technical terms. As for the order of clauses in the original, I frequently rearrange it to fit the requirements of the English way of saying things.

Wherever the antecedents of pronouns are not clear, I replace the pronouns with corresponding nouns.

Like all Midrashim, Midrash Tehillim is full of Scripture.

37. The only translation of Midrash Tehillim into a modern European language is the German rendering by August Wünsche, *Midrasch Tehillim oder Haggadische Erklärung der Psalmen . . . mit Noten und Quellenangaben versehen*, Trier, 1892-93. The translation is literal to the point of being unintelligible. Passages which are obscure in the original were generally translated as they are, and no effort was made either in the text or in the notes to clear up the obscurities. Wünsche followed Buber's text so closely that he apparently did not take the trouble to check the accuracy of Buber's references to other rabbinic texts. So he even copied the typographical errors which occasionally occur in Buber's notes (e.g., in Part 2, p. 154, n. *, Buber's reference is to "Jebamoth 47a" which Wünsche copied; it should be "77a"; *ibid.*, p. 220, n. *, Buber's reference is to "Chagiga 2a" which Wünsche copied; it should be "12a"; *ibid.*, p. 226, n. **, Buber's reference is to "Baba Mezia" which Wünsche copied; it should be "Baba Batra").

It should be said in extenuation of Wünsche that his output of translations of rabbinic texts was so considerable that he probably did not have the leisure to check the accuracy of references.

Midrash may in fact be defined as a florilegium of Scriptural verses interspersed with comments by Rabbis. These verses are introduced by standard Hebrew phrases such as *šene'amar*, "as is said," *dikētib*, "as is written," *wə'omer*, "and says," or *minnayin*, "whence?" In translating these terms, I often found consistency unwise, for frequently the Hebrew context demands that for complete clarity the formulas be varied in translation. So for *šene'amar*, besides "as is said," I use phrases such as "as Scripture says," "as the text states," or "and again," and so on. For *wə'omer*, "and says," I often substitute phrases such as "the text continues" or "Scripture goes on to say." *Minnayin*, "whence?" I sometimes render "Whence the proof?" or "And the proof?" Consistency in translating such formulas would have made the translation tedious and even unintelligible.

Very often a passage from Scripture, introduced by one of these formulas in support of a particular comment, fails to convey sufficient information to the modern reader who is unaware of the subtle intimations or general setting of a particular verse. In such instances I either paraphrase or expand the introductory or auxiliary formula, whenever necessary making use of brackets to set off the material interpolated.³⁸

The phrase *zehu še'amar haq-qaṭub*,³⁹ which means literally, "This is what Scripture says," presented a special problem. The literal translation fails to indicate the particular meaning which the commentator had in mind. Generally, when using this locution the commentator juxtaposes two verses so as to bring out a meaning which otherwise would not be discerned. Where the connection between the two verses thus juxtaposed was apparent, I used the formula "Elsewhere, this is what Scripture says."

38. In Midrash Tehillim occurs now and then the phrase *Qal wa-homer*, the first of the seven oldest norms of interpretation (see *JE*, 12, 32a, *s.v.* Talmud Hermeneutics). Its technical meaning is "inference *a minori ad maius*." Since I felt that in ordinary prose the use of such a formidable phrase would have made things unwieldy, I resorted to paraphrasing it by "*a fortiori*," or "all the more so."

39. Its Aramaic equivalent is *hada' hu dikētib*. On the meaning of the two phrases see the commentary of Abraham ben David of Posquière on Sifra (ed. Weiss, 43d); and Wilhelm Bacher, *Erke Midraš* (Tel Aviv, 1923), p. 176.

Where the connection was not apparent, I used the paraphrase, "These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere."

In quoting passages from Scripture I used, in the beginning, the Jewish Publication Society Version exclusively. But when I discovered that in countless instances the Rabbis' understanding of verses and passages differed from that which was represented in this version, I decided to draw upon other English versions as well.

Often, however, no one of the English versions represents the rabbinic understanding of a verse or passage. In such instances I translate the verse or passage anew in line with what I considered the rabbinic understanding to be. Where my own translation differs radically from the English versions, I indicate in a footnote what the usual translation is. In the same footnote I often explain how the commentator arrived at his unusual interpretation. Furthermore, in order to give the special sense of a verse as the Rabbis understood it, I resort at times to interpolation. The interpolated material set off within brackets I treat as though it were part of the Scriptural verse.

Very often the Rabbis interpret a verse or versicle in several different ways in the course of a succession of comments. In such instances I translate it anew in the sense required by each individual comment.

The men who composed Midrashim intended their works for readers who knew Scripture by heart. And so very often they quoted only the beginning of a verse, assuming that their readers could supply the latter part upon which the comment was based. Since this assumption no longer generally holds, I do not hesitate where the meaning requires it to quote more of the verse than is indicated in Buber's edition of the text.⁴⁰

A verse in Genesis which reads *God enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem* (9:27) is taken by the Rabbis

40. On the other hand, when I felt that conjunctions, such as "and" and "for," occurring at the beginning of a verse or clause quoted from Scripture impeded the flow of the argument, I eliminated them.

to mean that the words of Shem ought to be translated into the language of Japheth,⁴¹ that is, into the languages of the west. This recommendation holds true, and to an even greater extent, in our own days. I hope, then, that I have succeeded in my attempt to translate this rabbinic interpretation of the Psalms into readable English.

A work such as this could not have been completed without various kinds of help from a number of people. Professor Harry A. Wolfson of Harvard University taught me that the Rabbis made good sense and demonstrated it as he deciphered passages which appeared unintelligible; he also initiated me into the difficult art of translation, and guided me in the preparation of the Introduction. Professor Saul Lieberman of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America gave me much time in interpreting innumerable passages in Midrash Tehillim and in bringing forth—out of apparently unpromising ore—luminous sense. Professor Israel J. Kapstein of Brown University read the manuscript twice, and his sensitive understanding and felicity of style are imprinted on every page of the book. My beloved wife, taking upon herself the brunt of many chores and responsibilities, stood guard to make it possible for me to pursue my work. During these many years her faith in the worthwhileness of my endeavor never flagged. Leon Nemoy, editor of Yale Judaica Series, read the entire manuscript twice and made many valuable improvements.

The late Dr. Joshua Bloch, the retired Librarian of the Jewish Section of the New York Public Library; Professor Erwin R. Goodenough of Yale University, and the late Louis M. Rabinowitz of New York City; President Samuel Belkin of Yeshiva University; Rabbis Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Mordecai Savitsky of Boston; Professor Morton Smith of Columbia University; Professor Thomas Savage formerly of Brandeis University, and

41. See Deut. R., beginning. In a variant in Gen. R. 36:8, Bar Kappara is quoted as saying: "This means that in the tents of Shem the words of Scripture may be recited in the speech of Japheth." See Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 5702 [1942]), p. 18.

David A. Jonah, Librarian of Brown University; my mother, Rachel Braude; my parents-in-law, Joseph and Rose Finkelstein; my brother Michael and his wife Lillian; my sister, Dorothy Fuerst and her husband, Jimmy; my friends Rabbi Jacob K. Shankman of New Rochelle and A. Henry Klein and Beryl Segal of Providence offered help and encouragement when I needed both. Mrs. Christine D. Hathaway, of the Brown University Library, and Mrs. Catherine Brown prepared the indexes. The late Maureen Percelay Zusy, Albert M. Schaler, and my secretary, Mrs. Alexander Tanenbaum, painstakingly typed parts of the manuscript. Louis I. J. Symonds of Providence and Arthur I. Darman of Woonsocket provided financial assistance. To all these good friends I am deeply grateful, and it goes without saying that I absolve each of them of responsibility for errors or inadequacies in the pages which follow.

W. G. B.

Providence

September 1957

BOOK ONE

PSALM ONE

1. *Blessed is the man* (Ps. 1:1). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *He that diligently seeketh good, procureth favor* (Prov. 11:27). Who was such a person? David, king of Israel, who diligently sought to do good to the children of Israel, setting up among them twenty-four watches of priests and twenty-four watches of Levites.¹ And *procureth favor*—that is, David procured God's favor so that the Holy Spirit came to rest upon him [again],² and thus he was able to bless the children of Israel. And where does David bless them? In the words *Blessed is the man*. But *he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him* (Prov. 11:27)—that is, come to Doeg and to Ahithophel.³

2. Another comment on *Blessed is the man that . . . sitteth not in the seat of the scornful* (Ps. 1:1). These words are to be considered in the light of the following verse, *Then David the king went in, and sat before the Lord* (2 Sam. 7:18). This verse, according to R. Hiyya, teaches that sitting in the court of the Temple was prohibited, except to kings of the house of David. R. Ammi taught in the name of R. Simeon ben Lakish that sitting in the court of the Temple was prohibited, except in the place reserved for kings of the house of David. Therefore Scripture says, *David the king went in, and sat before the Lord*.

But did not R. Huna declare, in the name of R. Samuel, that there is no sitting in heaven?⁴ For it is said *I came near unto one of them that stand* (Dan. 7:16), stand because they—the host of heaven—have no knee joints, as it is said *their legs are straight legs* (Ezek. 1:7). It is also written *Above Him stood the seraphim* (Isa. 6:2), and further *All the host of heaven standing by*

Him on His right hand and on His left (1 Kings 22:19). Since there is no sitting before God in heaven, can David have sat in His presence?

No, R. Ammi concluded: Not even royalty of the house of David may sit in the court of the Temple of the Lord.

But if not, how shall the words *And David the king . . . sat before the Lord* be understood? That he leaned [against the wall].⁵

To whom, then, was sitting permitted in the court of the Temple, or in the Temple itself? You must admit that it was permitted only to the High Priest, as it is said *Now Eli the priest sat upon his seat by the doorpost of the Temple of the Lord* (1 Sam. 1:9).

What, therefore, does Scripture mean by saying that *David . . . sat before the Lord*? It means that he got set⁶ to pray.

We are taught in a Mishnah that an Ammonite or a Moabite male is prohibited from marrying an Israelite woman, and that the prohibition is to hold forever, but that Ammonite or Moabite females [upon their being converted] are permitted to marry Israelites.⁷ Therefore, David said in his prayer, "*Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house⁸ that Thou hast brought me hitherto?*" (2 Sam. 7:18): What did David imply by *hitherto*? He implied: "Not only was I permitted to enter the congregation of Israel, but Thou hast also made me king." (Here *hitherto* refers to kingship, as it does in the question asked about Saul: "Is there yet a man to come hitherto?" [1 Sam. 10:22].) And David continued: "*This was yet a small thing in Thine eyes*" (2 Sam. 7:19), as a man might say to his fellow: This is but a trifle to you; "*but Thou hast also spoken to Thy servant's house from afar*" (*ibid.*): for though my family was supposed to be kept out, we have been received into the congregation of Israel.

For this is the law of man (*ibid.*):⁹ Scripture does not say here "for this is the law of Abraham, of Isaac, or of Jacob," but "*for this is the law of man.*" But what man? He who is foremost among Prophets; he who is foremost among kings. The foremost among Prophets—he is Moses, of whom it is said *And*

Moses went up unto God (Ex. 19:3); the foremost among kings—he is David. You find that whatever Moses did, David did. As Moses led Israel out of Egypt, so David led Israel out of servitude to Goliath.¹⁰ As Moses fought the battles of the Lord against Sihon and Og, so David fought the battles of the Lord in all the regions around him, as Abigail said: *My lord fighteth the battles of the Lord* (1 Sam. 25:28). As Moses became king in Israel and in Judah, for it is said *And he became king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people . . . were gathered together* (Deut. 33:5), so David became king in Israel and in Judah. As Moses divided the Red Sea for Israel, so David divided the rivers of Aram for Israel, as it is said *David . . . divided the rivers of Aram* (Ps. 60:1, 2).¹¹ As Moses built an altar, so David built an altar. As the one brought offerings, so the other brought offerings. As Moses gave five books of laws to Israel, so David gave five Books of Psalms to Israel, the Book of Psalms entitled *Blessed is the man* (Ps. 1:1), the Book entitled *For the leader: Maschil* (Ps. 42:1), the Book, *A Psalm of Asaph* (Ps. 73:1), the Book, *A prayer of Moses* (Ps. 90:1), and the Book, *Let the redeemed of the Lord say* (Ps. 107:2). Finally, as Moses blessed Israel with the words *Blessed art thou, O Israel* (Deut. 33:29), so David blessed Israel with the words *Blessed is the man*.

3. *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked*. These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Hear, for . . . the opening of my lips shall be right things . . . All the words of my mouth are in righteousness, there is nothing froward or perverse in them* (Prov. 8:6, 8). In Scripture there is never a word suggesting frowardness or perversity. Thus we find Scripture speaking in a roundabout way so as to avoid an unseemly term, as in the verse *Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean* (Gen. 7:8).¹²

R. Yudan bar Manasseh added: Even when Scripture is about to list the signs of uncleanness, it always begins with the signs of cleanness: Thus before saying “the camel . . . does not part the hoof,” it says *he cheweth the cud* (Lev. 11:4); similarly, be-

fore saying "the swine . . . does not chew the cud," it says *he parteth the hoof* (Lev. 11:7). And so David said: Behold, the Holy One, blessed be He, declared of me, saying, *The Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart . . . to be captain over His people* (1 Sam. 13:14). Therefore, David modeled himself upon his Creator:¹³ As his Creator refrained from using unseemly speech, so did David. Though David might have said: "Cursed is the man that walketh in the counsel of the wicked," or "Cursed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the righteous,"¹⁴ he said instead: *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked.*

[As Moses and David were alike],¹⁵ so the verse *Moses and Samuel stood before Me* (Jer. 15:1) suggests a likeness between Moses and Samuel. For you find that what is said of the one is said of the other. The one was a Levite, and the other was a Levite. The one built an altar, and the other built an altar. The one brought offerings, and the other brought offerings. The one became king, and the other became king.¹⁶ The one was summoned by a call from God, and the other was summoned by a call from God.¹⁷ Indeed Scripture alludes to this likeness in the verse: *A prophet will the Lord thy God raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me* (Deut. 18:15). So, too, you find of [Moses and] Jeremiah, that what is said of the one is also said of the other.

R. Yudan said: This Psalm is the most excellent of all the Psalms.

4. Another comment on *Blessed is the man*. Consider these words in the light of the following passage: *The Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord giveth grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee* (Ps. 84:12-13). Hezekiah bar Hiyya taught: Blessed are the Prophets, who in figurative language liken the Creator to His creation, and the Planter to His plant. Thus Scripture says, *The Lord God is a sun and a shield*, and again, *The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?* (Amos

3:8), and further: *Behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east; and His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth did shine with His glory* (Ezek. 43:2). Thus the Prophets speak to the ear by way of what it can hear, and delight the eye by way of what it can see.

A further comment on *The Lord God is a sun and a shield*: Lest you say that as the sun strikes a man down, so does the Holy One, blessed be He, Scripture goes on to speak of God as *a shield*:—as a shield protects man, so the Holy One, blessed be He, protects the whole world. R. Hiyya bar Abin commented: God gives light like the sun, and provides cover like a shield.

A further comment on *shield*. The shield (*maḡen*) here referred to is of the kind known as *taris*, the [Roman] *'isḡuta*, which encloses a man on three sides. Whence do we know that man is also protected on the fourth side? Because Scripture says, *O Lord, Thou dost encompass him with favor as with a shield (ṣinnah)*¹⁸ (Ps. 5:13).

A further comment: *For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord giveth grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee*. Here Scripture speaks of our father Abraham. The word *sun* stands for Abraham, as it is said "Who raised up the righteous man from the east?" (Isa. 41:2). And the word *shield* occurs in the story of Abraham, as it is said "The word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying: 'Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield'" (Gen. 15:1). The words *the Lord God* were used in addressing Abraham, for we read "The children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him: 'Hear us, my lord: thou art a prince of God among us'" (Gen. 23:6). *The Lord giveth grace and glory*—gives these to Abraham, as it is written "And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold" (Gen. 13:2). *No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly*—that is, walk like Abraham, to whom it was said "Walk before Me, and be thou upright" (Gen. 17:1).

But if this verse means to speak of Abraham, one would expect

it to say "No good thing will He withhold from *him* that walks uprightly": why does it say, *from them that walk uprightly*? Because just as the Holy One, blessed be He, was a shield to Abraham who walked before Him in uprightness, so is He a shield to all men who walk before Him in uprightness. And what does the Psalm go on to say? *Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee* (Ps. 84:13): The verse speaks not of Abraham here, but of *man*—that is, of every such man.

David said: *Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the wicked*. That is, though Thou hast given ease to the wicked, they are not blessed in their ease; rather they stand, [then walk about restlessly].

5. *Blessed is the man*. R. Yudan¹⁹ began his comment by quoting the verse *Put not thyself forward in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men* (Prov. 25:6), but R. Yudan made his comment concise.²⁰ R. Phinehas, however, expanded his comment to some length. R. Yudan said concisely: The way David begins the Psalter is the way Moses ends his blessing; and the way Jacob ends his blessing is the way Moses begins his.²¹

R. Phinehas began his comment by quoting the verse *From my elders I receive understanding* (Ps. 119:100), and then said: You find that, in the beginning, the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself used to bless His creation, as it is said *And God blessed them, saying: "Be fruitful, and multiply"* (Gen. 1:22). When Noah arose, God blessed him and his sons, as is said *God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, "Be fruitful, and multiply"* (Gen. 9:1). When Abraham arose, God blessed Abraham, as is said *The Lord had blessed Abraham in all things* (Gen. 24:1). And how is what God said to Abraham, *And thou shalt be a blessing* (Gen. 12:2) to be interpreted? R. Nehemiah taught that God turned over the bestowal of blessing to Abraham, saying to him: "Until now it was My responsibility to bless My world. From now on, the bestowal of blessings is turned over to thee. Whom it pleases thee to bless, thou shalt bless!" Yet when Isaac arose, all that Scripture says is, *Abraham gave all*

that he had unto Isaac (Gen. 25:5). On the meaning of this verse R. Judah, R. Nehemiah, and the Rabbis differed. R. Judah said: It was the birthright that Abraham gave. R. Nehemiah said: It was the bestowal of blessing that he gave. The Rabbis said: It was the family vault²² and the deed thereto that he gave. In any event, observed R. Levi, in the name of R. Hama: All agree that Abraham did not bless Isaac, but only gave him gifts. And the reason that Abraham did not bless Isaac is to be understood from the parable of a king who had an orchard that he put under the care of a steward. The orchard had several kinds of trees growing so closely together that their branches were entangled. One kind yielded the elixir of life; another kind, deadly poison. The steward said: "If I water the trees of the elixir of life, those of deadly poison will share the water and flourish with the others. If I do not water the trees at all, how will those of the elixir of life flourish?" He finally declared: "In a year, I shall end my stewardship and go away: let the owner of the orchard do what he likes." Similarly, Abraham said: "If I bless Isaac now, the children of Ishmael and the children of Keturah will share the blessing with him. But if I do not bless the children of Ishmael and the children of Keturah, how can I bless Isaac?" Abraham finally declared: "I am only flesh and blood—here today, and tomorrow in the grave. Let, then, the Holy One, blessed be He, do what He will in His world." Therefore, when Abraham died, the Holy One, blessed be He, appeared to Isaac and blessed him, as is said *And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son* (Gen. 25:11).²³

When Isaac arose and blessed Jacob, he began his blessing with the word *give*, as is said *So God give thee of the dew of heaven* (Gen. 27:28), and ended it with the word *call*, as it is said *And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him* (Gen. 28:1). When Jacob arose to bless the tribes, he began his blessing with the word with which his father Isaac ended, as is written *And Jacob called unto his sons* (Gen. 49:1). How did Jacob end his blessing? With the word *this*, as it is written *This is it, that their father spoke unto them and blessed them* (Gen. 49:28). When Moses arose to bless

Israel, he said: "Jacob, God's first-born, began his blessing with the word *call*, and ended it with the word *this*. I shall begin with the word that Jacob ended with." He therefore began with *This is the blessing* (Deut. 33:1), and ended with *Blessed art thou, O Israel* (Deut. 33:29). When David arose, he began with the word that Moses ended with. He said: "Yea, I shall begin to bless Israel with the word *Blessed*" (Ps. 1:1).

6. A further comment on *Blessed is the man*. R. Nehemiah began his exposition by quoting the words, *Wisdom strengtheneth the wise* (Eccles. 7:19)—that is, strengthened David: strengthened him *more than ten mighty men that are in the city* (*ibid.*)—that is, more than the ten men who were the authors of the Book of Psalms, namely, Adam, Melchizedek, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Asaph, and the three sons of Korah. About these ten names,²⁴ the Sages do not differ that they are names of persons. About what do they differ? [About Jeduthun as a name]. Rab maintained that *For Jeduthun* (Ps. 39:1) means "concerning the *jeduthun*," that is, "concerning the judgments and punishments" which were imposed upon David and upon Israel.²⁵

R. Huna said in the name of R. Aḥa: Though certain Psalms bear the name of one of the ten authors, the book, as a whole, bears the name of David, king of Israel. As a parable tells us, there was a company of musicians that sought to sing a hymn to the king. The king said to them: To be sure, all of you are sweet singers, all of you are musicians, all of you have superior skill, all of you are men worthy of taking part in the singing of a hymn to the king, yet let the hymn, in whose singing all of you will take part, bear the name of only one man among you because his voice is the sweetest of all your voices. Thus it is written, *The saying of David the son of Jesse . . . the sweet singer of the Psalms of Israel* (2 Sam. 23:1). The singer who makes the Psalms of Israel sweet is David, the son of Jesse, a nobleman, and the son of a nobleman. Therefore what is it that is said at the end of the Book of Psalms? *The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended* (Ps. 72:20).²⁶

As the Psalms bear the names of ten authors, so do they bear also the names of ten kinds of song, namely, glory, melody, Psalm, song, praise, prayer, blessing, thanksgiving, *Hallelujah*, and exultation.²⁷ The most excellent song of all is *Hallelujah* which, in one word, contains both a name of God and a term for "praise."

Rab used to call the whole Book of Psalms *Hallelujah*.

7. *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.* R. Simeon ben Pazzi commented: If he walks not, how could he be standing on the way? ²⁸ And if he stands not on the way, could he come to sit in the seat of the scornful? And if he sits not among them, how could he scoff with them? The verse means to say to you, however, that when a man walks among the wicked, he ends up by standing with them; when he stands among them, he ends up by sitting with them; and when he sits among them, he ends up by scoffing with them. And when he scoffs, it is of him that Scripture says, *If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it* (Prov. 9:12). For our Masters taught: "As one good deed begets another good deed, so one wicked deed begets another wicked deed." ²⁹ But if a man is neither to walk, nor to stand, nor to sit, nor to scoff, does Scripture mean that he is to do neither good nor evil, but merely keep his hand over his mouth? ³⁰ No, for Scripture goes on to teach: *His delight is in the Law of the Lord; and in His Law doth he meditate day and night* (Ps. 1:2).

R. Berechiah said: It is written, *Be not overmuch wicked* (Eccles. 7:17). Does this mean that a little wickedness is allowed? No, it means that if you have been wicked, do not keep on with your wickedness.

R. Simeon ben Yohai taught: When a man sits still and does not do a wicked deed, he is rewarded as if he had performed a good deed.³¹ R. Ze'era maintained that such a man is so rewarded only if an occasion for a wicked deed came to hand and he abstained from it, for it is said *Depart from evil, and do good* (Ps. 34:15): that is to say, depart from evil, because thereby

you do good. Similarly, Scripture says, *They who do no wickedness: they walk in His ways* (Ps. 119:3).

8. *Blessed is the man*. R. Joshua ben Ḳarḥa said: The word *Blessed* is written twenty times in the Book of Psalms in correspondence to the twenty times that the word *woe* is found in the Book of Isaiah.³² Rabbi said: I wonder how R. Joshua could have taught me that the word *Blessed* occurs only twenty times in the Book of Psalms? But I say that it occurs twenty-two times in correspondence to the twenty-two letters of the alphabet.³³

Concerning the Book of Psalms, David prayed: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord* (Ps. 19:15): Let them be treasured by the generations, even be graven by the generations, and be read not as one reads the books of Homer, but both read and meditated upon; let those who read them in this way be rewarded therefor as though they had read and meditated upon the treatise of "The Signs of Leprosy" or of "Tents."³⁴

Let the words of my mouth . . . be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord. R. Jeremiah said in the name of R. Johanan: It is written *Let me dwell in Thy tent of worlds*³⁵ (Ps. 61:5). Can you actually believe that David prayed for a dwelling in the two worlds? What he meant was: "Let them read my words and make mention of me both in synagogues and in houses of study, as though I were still alive."

9. Another exposition: The entire First Psalm speaks of Adam.³⁶ *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked*. Adam said: "If I had not walked in the counsel of the serpent, how blessed I would have been!" *Nor standeth in the way of sinners*. Adam said: "If I had not stood in the way of the serpent, how blessed I would have been!" *Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful*. Adam said: "If I had not sat in the seat of the serpent, a seat of scorn, how blessed I would have been!" R. Joshua of Siknin related in the name of R. Levi: The serpent spoke slander against his Creator. The serpent asked Eve: "Why will you not eat of this tree?" And Eve said to him: "God commanded me³⁷ neither to eat of this tree nor to touch it." What

did the serpent do? He picked Eve up and pushed her against the tree. But she did not die, for, in truth, the Holy One, blessed be He, had only commanded: *Thou shalt not eat of it* (Gen. 2:17). To this divine commandment it was Eve who had added the words, *Neither shall ye touch it* (Gen. 3:3). Then the serpent said to her: "Our Creator ate of this tree, and then created the world and all that is in it; and if you eat of the tree, you will have the power to create a world as He did, for it is said, *Ye shall be as God* (Gen. 3:5). But, of course, every craftsman hates to have a rival in his craft."

It follows from this that the serpent was a scoffer.

10. *His delight is in the Law of the Lord*—that is, according to R. Levi, in the six laws which the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Adam, as it is said "And the Lord God commanded Adam" (Gen. 2:16).³⁸ *In His Law doth he meditate day and night* (Ps. 1:2)—that is, in the six laws which God commanded him. *He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water*: the Holy One, blessed be He, lifted Adam up, and planted him in the Garden of Eden. *That bringeth forth his fruit in his season*—that is, Adam brought forth Cain; *His leaf also shall not wither*: Abel shall not wither.³⁹ *Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper* (Ps. 1:3): Seth shall prosper.⁴⁰ *Not so the wicked* (Ps. 1:4)—that is, the serpent: of whom the next verse goes on to say, *The wicked shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous* (Ps. 1:5). According to R. Levi, this verse means that in the time-to-come all creatures will be made whole except the serpent and the Gibeonites: of the serpent it is said, *Dust shall continue to be the serpent's food* (Isa. 65:25), and of the Gibeonites it is said, *They that serve the city, out of all the tribes of Israel, shall continue to serve it* (ya'abduhu) (Ezek. 48:19)—for ya'abduhu, however, read yē'abduhu, "shall be expelled."

The Holy One, blessed be He, bestowed three goodly gifts upon the tribes of Israel: They have mercy, they have modesty, and they practice loving-kindness. And the proof that they have mercy? *The Lord . . . endow thee with mercy* (Deut. 13:18). And the proof that they have modesty? *That His fear may be in*

your faces, that ye sin not (Ex. 20:17). (From this verse it is clear to us that if a man has no modesty, his forebears did not stand at Mount Sinai.) And the proof that the tribes of Israel practice loving-kindness? *The Lord thy God shall keep with thee the covenant of loving-kindness* (Deut. 7:12). And so when David perceived of the Gibeonites that they had not even one of these gifts, he rose up and expelled them, as is said, *The Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites* (2 Sam. 21:2). Ezra, too, expelled them, as is said, *The Nethinim dwelt in Ophel*⁴¹ (Neh. 11:21). And in the time-to-come, the Holy One, blessed be He, will also expel them, as is said, *They that serve the city, out of all the tribes of Israel, shall continue to serve it* (Ezek. 48:19). However, the [original] *ḳēṭib*⁴² of *ya'abduhu* ("shall continue to serve") is *ye'abduhu* ("shall be expelled"). *They that serve the city* are the Gibeonites, of whom it is said "Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation" (Josh. 9:27).

For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous (Ps. 1:6)⁴³—that is, Adam and Eve. *But the way of the wicked shall perish*—that is, in the time-to-come the serpent will not be made whole.

11. *And he shall be like a tree planted* (Ps. 1:3). The verse does not use the [usual] word (*naṭu'a*), "planted," but (*šaṭul*), "fixed firmly," thereby telling you that even if all the winds come and blow at the righteous man, they will be unable to budge him from his place.

In His law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water . . . And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper (Ps. 1:2-3). Similarly, Scripture says, *This book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein* (Josh. 1:8): If you do this, the verse goes on to say, *Thou shalt make thy ways prosperous, and . . . thou shalt have good success* (*ibid.*): *thou shalt make thy ways prosperous* in this world, and *thou shalt have good success* in the world-to-come. This is also affirmed by Solo-

mon: *My son, keep thy father's commandments, and forsake not the law of thy mother. . . . When thou goest, it shall lead thee* (Prov. 6:20-22), in this world; *when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee* (*ibid.*), in the grave, from worms and creeping things; and *when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee* (*ibid.*), in the world-to-come.

12. Another comment: The Psalm *Blessed is the man* speaks of Noah, of whom it is said "Noah was a righteous man" (Gen. 6:9), *that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked*—that is, the wicked of three generations: of the generation of Enosh, of the generation of the flood, and of the generation which saw the dispersion of the races of man.⁴⁴ This comment is in keeping with the opinion of R. Judah, who said that Noah lived during these three generations, *the counsel of the wicked* referring to the generation of Enosh, *the way of sinners* referring to the generation of the flood, and *the seat of the scornful* referring to the generation which saw the dispersion of the races of man. *His delight is in the law of the Lord* (Ps. 1:2)—that is, in the seven laws which the children of Noah were commanded to keep.⁴⁵ *In His Law doth he meditate day and night*—that is, Noah meditated and inferred one law from another. He said: Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, see fit to have more clean animals than unclean ones taken into the ark? Because He desired that burnt offerings to Him be brought out of the clean animals. Whereupon "Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar" (Gen. 8:20). *And he shall be like a tree planted securely in rivers of water* (Ps. 1:3), for the Holy One, blessed be He, set Noah securely in the ark. As R. Levi said: Like a ship standing securely in harbor, so the ark stood secure in the waters for twelve months.

That bringeth forth his fruit in his season (*ibid.*). R. Yudan taught: By the time they were fifty years old, sixty years old, or at the most seventy years old, all of Noah's contemporaries had begotten children, but Noah was five hundred years old before he begot sons, as is said, *And Noah was five hundred years old;*

and Noah begot Shem, Ham and Japheth (Gen. 5:32). R. Hiyya said in the name of R. Aḥa: The Holy One, blessed be He, restrained the fountain of Noah's fertility so that Noah could not beget a son; otherwise, at the time of the flood, Noah would have had a son a hundred years old, who would have perished with the generation of the flood.⁴⁶ Since the court above used to punish men only after they were a hundred years old or more,⁴⁷ if one of Noah's sons had been a hundred years old, he would have perished with the generation of the flood. (According to R. Simcon ben Laḳish, this law of the court above will be reinstituted in the time of the Messiah,⁴⁸ of which it is said, *Then the voice of weeping shall be no more heard . . . the youngest shall die a hundred years old* [Isa. 65:20].) Should you say, "But in the generation of the flood there were men less than a hundred years old, and yet they too perished!" I answer: "Yes, because they were punished for the corruption of their fathers,⁴⁹ for it is said, *All flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth*" (Gen. 6:12).

Another tradition: Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, restrain the fountain of Noah's fertility? In order that Noah should not beget sons and multiply his seed which would perish with the generation of the flood and leave Noah grieving for his sons. Should you say, "But they might have been righteous men!" the answer would be, "If so, Noah would have had to build many arks." Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, restrained the fountain of Noah's fertility until he was five hundred years old.

That bringeth forth his fruit in his season (Ps. 1:3)—that is, brings forth Shem; *His leaf also shall not wither* (*ibid.*)—Ham shall not wither; and *Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper* (*ibid.*)—Japheth shall prosper. *Not so the wicked* (Ps. 1:4)—that is, the generation which saw the dispersion of the races of man. *Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment* (Ps. 1:5), the wicked being the generation of the flood, for we are taught in a Mishnah that the generation of the flood has no share in the world-to-come, and shall not stand in the judgment.⁵⁰ *For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous* (Ps. 1:6), the way of Noah and his sons; *but the way of the wicked shall perish* (*ibid.*), the way of the generation of the flood.

13. Another exposition: *Blessed is the man*—that is, Abraham, of whom God said, “He is a prophet”⁵¹ (Gen. 20:7). *The man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked*: Abraham did not walk in the counsel of the generation which saw the dispersion of the races of man, the generation which said: “Come, let us build us a Watcher⁵² and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven” (Gen. 11:4). By “come” they meant “give counsel,” as in the verse “Come here with your advice and counsel” (Judg. 20:7); and by “Watcher” they meant a god, as in the verse “Behold the Watcher and the Holy One came down from heaven” (Dan. 4:10). They then broke up into three companies, one saying: “Let us build a tower and dwell in it”; one saying: “Let us make war against God”; one saying: “Let us go up and there worship another god.” And all three companies were smitten. One company was turned into monkeys, demons, and evil spirits. The second company, the Lord confounded their speech. The third company, the Lord scattered them. Of this Scripture says, *The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him* (Prov. 10:24).⁵³

Nor standeth in the way of sinners (Ps. 1:1)—that is, Abraham stood not with the men of Sodom, of whom it is said “Now the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against the Lord exceedingly” (Gen. 13:13). *Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful* (*ibid.*), meaning men like Abimelech⁵⁴ who said to Abraham: “Behold, my land is before thee” (Gen. 20:15). But Abraham would not settle on the land,⁵⁵ *for his delight was in the Law of the Lord* (Ps. 1:2) who said of him: “I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord” (Gen. 18:19). *And in His Law doth he meditate day and night*. R. Samuel bar Nahman commented: “Abraham’s father did not teach him, and he did not have a master to teach him. From whom, then, did Abraham learn Torah?” He thereupon quoted the answer of R. Simeon ben Yohai: The Holy One, blessed be He, had provided Abraham with reins that were like two pitchers overflowing and filling him with wisdom and understanding⁵⁶ all through the night, as it is said “Yea, in the night seasons my reins instruct me” (Ps. 16:7). R. Samuel bar Nahmani said further in the name of R.

Jonathan: Indeed Abraham even knew the rabbinic regulations concerning an '*erub*' for the cooking of meals⁵⁷ and an '*erub*' for courtyards,⁵⁸ as it is said "Abraham hearkened to My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Gen. 26:5).⁵⁹

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water (Ps. 1:3). The Holy One, blessed be He, lifted Abraham up, and planted him in the Garden of Eden. Or, the verse may imply that the Holy One, blessed be He, planted Abraham in the Land of Israel. *That bringeth forth his fruit in his season* (Ps. 1:3)—that is, brings forth Ishmael; *His leaf also shall not wither*,—that is, Isaac shall not wither; *and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper*—the children of Keturah shall prosper. *Not so the wicked* (Ps. 1:4)—that is, Nimrod and his companions.

14. A different exposition: *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked*. This refers to the tribe of Levi who walked not in the counsel of the generation of the wilderness, nor took part with them in the making of the golden calf; *nor standeth in the way of sinners*, of whom Moses said: "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them a god of gold" (Ex. 32:31). *Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful* (Ps. 1:1) who after making the golden calf "sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to make merry" (Ex. 32:6). But the sons of Levi, what is written of them? When Moses said: "Whoso is on the Lord's side, let him come unto me" (Ex. 32:26), then "All the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him" (*ibid.*). R. Samuel bar Nahmani asked: "Would not everyone naturally want to be a member of the king's household?", but then pointed out that when Moses said, "Whoso is on the Lord's side, let him come unto me," he meant: "Let everyone who did not give a ring for the making of the golden calf, come unto me," and it was then that "All the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him."

But his delight is in the Law of the Lord (Ps. 1:2). This refers to the tribe of Levi, of whom it is said "The law of truth was in his mouth . . . the priest's lips should keep knowledge"

(Mal. 2:6). *And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water* (Ps. 1:3) also refers to the tribe of Levi whom the Holy One, blessed be He, planted in the Land of Israel, for the entire tribe entered the Land. Thus also, R. Zē'era taught in the name of R. Joshua ben Levi: Out of the entire tribe of Levi none of the men and none of the women, except Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, died in the wilderness.

The proof is to be found in the statement that Eleazar the priest, a son of the tribe of Levi, did not die, for it is said *These are the inheritances, which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun . . . distributed for inheritance by lot in Shiloh before the Lord, at the door of the Tent of Meeting* (Josh. 19:51). Now what was the intention in mentioning Eleazar in this verse? Scripture mentions Eleazar to tell us that what was true of him was true of his tribe, and that though all of those who entered the Land are named in the general statement, *They shall surely die in the wilderness; and there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun* (Num. 26:65), nevertheless, Eleazar also entered. Therefore, since we find that in the verse *These are the inheritances which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua, the son of Nun . . . distributed for inheritance . . . in Shiloh*, Eleazar is mentioned as an exception to the general statement, it follows that all members of his tribe are exceptions with him to the general statement, *They shall surely die*, etc. This we deduce from what we have been taught: "If a term of a general statement is made the subject of an exception, then what is predicated of the excepted term is not limited to the term, but extends to the general statement."⁶⁰ Therefore, though Eleazar with his tribe is included among those of whom Scripture says, *They shall surely die in the wilderness*, etc., Eleazar is the subject of an exception to this general statement. It follows that what is predicated of him in the exception is not limited to him alone, but extends to his entire tribe.

Nor can we say that Eleazar was excepted because he was less than twenty years old,⁶¹ for we find that Eleazar had taken a wife while he was still in Egypt, as is said, *And Eleazar Aaron's*

son took him one of the daughters of Putiel to wife (Ex. 6:25). Furthermore even before the decree of death was issued against the generation that was to die in the wilderness, Eleazar was already officiating as a priest in the Tent of Meeting, as is said *To the office of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest pertaineth the oil for the light, and the sweet incense, and the daily meat-offering* (Num. 4:16). And since we find that no Levite less than thirty years old had the right to minister as a priest, for it is said *Take the sum of . . . the sons of Levi . . . from thirty years old and upward . . . to do work in the Tent of Meeting* (Num. 4:3), we must conclude that Eleazar was thirty years old before the decree of death was issued.

15. A different exposition: *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked* refers to the sons of Korah who did not walk in the counsel of their father after Moses had said to them "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men" (Num. 16:26). *Nor standeth in the way of sinners*—like Korah and his companions, who, it is said, "have sinned at the cost of their lives" (Num. 17:3). *Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful* like Korah, who spoke in scorn against Moses and Aaron. What did Korah do? He assembled all the congregation against Moses and Aaron, as is said *Korah assembled all the congregation against them unto the door of the Tent of Meeting* (Num. 16:19), and in their presence he began to speak words of scorn, saying: In my neighborhood there was a widow, and with her were her two fatherless daughters. The widow had only one field, and when she was about to plow, Moses said to her: *Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together* (Deut. 22:10). When she was about to sow, Moses said to her: *Thou shalt not sow thy field with two kinds of seed* (Lev. 19:19). When she was about to reap the harvest and to stack the sheaves, Moses said to her: "Thou shalt not harvest the gleanings, the overlooked sheaves, and the corners of the field" (cf. Lev. 19:9; Deut. 24:19). When she was about to bring the harvest into the granary, Moses said to her: "Give me the heave-offering, the first tithe, and the second tithe." She submitted to God's decree and

gave them to him. What did the poor woman do then? She sold the field and bought two sheep, so that she might clothe herself in the wool shorn from them, and so that she might profit out of the lambs. As soon as the sheep brought forth their young, Aaron came and said to the widow: "Give me the firstling males, for this is what the Holy One, blessed be He, said to me: *All the firstling males that are born of thy herd and of thy flock thou shalt sanctify unto the Lord thy God*" (Deut. 15:19). Again she submitted to God's decree, and gave the young of her sheep to Aaron. When the time for shearing arrived, she sheared her two sheep. Then Aaron came again and said to the widow: "Give me the first portion of the shearing." She said: "There is no strength in me to withstand this man; behold, I will slaughter the sheep and eat them." After she slaughtered them, Aaron came again and said to her: "Give me the shoulder, the jaws, and the maw." The widow said: "Though I have slaughtered my sheep, I am still not free of thy demands: behold, I devote my sheep to the uses of the Temple."⁶² But Aaron said to her: "If the sheep are to be devoted to the uses of the Temple, they belong entirely to me, for it was said to me *Everything devoted in Israel shall be thine*" (Num. 18:14). Thereupon Aaron lifted up the sheep, went on his way, and left her weeping with her two daughters.

Is such a thing right? Oh, the despoiled woman! the hapless woman! Moses and Aaron have done all these things to her, but hang the blame on the Holy One, blessed be He!

The verse *But his delight is in the Law of the Lord* (Ps. 1:2) applies to the sons of Korah, who composed a Psalm,⁶³ saying: Are we still bound to honor our father [or] ought we to accord honor to Moses our teacher?⁶⁴ Thereupon they decided in favor of honoring Moses. The words which conclude the verse *In His Law doth he meditate* also apply to the sons of Korah.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water (Ps. 1:3). This verse, too, applies to the sons of Korah. After Korah and his company were swallowed up, Korah's sons remained standing like a boat's mast, as it is said, *They remained like a*

mast (Num. 26:10). Rabbi said: "All the area around them was rent, but the ground they stood upon was not rent." R. Samuel bar Nahman explained that the three sons of Korah were not standing together in one place, but that each was by himself, so that after the earth was rent they stood like three pillars. Accordingly, in the popular saying, "On what does the earth stand? On three pillars," the three are said by some to refer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by others to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and by still others to the three sons of Korah.

Not so the wicked—that is, Korah and his company. *Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment* (Ps. 1:5),—that is, Korah and his company shall not stand. *For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous* (Ps. 1:6) who are the sons of Korah; *The way of the wicked shall perish*: Korah and his company shall perish.

16. Another comment on *His delight is in the Law of the Lord* (Ps. 1:2). Elsewhere this is what Scripture says: *Good luck have thou with thine honor: ride on because of the law of truth, of meekness, and of righteousness* (Ps. 45:5).⁶⁵ A scholar will prosper in honor when he brings together his fellows, not to flatter them, but *because of the law of truth, of meekness, and of righteousness*. Therefore, the legal decisions of R. Johanan and of Resh Lakish were held in great honor and received much praise, whenever scholars sat down to analyze them.

Thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things (Ps. 45:5). R. Hiyya taught: If you take delight in Torah, which was given in a terrifying setting and which was written with God's right hand, there will come a time when you, too, from a teacher's chair will render decisions based on Torah.

R. Abba taught: If you take delight in Torah, the result will be the naming of Torah after you. And R. Yudan observed: Scripture does not say here "In the Law of the Lord doth he meditate day and night," but says, *In his law doth he meditate day and night*. This is to say that if a man meditate hard upon the Law, it will be named after him: For example, R. Hiyya's Mishnah,⁶⁶ or R. Hoshaiiah's Mishnah, or Bar Kappara's, or the like. And

why are these collections of Mishnah so named? Because the men they are named after meditated hard upon the Law.

You can see for yourself that this is a fact, for although the Written Law surely belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He, and is called *The Law of the Lord* (Ps. 19:8), yet because Moses went on high and there meditated forty days and forty nights, almost dying for its sake, the Written Law came to be called after Moses, for it is said, *Remember ye the Law of Moses My servant* (Mal. 3:22).

17. A further comment on *His delight is in the Law of the Lord*. When a man occupies himself with Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, will provide things that delight him, for it is said *His delight is in the Law of the Lord*.

R. Eliezer taught: The children of Israel say to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe! We would like to labor day and night in the Torah, but we have not the leisure." The Holy One, blessed be He, replies: "Keep the ordinance of Tefillin, and I shall reckon it as if you had labored day and night in the Torah."⁶⁷ R. Johanan said, however: But is not this point already fully made in Scripture in the passage *And it shall be for a sign unto thee, upon thy hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the Law of the Lord may be in thy mouth . . . Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year* (Ex. 13:9-10)?⁶⁸

R. Joshua argued: What R. Eliezer teaches makes it impossible for the words *In His Law doth he meditate day and night* to be obeyed at night, for the ordinance of Tefillin can be kept only by day, as it is said, *Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in its season from day to day*.⁶⁹

When R. Eliezer asked R. Joshua: "Then, according to you, in what way can the words *In His law doth he meditate day and night be obeyed*?" R. Joshua answered: "By the reading of the Shema,⁷⁰ for when a man reads the Shema morning and evening, the Holy One, blessed be He, reckons it for him as if he had labored day and night in the study of Torah."

Bar Kappara taught: When a man reads two chapters of Scrip-

ture in the morning, and reads two more chapters in the evening, he obeys the words, *And in His Law doth he meditate day and night*. R. Hiyya bar Abba said that what Bar Kappara taught could apply only to a man who was in the habit of expounding the two chapters. For only when he adds two expositions of the chapters he reads in the morning and two of the chapters read in the evening, is it reckoned as if he had labored day and night in the study of Torah.

R. Berechiah said: Our forefathers instituted the practice of studying Mishnah at dawn and at dusk.⁷¹

It was asked of R. Joshua, "At what time may a father teach his son the wisdom of the Greeks?" He answered: "It may be taught at a time which is not part of the day, nor part of the night, for it is said *This book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night* (Josh. 1:8)." R. Joshua also said: A father should not even take time to teach his son a craft lest he cause his son to neglect the words of Torah,⁷² of which it is said *Therefore choose life* (Deut. 30:19).

In a Mishnah⁷³ we read: In the morning, two benedictions are said before the Shema, and one after the Shema; in the evening, two benedictions are said before the Shema, and two after⁷⁴ the Shema; thus the number of meditations is the same⁷⁵ for day and night in order to conform to the command of the verse, *Thou shalt meditate therein day and night* (Josh. 1:8).

R. Jose bar Abin taught in the name of R. Joshua ben Levi that [seven benedictions are said daily], in conformity with the statement of the verse *Seven times a day do I praise thee* (Ps. 119:164).

R. Nahman said in the name of R. Mani: If a man acts in accordance with the words *Seven times a day do I praise Thee*, it is reckoned as if he had obeyed the command *Thou shalt meditate therein day and night*.

18. Another comment on *And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water* (Ps. 1:3).⁷⁶ Elsewhere this is what Scripture says: *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters* (Isa. 55:1). Like waters given from heaven, as it is said *At the sound of His giving a multitude of waters in the heavens* (Jer.

10:13), so were the words of Torah given from heaven, as is said *Ye yourselves have seen that I talked with you from heaven* (Ex. 20:19). Like waters given without cost to the world, so were the words of Torah given without cost to the world, as it is said *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money* (Isa. 55:1). Like waters coming down with thunder and lightning to earth, as it is said *It is the Lord that commandeth the waters; it is the glorious God that thundereth* (Ps. 29:3),⁷⁷ so the words of Torah came down with thunder and lightning upon the earth, as it is said *And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount* (Ex. 19:16). Like waters which are living things, so words of Torah are living things to those who occupy themselves with them, as it is said *They are life unto those who find them* (Prov. 4:22), and also, *It is no vain thing for you: because it is your life* (Deut. 32:47). Like waters coming down in myriads of drops and becoming a multitude of brooks, so are words of Torah: One day a man learns one law, the next day another law, until brimming with wisdom he wells forth like a fountain.

R. Unia said: Since waters may be diverted not only into gardens and orchards but also into privies and bath houses,⁷⁸ it might be argued that the words of Torah can likewise be so diverted: Therefore Scripture declares that *The ways of the Lord are right . . . but transgressors stumble therein*⁷⁹ (Hos. 14:10).

R. Ḥiyya taught: As the waters cover the nakedness of the sea, as is said *The waters cover the sea* (Isa. 11:9), so the words of Torah cover the nakedness of Israel, as is said, *Love*⁸⁰ *covereth all transgressions* (Prov. 10:12). As in asking for water a grown man is not ashamed to say to a child, "Let me have a drink of water," so in studying Torah a grown man should not be ashamed to say to a child, "Teach me a chapter" or "Teach me a law." As in thirst for water a man is not too lazy to go out to drink, so in study of Torah, a disciple should not be too lazy to go to his master to be taught by him. Thus it happened with R. Jose who went to his master to study Torah, etc.⁸¹

Of this, Scripture says *Moses commanded us a law, an inherit-*

ance of the congregation of Jacob (Deut. 33:4)—that is, whoever regards himself as a member of the congregation is to be counted as of Jacob. Thus even proselytes, if they occupy themselves with Torah, are equal in worth to the high priest, for the verse which reads *Ye shall therefore keep My statutes, and Mine ordinances, which if a man do, he shall live by them* (Lev. 18:5) does not say “Which if a priest do,” nor say, “Which if a Levite do,” nor say, “Which if an Israelite do,” but says, *Which if a man do*.

Mark also what is said of Jethro: *And the families of scribes who sat before Jabez: the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, the Sucathites. These are the Kenites that came of Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab* (1 Chron. 2:55).⁸² And Shemaiah and Abtalyon, who were among the descendants of [the Canaanite] Sisera, taught Torah to multitudes just as the men of the Great Synagogue⁸³ did. Hence it is written *These words the Lord spoke unto all your congregation* (Deut. 5:19).

19. *In His Law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water* (Ps. 1:2-3a). Elsewhere, this is what Scripture says: *Wisdom . . . is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her* (Prov. 3:18). R. Isaac bar Hiyya taught: Why is the wisdom of Torah called a *tree of life*? Because it is as precious as life itself to all living things.

R. Yudan taught: Why is Torah likened to the tree of life? To tell you that as the tree of life is spread out above all living creatures in the Garden of Eden, so Torah is spread out above all living creatures and can bring them into life in the world-to-come.

It is taught that it takes five hundred years to travel past the trunk of the tree of life, and that the four rivers (cf. Gen. 2:10) of the beginning of time separated from under it.

R. Samuel bar R. Isaac was in the habit of planting himself in one learned company after another so as to bring to fulfillment the words *I have more understanding because of an abundance of teachers* (Ps. 119:99). For to what do the words *rivers of water* refer? To cities such as Tiberias with its learned companies, Sepphoris with its learned companies, Jamnia with its learned companies, and Lydda with its learned companies.

That bringeth forth his fruit in his season (ibid.). R. Ḥanina taught that a man ought to divide his hours of study in this way:⁸⁴ part of the time for Scripture, part of the time for Mishnah, and part of the time for Talmud.

His leaf also shall not wither (ibid.): all men will have need of his small talk as well as of his instruction in Torah.

And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper (ibid.): The reason all men sought the counsel of a teacher like R. Eleazar ben 'Arak was that when he gave counsel it turned out well. People would say to him, "Thou art a prophet!" And he would answer: "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I have the tradition from my Masters that all counsel given in God's name turns out well."

R. Menasya retorted: Is this not already fully stated in the verse *There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand* (Prov. 19:21),—that is, only such counsel wherein is the word of the Lord shall stand.

20. *The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away* (Ps. 1:4). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys* (Song 2:1). The congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, I am the beloved, for Thou hast lavished more love upon me than upon all other peoples. I am *the rose*: with the hands of Bezalel⁸⁵ I have made for Thee a Tabernacle for Thy shadow,"—*rose* (*ḥabāšelet*) is here seen as a composite of the words for "Tabernacle" (*ḥebḥyon*) and "shadow" (*šel*), or as a composite of the words "beloved" (*ḥabīb*) and "shadow" (*šel*)—*of Sharon*: I am the people that at Moses' bidding sang a song (*shirah*) unto Thee.

A different comment on *I am the rose of Sharon*: "I am the beloved which was covered (*ḥabuyah*) by the shadow of Egypt, but after the Holy One, blessed be He, brought me to Rameses, through good deeds I freshened as quickly as a rose."⁸⁶ *Of Sharon*: "I am the people which sang a song of triumph to God," for it is written *Ye shall have a song as in the night when a feast*

was hallowed (Isa. 30:29). R. Johanan said in the name of R. Simeon⁸⁷ ben Jehozadak: This verse is intended to teach that as a song was sung on the night of Sennacherib's discomfiture (cf. Isa. 30:31), so a song is to be sung on the night of the feast celebrating Pharaoh's discomfiture.⁸⁸

Another comment on *I am the rose of Sharon*: "I am the beloved, the one who was covered by Mount Sinai, for the Lord arched the mount over me as if it were a vault, as is said *And they stood at the nether part of the mount* (Ex. 19:17),⁸⁹ and at once my resolve freshened as does a rose, and I said: *All that the Lord hath spoken we will do, and obey* (Ex. 24:7)."

Another comment on *I am the rose of Sharon*: "I am the beloved who is covered by the shadow of the [gentile] kingdoms, but when the Holy One, blessed be He, redeems me, I shall freshen like a rose and sing a song to Him, as is said *O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvelous things* (Ps. 98:1)."

R. Berechiah taught: It was the wilderness⁹⁰ which said, *I am the rose of Sharon*: "I am the one beloved by the Holy One, blessed be He, for all the good things of the world are hidden within me, and God has bestowed His blessing upon me, for He said, *I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the Shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil-tree; I will set in the desert the fir-tree, and the pine, and the box-tree together* (Isa. 41:19). And when the Holy One, blessed be He, requires it of me,⁹¹ I shall return to God what He laid away with me,⁹² and I shall again blossom as the rose, and shall sing a song to Him, for it is said *The wilderness and the parched land shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose* (Isa. 35:1)."

The Rabbis taught that it was the earth which said *I am the rose of Sharon*: "I am the beloved one in whose shadows all the dead of the world are hidden. But when the Holy One, blessed be He, requires it of me, I shall return to Him what He laid away with me, as is said *Thy dead shall live, my dead bodies shall arise—Awake and sing ye that dwell in the dust* (Isa. 26:19),⁹³ and I will blossom as the rose, and sing a song to God,

as is said *From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs: 'Glory to the Righteous' (Isa. 24:16).*"

[*I am . . . the lily of the valleys.*] R. Eleazar⁹⁴ said: The righteous are likened to the most exquisite plant and to its most exquisite variety: the most exquisite plant, the lily; its most exquisite variety, the lily of the valley: not the lily of the mountain which soon withers, but the lily of the valley which blossoms again and again. But the wicked, they are likened to the vilest thing and to its vilest representative: the vilest thing is chaff, for it is said of the wicked, *Let them be as chaff before the wind* (Ps. 35:5). It is written further, *The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away* (Ps. 1:4): Do not suppose that the wicked are likened to the chaff of the valley which contains some moisture! No, they are like the chaff of the mountains, which the wind driveth away.

R. Abba bar Kahana taught that the congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, *I am . . . the lily of the valleys*, deep in the valleys of trouble,"⁹⁵ but when the Holy One, blessed be He, lifts me up out of my troubles, with good deeds I shall freshen like a rose, and shall sing a song to Him, as is said *Lord, in trouble have we sought Thee* (Isa. 26:16)." ⁹⁶

But the Rabbis taught that the congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He, "*I am . . . the lily of the valleys*. Master of the universe! I am the one hidden away in the valleys of Gehenna, but when the Holy One, blessed be He, raises me up out of the horrible pit, out of the depths of Gehenna, with good deeds I shall freshen like a rose and shall sing a song to Him, as is said *He brought me up also out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God; many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord* (Ps. 40:3-4)."

This teaching of the Rabbis agrees with that of R. Eleazar the Modiite: In the time-to-come, all the guardian angels of the nations of the earth will come into the presence of the Holy One,

blessed be He, and in His presence they will denounce Israel, saying, "Master of the universe! How do the children of Israel differ from the other nations of the earth? The others worshipped idols, and these worshipped idols. The others shed blood, and these shed blood. The others committed incest, and these committed incest. But though the others are being sent down to Gehenna, these are not being sent down." The Holy One, blessed be He, will answer: "Since what you say is true, let each and every nation together with its god go down into Gehenna, and let each be tested by fire; and let the children of Israel also go down into Gehenna, and let them be tested by fire." Whereupon the children of Israel will answer the Holy One, blessed be He, and say, "Thou art our expectation, and Thou art our hope. We have no one worthy of trust but Thee. And if it be Thy will [that we go down into Gehenna], pray go Thou at the head of us." The Holy One, blessed be He, will then say to them: "Be not afraid, for all of you are clothed in scarlet!" by which is meant the mark of circumcision, as alluded to in the verse, *She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet* (Prov. 31:21).⁹⁷ "Nevertheless, I shall go down with you," as is said *For all the peoples walk every one in the name of his god; we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever* (Micah 4:5).

R. Reuben said in the name of R. Hanina: Were it not that the verse is so clear, it is scarcely conceivable that one would dare say such a thing as *By fire will judgment be executed upon the Lord* (Isa. 66:16).⁹⁸ Mark that the verse does not read "will execute," but *will be executed*. This is what David had in mind when he said: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me* (Ps. 23:4).⁹⁹ By *rod* is meant chastisement, as is said "I will visit . . . transgression with the rod" (Ps. 89:33); by *staff* is meant one's understanding of Torah, as is said "The princes digged it, by the direction of the Lawgiver, with their staves" (Num. 21:18). But lest the words *they comfort me* might lead one to think that understanding of Torah

may be had without chastisement, therefore the word *only* [which begins the next verse (Ps. 23:6a) makes the comforting conditional]. And lest the verse *Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life* (*ibid.* 23:6a), might lead one to think that it is speaking of life in this world, therefore the Psalm continues, *and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever* (Ps. 23:6b).¹⁰⁰

R. Tanhuma¹⁰¹ said: What do the righteous in this world resemble? A charger¹⁰² inlaid with precious stones and jewels, and grass-cuttings lying upon it. When the charger is picked up so that what lies upon it is blown away, only then is the beauty of the charger seen. Even so, there will come a time when the wicked will be blown like grass from the face of earth, as is said *The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the breath of the Lord bloweth upon it—surely the people is grass. The grass withereth* (Isa. 40:7–8a). In this world the righteous are smitten, but in the world-to-come they will have firm footing and great strength, as is said *But the word of our God shall stand for ever* (*ibid.* 40:8b), *the word of our God* referring to the righteous who obey the Torah, the word¹⁰³ of our God.

21. *On account of the word "so,"*¹⁰⁴ *the ungodly shall not stand* (Ps. 1:5). Elsewhere, this is what Scripture says: *The lips of the wise disperse knowledge; but the heart of the fat*¹⁰⁵ *doeth not so* (Prov. 15:7). *The lips of the wise disperse knowledge*: the wise are disciples who teach Torah. And *the heart of the fat doeth not so*: the fat are the exceedingly rich,¹⁰⁶ who have not the vital sap of Torah within them.

R. Hezekiah said: They are men whose knowledge of Torah is superficial, not thorough; as the saying goes, "A single coin in a bottle goes clink-clink."

Another comment on *The lips of the wise disperse knowledge*. The wise are the children of Israel who by proclaiming His oneness every day, morning and evening, continually enthrone the Holy One, blessed be He. *But the heart of the foolish doeth not so*: The foolish are unbelievers who say that the world is a machine that runs itself.

Another comment on *The lips of the wise disperse knowledge*. R. Yudan and R. Phinehas said: This means that the Holy One, blessed be He, declared to the wicked: I created the world by the command, *It shall be so* (Gen. 1:11). But you say that it was not so created: by your lives, not so? *On account of the word "so," the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment* (Ps. 1:5).

But is it not better for them if they do not have to stand in the judgment, and do not have to give an account of themselves? However, it shall be with them, as the saying goes: "Such-and-such stood up in court and had not a leg to stand on."

R. Abba bar Kahana taught that in the verse *Therefore the ungodly [ones] shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous* (Ps. 1:5), by *the ungodly [ones]* is meant two such and by *sinners* is meant two such, making four. These are the four kingdoms¹⁰⁷ which will have not a leg to stand on in the day of judgment.

R. Samuel bar Nahmani said: The judgment for the sin of idolatry will alone utterly destroy the wicked. He has this verse: *Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment*, where Scripture does not say "in the judgments" but *in the judgment*. Of idolatry it is written *But they are through one thing brutish and foolish: the instruction of idols!* (Jer. 10:8),¹⁰⁸ and also *The evil shall slay the ungodly* (Ps. 34:22), and further, *For a righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the ungodly shall fall by one mischief* (Prov. 24:16). One alone, not two, will suffice.

22. *For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous* (Ps. 1:6). Elsewhere this is what Scripture says: *The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch upon the evil and the good* (Prov. 15:3). And the proof? The verse: *The Lord saw that Leah was hated and He opened her womb* (Gen. 29:31).

The way of the wicked shall perish. R. Eliakim said: For the sake of the way of the righteous, the Holy One, blessed be He, sees to it that the way of the wicked perishes, so that the righteous may not be led astray in it.

R. Eleazar declared: Indeed, for the newly wicked God sees

to it that their way perishes, but when they persist, He allows them to go on their way, for it is said *If it concerneth the scorn-ers, He lets them scorn* (Prov. 3:34). That this is so you can tell from what happened to the wicked Balaam. When Balak sent messengers to him telling him to curse Israel, what did Balaam say first? He said: *If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God* (Num. 22:18). For while Balaam slept, the Holy One, blessed be He, appeared to him in a dream,¹⁰⁹ as is said *And God came unto Balaam* (Num. 22:9), and said: *Thou shalt not go with them* (Num. 22:12). Whereupon¹¹⁰ Balaam said: "Because I am righteous, God does not wish to put me to any trouble"; and therefore he asked the Holy One, blessed be He, "Shall I curse the people of Israel from here?"¹¹¹ And when God said: *Thou shalt not curse the people* (*ibid.*), Balaam asked further: "Shall I then bless the people of Israel from here?" And God replied: "They do not need thy blessing, for they are blessed (*ibid.*)."¹¹²

Concerning this incident, R. Tanhuma quoted the proverb: To a wasp we say, "Neither thy honey nor thy sting."

Another comment on *The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the wicked shall perish*. R. Berechiah said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, was about to create Adam, He foresaw that righteous as well as wicked men would descend from him, and He said: "If I create Adam, wicked men will descend from him. If I do not create him, how will righteous men ever descend from him?" What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? Putting the way of the wicked¹¹³ out of His sight, He summoned up the measure of mercy¹¹⁴ and created Adam. Hence it is said *The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the wicked shall perish*—that is, God put the way of the wicked out of His sight.

Another comment on *The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the wicked shall perish*: You find that for the sake of Abraham, God caused Nimrod to perish; for the sake of Isaac, Abimelech; and for the sake of Jacob, Esau. Hence,

The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the wicked shall perish. And when does the Lord make known His regard for the way of the righteous? When He sees to it that the way of the wicked perishes. As Scripture says, *The hand of the Lord shall be known toward His servants.* When? When *He will have indignation against His enemies* (Isa. 66:14).

R. Johanan said: There will come a time when the Holy One, blessed be He, will sit in judgment on both the righteous and the wicked [without reading aloud the record of each person]. And after He has given His judgment of the righteous and has led them to the Garden of Eden, and after He has given His judgment of the wicked and has condemned them to Gehenna, then the wicked will say: "God did not properly judge us, for those whom He favored He acquitted, and those whom He did not favor He condemned." The Holy One, blessed be He, will reply: "I did not wish to make public your sins." And what will the Holy One, blessed be He, do then? He will read their indictments aloud, and they will go down to Gehenna.

R. Phinehas said: He who is completely steeped in sin cannot repent, and will never be forgiven. The Holy One, blessed be He, says to such sinners as this: "You might even set Gehenna on fire,"¹¹⁵ for it is said *As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife* (Prov. 26:21); therefore I shall impose a multitude of punishments upon you."

R. Huna taught in the name of R. Simeon: It is said *And they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that keep transgressing against Me* (Isa. 66:24): The verse does not read "upon the men that have transgressed against Me," but *upon the men that keep transgressing against Me*, those, that is, who keep transgressing even after they are condemned.

PSALM TWO

1. *Why do the heathen rage . . . against the Lord, and against His anointed?* (Ps. 2:1, 2). Elsewhere, this is what Scripture says: *The wicked are like the troubled sea . . . whose waters cast up mire and dirt* (Isa. 57:20). Like the sea whose mire and dirt are upon its shore, so the foulness of the wicked is upon their lips. Thus Pharaoh asked: *Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?* (Ex. 5:2). And when it is said of Sisera that for *Twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel* (Judg. 4:3), by *mightily* is meant blasphemously and revilingly, as is suggested by the verse “Your words have been all too mighty against Me, saith the Lord” (Mal. 3:13). And Sennacherib spoke foully: *Hath any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria . . . that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?* (2 Kings 18:33, 35). And Nebuchadnezzar spoke foully: *O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego . . . who is the god that shall deliver you out of my hands?* (Dan. 3:14, 15).

2. Another comment on *Why do the heathen rage? . . . The kings of the earth set themselves . . . against the Lord, and against His anointed.* Elsewhere, this is what Scripture says: *It is He that sitteth above the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers . . . that bringeth princes to nothing* (Isa. 40:22, 23). Therefore whom do the wicked resemble? Grasshoppers trapped in an urn, flinging themselves upwards, only to fall down. So shall it be with the wicked.

R. Judah bar Nahmani commented: After the generation of the flood, the next generation said, “*Come, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven*” (Gen. 11:4). Ought not the next generation have profited from the experience of the preceding one? Yet, even in the time-to-come, Gog and Magog¹ will set themselves against the Lord and His anointed, only to fall down. David, foreseeing this, said: *Why do the heathen rage? . . . The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and His anointed.*

Another comment on *The wicked are like the troubled sea* (Isa. 57:20). As a wave rises out of the troubled sea and rears up as though to flood the whole earth, yet falls flat on the sand when it reaches the shore, so whenever one heathen nation joins with another to harm the children of Israel, it will fall before them. The heathen of the earth resemble the sea, as is said *The wicked are like the troubled sea*; and the children of Israel resemble the sands of the sea, as is said *The children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea* (Hos. 2:1). You find that Nimrod² and his allies joined together against Abraham, but they fell before him, for, as Scripture says, *The night itself contended against them*.³ (Gen. 14:15). Abimelech fell before Isaac; Esau and Laban, before Jacob; Pharaoh and Egypt, before the children of Israel, and the same is true of many others mentioned in Scripture. And in the time-to-come Gog and Magog will fall before the children of Israel. Foreseeing their fall David cried out: *Why do the heathen rage? . . . The kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord, and against His anointed.*

Why do the heathen rage? (Ps. 2:1). R. Isaac observed: When a man says to his friend: "Why dost thou this or that?" his friend gets angry. Yet the righteous say to the Holy One, blessed be He, *Why do the heathen rage?* and God does not get angry, and the righteous are not punished. And why are the righteous not punished? Because they seek no boon for themselves, but only for the children of Israel.

The people imagine a vain thing (ibid.). R. Aibu commented: All the raging of the wicked—their wearying of themselves—is in vain, as is said, *The people labor for the fire, and the nations weary themselves for vanity* (Hab. 2:13). But the children of Israel, *They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble* (Isa. 65:23).

3. *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed.* When the children of Israel will come to the Holy One, blessed be He, [with complaints against their enemies],⁴ He will answer, *I shall deliver⁵ them into your hands* (Lam. 3:63): "I shall

break their power," as it is said *God the Most High . . . hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand* (Gen. 14:20).

Should it be reported to the lord Messiah in the time-to-come, "A certain land is in rebellion against thee," He will say, "Let locusts come and smite it," as is said *He shall smite the land with the rod of his mouth* (Isa. 11:4). Or should it be reported to him, "A certain province is in rebellion against thee," he will say, "Let the angel of death come and slay, and so destroy it," as is said *And with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked* (ibid.). And when the kings of the heathen see how great is their affliction, they will come and bow down to the lord Messiah, as is said *They shall bow down to thee with their face to the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet* (Isa. 49:23).

Against the Lord, and against His anointed (Ps. 2:2) was Korah, who murmured against Aaron, the anointed of the Lord, because of the priesthood. Moses said: "If my brother Aaron had taken the priesthood on his own, you would have acted properly in murmuring against him. But ah! the Holy One, blessed be He, to whom greatness, sovereignty, and power belong, gave it to him; therefore any man who sets himself against Aaron sets himself against none other than the Holy One, blessed be He." Hence it is said, *Against the Lord, and against his anointed*.

Another comment on *against the Lord, and against His anointed*,⁶ by way of the parable of a mighty man who lived in a certain land. An army about to invade the land, but fearful of the mighty man, took counsel, saying: "What must we do? Come, let us first slay the mighty man, and then fight against the land." Likewise speak kings and rulers of the earth.

4. R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Levi: Cursed be the wicked who contrive dark counsel against Israel, each one boasting: "My counsel is better than thine." Esau said: "Cain was a fool, for he slew his brother Abel while his father was still alive. Did not Cain know that his father would be fruitful and multiply and would beget Seth? I shall not act so unknowingly. When *the days of mourning for my father are at hand, I will slay my brother Jacob* (Gen. 27:41) and inherit his portion." Pharaoh said:

"Esau was a fool in saying, *Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand*. Did he not know that while his father was alive, his brother Jacob would be fruitful and would multiply? I shall not act so unknowingly. Under the very birth-stools of their mothers, while they are yet new-born infants, I shall smite the children of Israel." So in saying *Let us deal wisely* (Ex. 1:10), Pharaoh meant: "Let us act more knowingly than those who preceded us." At once *Pharaoh charged all his people, saying: Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river* (Ex. 1:22). Haman said: "Pharaoh was a fool when he *charged all his people, saying: 'Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.'* Did he not know that the daughters would marry, would be fruitful, and would multiply? Yea, surely I shall not act so unknowingly: I shall *destroy, slay, and cause to perish all Jews, both young and old, little children and women* (Esther 3:13)." And Gog and Magog will likewise say, "Fools were all the former who involved themselves in scheming counsel against Israel.⁷ Did they not know that Israel have their Guardian in heaven? Yea, surely we shall not act so unknowingly—first we will make war against their Guardian, and then we shall turn upon Israel." Hence it is said *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed*. But the Holy One, blessed is He, will say to Gog and Magog: "Oh, ye wicked, do you set yourselves to make war against Me? How many battalions have I by Me! How many angels of flame, lightning, and fire have I by Me! And I shall go forth with them, and I shall fight beside them." Thus Scripture says: *The Lord will go forth as a mighty man . . . like a man of war . . . He will behave Himself mightily against His enemies* (Isa. 42:13). And Scripture says also: *For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle . . . Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fighteth in the day of battle . . . and the Lord my God shall come, and all the holy ones with Thee* (Zech. 14:2, 3, 5b). And what does Scripture go on to say? *The Lord shall be King over all the earth* (*ibid.* 14:9).

5. *The kings of the earth . . . say: "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us"* (Ps. 2:2, 3). *Let us break their bands asunder*—that is, the bands of the Tefillin⁸ which the children of Israel wear upon their arms; *and cast away their cords*—that is, the cords of the Tefillin which the children of Israel wear upon their heads."⁹

Another comment: *Let us break their bands asunder*—that is, break the seven laws which were enjoined upon the children of Noah;¹⁰ *and cast away their cords from us*—that is, the precepts¹¹ concerned with such things as the booth and the festive wreath¹²—precepts whose performance requires the interweaving of branches, and which are therefore called "cordings" (Lev. 23:40).¹³

Thus also, in the verse, *And many peoples shall go and say: "Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths"* (Isa. 2:3), the *ways and paths* are the seven laws whereby the children of Noah were bound.¹⁴

6. *He that sitteth in the heavens . . . will . . . speak unto them . . . I have set My king upon My holy hill of Zion* (Ps. 2:4-6). R. Isaac bar Hama taught: All the doings of the Holy One, blessed be He, are in holiness. His speech is in holiness, as is said *God spoke in His holiness* (Ps. 60:8); the praise of Him is in holiness, as is said *Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts is holy* (Isa. 6:3); His going is in holiness, as is said *The goings of my God, my King, in holiness* (Ps. 68:25); the baring of His arm is in holiness, as is said *The Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations* (Isa. 52:10); His sitting is in holiness, as is said *God sitteth upon the throne of His holiness* (Ps. 47:9); He is glorious in holiness, as is said *Who is like unto Thee, glorious in holiness?* (Ex. 15:11).

Another reading: *He that sitteth in the heavens will make them laugh*¹⁵ (Ps. 2:4)—that is, the Holy One, blessed be He, will make the heathen laugh in derision of one another.

R. Aha said in the name of R. Samuel bar Nahmani: There are four places in Scripture where God is described as laughing:

(1) *He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision* (Ps. 2:4). (2) *But Thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them; Thou shalt have all the heathen in derision* (Ps. 59:9); (3) *The wicked plotteth against the just . . . The Lord shall laugh at him* (Ps. 37:13); (4) *Because I have called, and ye refused . . . I also, in your calamity, will laugh* (Prov. 1:26).

7. *Then will He speak unto them in His wrath* (Ps. 2:5). But elsewhere Scripture says: *The Lord, the Lord, God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness* (Ex. 34:6). Therefore, it must be concluded that God is merciful and gracious to the children of Israel, but to the peoples of the earth who brought terror to the children of Israel God is wrathful and fierce, as is written *Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel, both with wrath and fierce anger* (Isa. 13:9). Hence it is said *Then will He speak unto them in His wrath*.

8. *Truly it is I that have set (nasakti) My king* (Ps. 2:6). What else can *nasakti* mean? "Anointed," as in the verse *Neither did I anoint (sakti) myself at all* (Dan. 10:3). Or "melted," as in the verse *A molten (massekah) calf* (Ex. 32:4). Or "made great," as in the verse *Eight great (nasik) ones among men* (Micah 5:4), and in the verse *The greatness (nasik) of the north* (Ezek. 32:30).¹⁶ And where have I made My king great? *Upon My holy hill of Zion* (Ps. 2:6), as the verse concludes.

9. *I will declare of the decree of the Lord. He said unto me: "Thou art My son"* (Ps. 2:7): The children of Israel are declared to be sons in the decree of the Law, in the decree of the Prophets, and in the decree of the Writings: In the decree of the Law it is written *Thus saith the Lord: Israel is My son, My first-born* (Ex. 4:22). In the decree of the Prophets it is written *Behold My servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high* (Isa. 52:13), and it is also written *Behold My servant, whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth* (Isa. 42:1). In the decree of the Writings it is written, *The Lord said unto my lord: "Sit thou at My right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool"* (Ps. 110:1), and it is also written *I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of*

heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the Ancient of days, and he was brought near before Him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him (Dan. 7:13, 14).

In another comment, the verse is read *I will tell of the decree: The Lord said unto me: Thou art My son . . . Ask of Me, and I will give the nations for thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth for thy possession* (Ps. 2:7, 8). R. Yudan said: All these goodly promises are in the decree of the King, the King of kings, who will fulfill them for the lord Messiah. And why all this? Because the Messiah occupies himself with Torah.

Another comment on *Thou art My son*: God does not say "I have a son," but "Thou art like a son to Me," as when a master wishing to give pleasure to his slave, says to him, "Thou art as dear to me as a son."

This day have I begotten thee (*ibid.*). R. Huna said: Suffering is divided into three portions: one, the Patriarchs and all the generations of men took; one, the generation that lived in the time of [Hadrian's] persecution¹⁷ took; and one, the generation of the lord Messiah will take. When the time comes, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say: "I must create the Messiah—a new creation." As Scripture says, *This day have I begotten thee*—that is, on the very day of redemption, God will create the Messiah.

So, too, the verse *She bare him after Absalom* (1 Kings 1:6) cannot be taken literally. *Bare* cannot mean "gave birth to," for how could Absalom's mother be said to have given birth to Adonijah? Was not Absalom the son of Maacha, and was not Adonijah the son of Hagit? *Bare* means, then, that Hagit made her son bear himself like Absalom. Just as Absalom got himself chariots and horsemen in order to rebel against his father, so did Adonijah; just as the one was a quarrelsome man, so was the other; and just as the one went about with *fifty men running before him* (1 Kings 1:5), so did the other.

10. *Ask of Me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth for thy possession* (Ps. 2:8). God, speaking to the Messiah, says: If thou dost ask for dominion

over the nations, already they are thine inheritance; if for the ends of the earth, already they are thy possession.¹⁸

R. Johanan taught: To three men¹⁹—Solomon, Ahaz, and the lord Messiah—the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Ask of Me." To Solomon, as is written *In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said: "Ask what I shall give thee"* (1 Kings 3:5). To Ahaz, as is written *"Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God: ask it either in the depth, or in the height above"* (Isa. 7:11). (Why was he called Ahaz, "one who has shut up?" Because he shut up and, by not asking, did not let goodness come to the world.²⁰ According to another explanation, he was called Ahaz because he shut up the doors of synagogues and of schools to prevent the study of Torah).²¹ To the lord Messiah, as is written *Ask of Me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth for thy possession.*

R. Samuel bar Nahmani taught: By close study of Scripture we learn that God said to two other men also—to Abraham and to Jacob—"Ask of me, and I shall give thee." In Abraham's asking *O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me* (Gen. 15:2) there is the implication that God said to him: "Ask of Me, and I shall give thee." And in Jacob's saying *Of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee* (Gen. 28:22) there is the implication that God said to him also: "Ask of Me, and I shall give thee."

The Messiah's asking is again referred to in the verse *He asked life of Thee, Thou gavest it him; even length of days for ever and ever* (Ps. 21:5). What did the Messiah ask? He asked that Israel should live and endure for ever and ever.

11. *Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel* (Ps. 2:9). When one of the prominent men of Sepphoris, a heretic it is said, lost his son by death, R. Jose²² went up to comfort him. When he saw the man, R. Jose smiled. The man asked: "Why art thou smiling?" R. Jose answered: "We trust in the Lord of heaven that thou wilt see thy son again in the world-to-come." The man said: "The

burden of my grief is not enough for me! Must thou come to add to the burden?" And he went on: "Can the sherds of a broken vessel ever be joined together again?" R. Jose answered: "No!" The man said: "Not even the likes of you will ever be brought together again. Does not your Scripture say, *Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel?*" R. Jose answered: "The verse speaks only of a potter's vessel. For before the clay of a potter's vessel is put through the fire, its form is not fixed; if it is broken it can be reshaped by crushing it and making it into another vessel; after it is put through the fire, however, its form is fixed, and if thereafter it is broken, it cannot be reshaped. On the other hand, a glass vessel, its form having been fixed before it is put through the fire, cannot be reshaped if it is broken; after it is put through the fire, however, the form of the vessel is no longer fixed, and if thereafter it is broken, it can be reshaped."²³ The man said: "Because a glass vessel is made by having breath blown through it, it can be reshaped." R. Jose then answered: "Let thine ears heed what thou lettest forth from thy mouth: If a vessel of glass, made with breath blown by a mortal, can be reshaped if it is broken, how much more true is this of a human being made with breath blown by the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said *The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life* (Gen. 2:7)!"

R. Isaac said: Scripture does not say, "like an earthen vessel," but *like a potter's vessel*, which can be reshaped before being put through the fire; [so the wicked can repent before being condemned to Gehenna].

12. *Kiss in purity*²⁴ (Ps. 2:12). Elsewhere, this is what Scripture says: *Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other* (Ps. 85:11). *Righteousness* alludes to Moses, of whom it is said "He executed the righteousness of the Lord" (Deut. 33:21); *peace* alludes to Aaron, of whom it is said "He walked with Me in peace" (Mal. 2:6); and *kissed each other* alludes to both of them, as is said "Aaron . . . went, and met him in the mountain of God, and kissed him" (Ex. 4:27).

Our Masters taught: All kisses are frivolous except three: the kiss at parting, of which it is written *Orpah kissed her mother-in-law* (Ruth 1:14); the kiss of homage, of which it is written *Samuel took the vial of oil and poured it upon Saul's head, and kissed him* (1 Sam. 10:1); and the kiss after long separation, as when *Aaron . . . kissed . . . Moses* (Ex. 4:27).

13. In another comment, the words are read *Kiss the grain*²⁵ (Ps. 2:12). By *grain* is meant Israel, as in the verse where it is said to Israel *Thy belly is like a heap of wheat* (Song 7:3). Why is Israel likened to wheat? R. Idi said: Like the grain of wheat which is cleft in the middle and thereby differs from all other cereals, all others being less important than it, so the children of Israel, by circumcision, by knotted fringes, by Tefillin, and by Mezuzahs,²⁶ are set apart from heathen peoples, all such peoples being less important than they are.

R. Simeon ben Lakish said: Like wheat which is counted measure by measure when it is taken out to be sown, and which is counted measure by measure when the harvest is brought in, so it was with the children of Israel: When they went down into Egypt, they went down only after they were counted, for it is said *Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons* (Deut. 10:22); and when they journeyed out of Egypt, they journeyed only after they were counted, for it is said *And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot* (Ex. 12:37).

R. Hanina commented on what R. Simeon ben Lakish said: Why are the children of Israel likened to wheat? The parable of the householder and his steward will tell you. When the steward comes to cast up his accounts with the householder, the householder does not ask: "How many wicker baskets of straw art thou bringing into the storehouse?" or "How many bundles of stubble art thou bringing into the granary?" Instead, he lets the steward consign the stubble to the fire and scatter the straw before the wind. What, then, does he say? "Take heed! Take the sum of the measures²⁷ of wheat thou bringest into the granary, for it is life for the world." Now, by the householder is

meant the Holy One, blessed be he, for the fulness of the earth is His, as is said *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof* (Ps. 24:1); by the steward is meant Moses of whom God said: *He is trusted in all My house* (Num. 12:7). What did the Holy One, blessed be He, say to Moses? Take no heed of the heathen, for they are like stubble, as it is said *Thy wrath . . . consumeth them as stubble* (Ex. 15:7). And what is done with stubble? It is floated off in the water, as is said *He shook off Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea* (Ps. 136:15). The heathen are also likened to thorns, as it is said *The peoples shall be as the burnings of lime; as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire* (Isa. 33:12). But Israel is like wheat, as it is said *Thy belly is like a heap of wheat* (Song 7:3). Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Take heed of the children of Israel by counting them to make sure of how many they are, as is said *Take the sum of the children of Israel according to their number* (Ex. 30:12).

14. Another interpretation of *Thy belly is like a heap of wheat* (Song 7:3) by way of the parable of an ear of wheat: An ear of wheat springs up and grows straight as a palm tree, its stalk long, its leaves long and wide, and the ear at the very top. Now when the stalk boasts and says, "For my sake was the field sown," and the leaves also boast and say, "For our sake was the field sown," the ear of wheat replies: "Soon harvest time will come, and every one will see and know for certain for whose sake the field was sown."²⁸ In no time at all, with the coming of harvest, the straw is disposed of in the water,²⁹ the chaff in the wind, and the weeds in flame, but the wheat is brought in for safe-keeping, and whoever handles it, kisses it.³⁰ Likewise, the peoples of the earth say, "For our sake was this world created." But in the time-to-come, when the day of judgment arrives, they will be dragged into the Valley of Hinnom,³¹ as is said *Now will I arise, saith the Lord . . . And the peoples shall be as the burnings of lime* (Isa. 33:10, 12), and as is also said *I will sit to judge all the nations round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe . . . for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision* (Joel 4:12-14). Only Israel will remain in the

time-to-come, as is said *The Lord's portion will be His people . . . him alone will the Lord lead* (Deut. 32:9, 12).^{31a}

15. Another comment on *Thy belly is . . . a heap of wheat set about with lilies* (Song 7:3). R. Yudan said: The *heap of wheat* is the Book of Leviticus³² wherein the laws of sin-offerings,³³ and the laws of guilt-offerings are set down, as is said *This is the law of the burnt-offering* (Lev. 6:2), *This is the law of the sin-offering* (Lev. 6:18), and *This is the law of the guilt-offering* (Lev. 7:1).³⁴ Consider, how many religious prescriptions and their refinements, how many minor and major precepts, how many laws concerning *piggul*³⁵ and concerning *notar*³⁶ are in the Book of Leviticus. And yet it is *set about with lilies*—that is, with words of instruction that are as delicate as lilies.

Of this, R. Levi said: It is the way of the world that when a man marries a woman who is some twenty or even thirty years old, he will come to make love to her directly after the wedding feast. But if the woman says to him: "I have seen something resembling a red rose,"³⁷ he will instantly draw away from her. What causes the man not to come near her? What wall is there between them? What fence? What serpent bit him? What viper stung him? What, in truth, could have stung him but the words of Torah that are as delicate as lilies: it is written therein *And thou shalt not approach a woman . . . as long as she is impure by her uncleanness* (Lev. 18:19).³⁸ Similarly, if a dish of meat is brought to a man who is hungry for food, and if it is said to him: "A piece of forbidden fat has fallen into the dish," he will instantly draw his hand away from the dish and will not eat of it. What causes the man who is hungry for food not to eat of the dish? You must admit that the cause is in the words of Torah that are as delicate as lilies: it is written therein *Ye shall eat neither fat nor blood* (Lev. 3:17).

16. Another comment on *Thy belly is like a heap of wheat* (Song 7:3). R. Hunya said in the name of R. Idi: Is not a heap of pepper plants or a heap of cedar cones more beautiful than a heap of wheat? Why then is Israel likened to nothing more beautiful than a heap of wheat? Because the world can live

without pepper plants and without cedar cones, but the world cannot live without wheat: Likewise, the world cannot live without Israel.

17. In another comment the verse is read *Sustain yourselves with grain*,³⁹ *lest He be angry, and ye lose the way* (Ps. 2:12). Rab and R. Hiyya differed as to the precise meaning of this verse. According to Rab, it means "Sustain yourselves with the bread of Torah, as is said 'As for him that wanteth understanding . . . come, eat of My bread' (Prov. 9:4, 5), or else the measure of God's just anger will be aroused against you, and you will lose the way of Torah." R. Hiyya, however, said that the verse means: "Sustain yourselves with the bread of repentance, or else the measure of God's just anger will be aroused against you, and you will lose the way of repentance. [God says:] 'Do not think that I need camps full of soldiers or siege-engines: If I kindle but one spark, I can make the world, which I created, perish,' for, as the verse concludes, *Ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little* (Ps. 2:12)."

[In another comment the verse is read *Do homage to the son*] ⁴⁰ (Ps. 2:12). What parable fits here? That of a king who became angry at the inhabitants of a certain city, and the inhabitants of the city went and pleaded with the king's son to mollify the king. So he went and mollified his father. After the king was mollified by his son, the inhabitants of the city were about to sing a song of homage to the king. But the king said to them: "Is it to me that ye would sing a song of homage? Go and sing the song of homage to my son: had it not been for him, I would long ago have destroyed the inhabitants of this city." Likewise, when the peoples of the earth will be told *O clap your hands, all ye peoples; shout unto God with the voice of triumph* (Ps. 47:2) and will be about to sing a song of homage to the Holy One, blessed be He, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say: "Is it to Me that ye would sing a song of homage? Go and sing it to Israel. Had it not been for them, the earth would not have endured for a single hour, for it is said *If I whet My glittering sword, and My hand take hold on judg-*

ment . . . I will make Mine arrows drunk with blood . . . Sing aloud, O ye nations, to His people (Deut. 32:41-43)."

A further comment on *Ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little* (Ps. 2:12): It is the nature of a mortal that when he is angry he is not at the same time well-disposed, and when he is well-disposed he is no longer angry. But the Holy One, blessed be He, when He is angry, is well-disposed in the midst of His anger, as it is said *For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a life-time* (Ps. 30:6). Hence the words *Ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little* are spoken to the peoples of the earth. The end of the verse, *Blessed are all they that take refuge in Him*, is spoken of the children of Israel, for they are the ones who take refuge in the Holy One, blessed be He.

PSALM THREE

1. *A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son* (Ps. 3:1). Consider these words in the light of the verse: *It is a joy to the righteous to do judgment* (Prov. 21:15).¹

This verse may mean that when He executes judgment, it is a joy to the Righteous One of the world. Why? Because He is thereby exalted in the world, as it is said *The Lord of hosts is exalted through judgment, and God the Holy One is sanctified through righteousness* (Isa. 5:16).

Or the verse *It is a joy to the righteous to do judgment* may mean that when He dealt the measure of judgment to His Holy Temple and destroyed it, it was a joy to the Righteous One of the world, as it is said *O God, awful art Thou because of Thy holy places* (Ps. 68:36). R. Johanan, commenting on what God did to His holy places,² said: "Since God did not spare His own House and His own Temple, how much more awesomely will He deal with those of others when He comes to punish the others!"

Or the verse *It is a joy to the righteous to do judgment* may mean that when He executes judgment upon righteous men, it is a joy to them, because He cleanses them thereby of their transgressions. That this is true you can see from the example of David. As soon as the measure of God's judgment struck him, David began to rejoice and to compose *A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son*.

2. Another comment on *A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son*. As to the exact order of David's Psalms, Scripture says elsewhere: *Man knoweth not the order*³ thereof (Job 28:13). R. Eleazar taught: The sections of Scripture are not arranged in their proper order. For if they were arranged in their proper order, and any man so read them, he would be able to resurrect the dead and perform other miracles. For this reason the proper order of the sections of Scripture is hidden from mortals and is known only to the Holy One, blessed be He, who said: "*Who, as I, can read and declare it, and set it in order*" (Isa. 44:7).

R. Jacob said in the name of R. Aḥa: Why is the Psalm on Gog and Magog (Ps. 2) placed next to the Psalm on Absalom? To tell you that a wicked son works greater cruelty upon his father than will the wars of Gog and Magog.

When R. Joshua ben Levi sought to arrange the Psalms in their proper order, a heavenly voice⁴ came forth and commanded: "Do not rouse that which slumbers!"

When R. Ishmael, in the presence of his master, sought to arrange the Psalms in their proper order, his master said to him: It is written *All His commandments are sure. They stand conjoined for ever and ever; they are done in truth and uprightness* (Ps. 111:7-8).

3. Another comment on *A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son* (Ps. 3:1). When did David compose this Psalm? When he *went up by the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up* (2 Sam. 15:30). But if David was weeping, how can he have been composing a Psalm? And if he was composing a Psalm, why was he weeping? This, R. Abba bar Kahana answered by a parable: A king who became angry at his son banished him from his palace, but later sent his son's tutor after him. The tutor went and found him both weeping and singing, and asked: "Why dost thou weep and sing at the same time?" He answered: "I am weeping because I made my father angry; but I am singing because my father sentenced me not to be slain, but to be banished. And as though it were not enough for me that he did not have me slain, he banished me in the company of captains and commanders."⁵

According to R. Yudan, however, this is what David said: "Jacob fled, as it is said *Jacob fled into the country of Syria* (Hos. 12:13); Moses fled, as is said *Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh* (Ex. 2:15-17).⁶ Like them, I am fleeing." Thereupon David recited the verse *I remembered Thy judgments of old, O Lord: and have comforted myself* (Ps. 119:52), as if to say: "When I remember the measure of judgment which Thou didst deal to those who lived before me, it comforts me." When did David speak thus? When *David said unto all his servants that were*

with him at Jerusalem: "Arise, and let us flee, for else none of us shall escape from Absalom; make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring down evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword" (2 Sam. 15:14). As to the meaning of the words *lest he . . . bring down evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword* Rab and R. Yudan differed. Rab maintained that David meant, "Absalom will bring down the evil of death upon us: We are like the inhabitants of a city condemned to be smitten with the edge of the sword."⁷ But R. Yudan maintained that David meant, "The Owner of the cup has begun to scour it, and will not stop until He has scoured it thoroughly." And so when David perceived that the Holy One, blessed be He, was scouring him clean of his transgressions, he began to compose a Psalm.

And at just what point in his flight did he begin to compose it? When *All his servants passed on beside him*;⁸ and *all the Kerethites, and all the Pelethites* (2 Sam. 15:18). (R. Aibu maintained that the *Kerethites* were the judges of the Sanhedrin who gave the final verdicts [*kēritot*], and that the *Pelethites* were the judicial experts [*mufla'e*]. According to the Rabbis, however, the *Pelethites* were the judges of the Sanhedrin, from whose verdict there was no appeal [*pele'*]⁹). Thus when David heard all his servants say to him: *Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall choose* (2 Sam. 15:15), he reasoned: "When the judicial authority of a ruler is destroyed, his servants do not stand in their prescribed places in his presence, but in disorder and confusion: They who should stand at his right, stand at his left; they who should stand at his left, stand at his right. But when they see that his judicial authority is well established, they make certain that they stand in their prescribed places." Thereupon David said: "If my royal authority were destroyed, each one of my servants would not now be standing in his prescribed place." And they concurred, all making obeisance to him. Just when did they do this? *When David was come to the top of the mount where he worshipped God, behold Hushai the Archite came to meet him* (2 Sam. 15:32).

R. Judah, R. Nehemiah, and the Rabbis differed as to the meaning of *the Archite*. One said: Hushai was called *the Archite* because he was one of David's highest officials.¹⁰ Another said: *The Archite*, because through him the house of David was to be put on a firm footing, and through him the house of David was to be kept in good repair.¹¹ The third said: *The Archite*, after the name of his native city. Now when David perceived that his rule was on a firm footing, he began to recite a Psalm. And when did he begin to recite it? *When David was come to Mahanaim* (2 Sam. 17:27),—Mahanaim, its dual suffix being the Hebrew equivalent of [the Greek] *didymos*, means "twin camps"—*Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon* (*ibid.*)—Shobi's real name being Hanun,¹² why was he called Shobi? Rabbi said: because for a time he restrained his inclination to do evil.¹³ But the Sages said: because his repentance was genuine—¹⁴ *and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim* (*ibid.*), all together began to honor David. They brought beds, and basins, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and meal, and parched corn, and beans, and lentils, and parched pulse, and honey, and curd, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him . . . for they said: "The people is hungry, and faint, and thirsty" (*ibid.* 17:28–29): The beds were couches of down; the basins were jugs of wine; the earthen vessels came from Beth-Rametha;¹⁵ the wheat and the barley were of the usual varieties;¹⁶ the parched corn was *šattiṭa*, a dish made of the flour of roasted ears of corn mixed with honey;¹⁷ the beans and the lentils were of the usual kinds; the parched pulse was roasted ears of corn; the honey, the curd, and the sheep were of the usual kinds; and the cheese of kine was a special kind of cheese made out of cow's milk and called *torin* because not even a fly can keep its footing upon it.¹⁸

As soon as David saw the offerings of these men he began to say, "These are men ¹⁹ I was afraid of, but they are making peace with me:—surely not of their own desire, but because the Holy One, blessed be He, has made them seek peace with me,

as it is said, *When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him* (Prov. 16:7)." Thereupon David began to recite his Psalm, *A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.*

So David and his men went in the way (2 Sam. 16:13a).²⁰ Is it conceivable that they flew in the air? Why then should Scripture have specified that they went *in the way*? To make it plain that they went in the way of humility.

And Shimei went along the rib of the hill (*ibid.* 16:13b), the word *rib* intimating that as Shimei went along, he recalled to David the incident of the rib,²¹ of which David was to say *I had been made ready for the rib*²² (Ps. 38:18). By this David meant to declare to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe! It is revealed and known to Thee that Bath-sheba was held ready for me from the six days of Creation, yet she was given to me for sorrow: *My sorrow is continually before me* (*ibid.*). And David was to instruct and point out to Solomon his son and say to him: *Shimei . . . abused me with grievous (nmršt) abuse in the day when I went to Mahanaim* (1 Kings 2:8a). How is *nmršt* to be understood? As an acrostic:²³ the letter *N* stands for *no'ef*, "adulterer"; the letter *M*, for "Moabite"; the letter *R*, for *roṣeah*, "murderer"; the letter *Ṣ*, for *ṣorer*, "persecutor"; and the letter *T*, for *to'eḇah*, "abomination."

Shimei had previously said to David: *Behold, thou art taken in thine own mischief* (2 Sam. 16:8). What was he referring to in saying *Thou art taken in thine own mischief*? According to R. Abba bar Kahana, to Bath-sheba's canopied litter which David had along with him.

Later²⁴ Shimei pleaded: "*Let not my lord . . . remember that which thy servant did iniquitously the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem . . . For thy servant doth know that I have sinned; therefore, behold, I am come this day the first of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king*" (2 Sam. 19:20-21).

R. Samuel bar Naḥmani came up from Babylonia in order to inquire about the meaning of three passages in Scripture.²⁵ Upon

meeting Jonathan Ish-Habbirah, he first asked him: What is the translation of *pěrazon* in the verse *Pěrazon ceased in Israel, they ceased, until that I, Deborah, arose, that I arose, a mother in Israel* (Judg. 5:7)? Jonathan replied: *Pěrazon* means the small villages which were destroyed in the time of Sisera, but which, when Deborah arose, became mother-cities in Israel.²⁶ It is so translated in the verse "Beside villages (*pěrazi*) a great many" (Deut. 3:5).

The second thing R. Samuel bar Naḥmani asked Jonathan was: Why is it written *To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses; for we have rebelled against Him* (Dan. 9:9)? Should not the verse give as the reason for God's mercy that "we have obeyed His law!" Jonathan replied: Scripture puts it rightly. When a laborer deals faithfully with his master, and his master pays him his hire as is customary, what reason is there for the laborer to be grateful to his master? When ought he be grateful to him? When he does not deal faithfully with his master, and yet his master does not withhold any of his hire. Hence Daniel said: *To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses; for we have rebelled against Him*.

R. Samuel bar Naḥmani asked further: Have you in all your life ever seen any who kept rebelling against their king, and yet for whom the king kept on providing sustenance? R. Jonathan replied: Yes, those of whom it is written *Our fathers . . . yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and had wrought great provocations, yet Thou . . . withheldst not Thy manna from their mouths . . . Yea, forty years didst Thou sustain them in the wilderness* (Neh. 9:18, 20b, 21a). R. Simeon ben Yoḥai said: Our fathers made thirteen molten calves for themselves, one for each tribe, and one owned in common by all the tribes, as is implied in the words, *They had made them a molten calf, and said: "This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt," and had also wrought great provocations* (ibid. 9:18). (The molten calf which was owned in common by all the tribes contained one hundred and twenty-five talents of gold, this being the numerical value of the letters in the word *mskh*²⁷ in *They had*

made them a molten [mskh] calf [ibid.]). Nevertheless, on the very day of their making the molten calves, manna came down for our fathers. This proves the truth of the verse O Lord, charity belongeth unto Thee (Dan. 9:7), for despite their provocations Thou . . . withheldest not Thy manna from their mouths (Neh. 9:20).

When R. Judah the Levite ben R. Shallum came [to Babylonia], he said that according to R. Berechiah's teaching there was still more to be told. He said: There is still more to be told, because as the manna came down for them they kept setting it as a sweet savor before the molten calves, and yet the manna still did not cease coming.²⁸ As Ezekiel said: *My bread also which I gave thee, fine flour, and oil, and honey, wherewith I fed thee, thou didst even set it before them for a sweet savor, and thus it was; saith the Lord God (Ezek. 16:19).* What is meant by *And thus it was?* That though they set it before the molten calves, the manna still came down. You must admit therefore that Daniel was right to stand up and declare: *To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses; for we have rebelled against Him (Dan. 9:9).*

Finally,²⁹ R. Samuel bar Nahmani asked R. Jonathan: What did Shimei mean when he said to King David: *Let not my lord . . . remember that which thy servant did iniquitously the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem . . . For thy servant doth know that I have sinned; therefore behold, I am come this day the first of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet the lord my king (2 Sam. 19:20-21)?* R. Jonathan replied: How have you, in Babylonia, explained it? R. Samuel bar Nahmani said: This is how we explain it: When Shimei fell down before David, he said, "As the righteous Joseph rewarded his brothers with kindness even though they had dealt ill with him, so do thou, like Joseph, reward me with kindness, even though I dealt ill with thee." R. Jonathan said to R. Samuel bar Nahmani: You explain these verses well. Yet listen also to this fine comment on them: What is meant by *the house of Joseph in I am come this day the first of all the house of Joseph?* All

Israel is meant by the name *Joseph*, for even Judah is so called, as is said "It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:15). And so Shimei was saying to David: "All Israel has dealt ill with thee, and I more so than anyone else. Now all Israel sits waiting for whatever mercy thou mayest show me. And if thou dost accept my contrition, all Israel will come forward and make peace with thee." This is the comment on *I am come this day the first of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet the lord my king*.

When David heard Shimei, he began to recite *A Psalm of David*.

4. *Lord, how are they increased that trouble me* (Ps. 3:2a). Elsewhere David himself said: *The man . . . shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity* (2 Sam. 12:5-6). According to R. Judah bar Ḥanina, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to David, "Thou didst commit adultery once: sixteen women in thy family will suffer rape. Thou didst murder once: sixteen of thy kindred will be murdered. *Fourfold?* Nay, four times four."³⁰

According to R. Joshua, David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: *Lord, how are mine adversities*³¹ *increased!* Had a stranger taken over my throne, it would have been a great adversity for me. Or, had my son seized the throne of a stranger, it would have been a great adversity for me. But since it is my own son who is taking over my throne, *Lord, how are mine adversities increased!* Had a stranger raped my concubines, it would have been a great adversity for me. But since it is my own son who has raped my concubines, *Lord, how are mine adversities increased!* Had a stranger slain my son, it would have been a great adversity for me. But since it is my own son who has slain my son,³² *Lord, how are mine adversities increased!*

*How great*³³ *are they that rise up against me* (*ibid.* 3:2b): Great of stature, and great in learning. [Great of stature was] Shobach:³⁴ he was called Shobach because he stood as high as a dovecote (*šobaḳ*).—[He was also called] Shophach,³⁵ because he shed (*šofek*) blood.—[Of such stature were] also Goliath, of

whom it is said: *His height was six cubits and a span* (1 Sam. 17:4), and Saul, of whom it is said: *From his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people* (*ibid.* 9:2).

Great in learning were Doeg and Ahithophel. As to Doeg, he was chief of the high court, for it is said *Doeg the Edomite the chiefest of the herdmen of the people that belonged to Saul* (*ibid.* 21:8).³⁶ And as to Ahithophel, it is written *Now the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God* (2 Sam. 16:23), and since here the word *man* is only read but not actually written in Scripture,³⁷ it is intimated thereby that Ahithophel was not like a man, but like an angel. Accordingly, David said of Ahithophel: *It was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it . . . But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and my familiar friend. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company* (Ps. 55:12-14).

Hence David said: *Lord, how are mine adversities increased. How great are they that rise up against me* (Ps. 3:2).

5/6. *How great are they that say of my soul: "There is no help for him in God, ever"*³⁸ (Ps. 3:3). R. Samuel interpreted this verse as referring to Doeg and Ahithophel: *great are they*, in learning, *that say*. What is it they say? "Is it possible that a man who took the ewe lamb, murdered its shepherd, and caused the people of Israel to die by the sword, can make amends? No! *There is no help for him in God, ever.*"

But Thou, O Lord, art a shield about me; my glory and the lifter up of my head (Ps. 3:4). By this David meant: Though Thou, O Lord, dost agree with Doeg and with Ahithophel, for Thou didst write in Thy Torah "Both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death" (Lev. 20:10), nevertheless, Thou art *a shield about me*: because of the merits of my fathers, Thou didst encompass me as with a shield, so that Thou didst shield *my glory* through Hushai the Archite;³⁹ and through Nathan the prophet who said to me: "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (2 Sam. 12:13), Thou wast *The lifter up of my head*.

But the Rabbis read these two verses as follows: *Many there are that say of my soul: There is no help for it in God, ever. But for Thee, O Lord, that art a shield about me, that sayest, "But for My glory," Thou art the lifter up of my head* (Ps. 3:3-4). *Many . . . are the nations of the earth of whom it is said "Ah, the uproar of many peoples" (Isa. 17:12). That say of my soul: The nations of the earth say of Israel: "This people heard God speak the words, 'I am the Lord thy God that brought thee out of the land of Egypt . . . Thou shalt have no other gods before Me' (Ex. 20:2-3), and yet, forty days later, this people said of a molten calf, 'This is thy God, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt' (ibid. 32:8). Can such a people expect help? Surely There is no help for it in God, ever."* And although Thou, O Lord, dost agree with the nations, for Thou didst write in Thy Torah, "He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the Lord only, shall be utterly destroyed" (Ex. 22:19), yet Thou hast not destroyed us utterly. *But for Thee, O Lord, that art a shield about me* (Ps. 3:4): If Thou hadst not made the shields of my fathers shine upon me—that is, had it not been for the merits of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—Thou wouldst not have protected us. *That sayest, "But for My glory" (ibid.): that is, If Thou hadst not caused the glory of Thy presence to dwell among us, as is said "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8), what then? But Thou art become the lifter up of my head: Instead of cutting off our heads as we deserved, Thou gavest us the joy of lifting our heads, as is said Thou liftest the heads of the children of Israel (Ex. 30:12).⁴⁰*

7. *With my voice I call unto the Lord, and He answereth me out of His holy mountain, ever*³⁸ (Ps. 3:5). R. Berechiah commented: As long as the Temple stood, Thou didst answer our prayers.⁴¹ But now that Thy holy mountain is bare, how do we know that Thou answerest our prayers? Scripture says, *He answereth me out of His holy mountain, ever.*

I laid me down, and I slept; I awake, for the Lord sustaineth me (Ps. 3:6). David said: *I laid me down*, away from prophecy;

and I slept, apart from the Holy Spirit; *I awake*, through Hushai the Archite. *For the Lord sustaineth me*, through Nathan the prophet.⁴²

Another comment on *I laid me down, and I slept*. The congregation of Israel said: *I laid me down*, away from prophecy; *and I slept*, apart from the Holy Spirit; *I awake*, through Elijah, as is said "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet" (Mal. 3:23); *for the Lord sustaineth me*, through the lord Messiah.

I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about (Ps. 3:7)—set themselves to make war against me. Thus Moses, after saying to the people of Israel: *If thou shalt say in thy heart: "These nations are more than I; how can I dispossess them?"* (Deut. 7:17), declared: *Thou shalt not be afraid of them . . . for the Lord thy God is in the midst of thee* (Deut. 7:18, 21).

Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God (Ps. 3:8). R. Phinehas stated in the name of R. Hoshai: In the Book of Psalms,⁴³ David was moved to say five times to the Holy One, blessed be He, *Arise*: four times against the four kingdoms,⁴⁴ and once in the wars of Gog and Magog.

For Thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the jawbone (*ibid.*)—smitten them, according to R. Levi, with strangling,⁴⁵ for it is said *And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he . . . set his house in order, and strangled himself* (2 Sam. 17:23).

According to R. Abijah, the verse means: Thou hast smitten all mine enemies though they were as mighty as Samson himself, of whom it is written, *And he found a new jawbone of an ass, . . . and smote a thousand men therewith* (Judg. 15:15).

Thou wilt break the teeth of the wicked. (Ps. 3:8). When Thou hast done this, then it will become apparent that *salvation belongeth unto the Lord; Thy blessing is upon Thy people for ever* (*ibid.* 3:9).

PSALM FOUR

1. *For the leader; with string-music. A Psalm of David. Hear me, when I call, O God of my righteousness* (Ps. 4:1-2a). All that David says in the Book of Psalms is said of himself or of the congregation of Israel.¹ According to R. Judah, the words *Hear me, when I call, O God of my righteousness* mean that David prayed for himself, saying: "O God of vindication, the obligation to vindicate me rests upon Thee."² Because I am of the tribe of Judah, it is proper for Thee to hear the voice of my prayer, since in blessing the tribe of Judah Moses said: *Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah* (Deut. 33:7)."³

According to the Rabbis, the verse means that the congregation of Israel prayed for itself, saying: "Hear me when I call, O God of vindication. The obligation to vindicate me rests upon Thee. Even if I have no good works, show mercy to me."

R. Joshua ben Levi taught that because David said: *I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of His holy hill* (Ps. 3:5), we know that God heard the voice of prayer when the Temple was standing. But with the Temple destroyed, does He still hear? Yes, because Scripture says, *Hear me when I call*—that is, whenever I call.

2. A further comment on the verse *Thou who hast set me at large when I was in distress* (Ps. 4:26). According to R. Johanan, there were three matters that David was distressed about: the site of the house of God; the taking of Bath-sheba; and Solomon's succession to the kingship. But the Holy One, blessed be He, set his mind at rest about them. And the proof that David was distressed about the site of the house of God? Scripture says, *Lord, remember unto David all his distress; how he swore unto the Lord . . . "Surely I will not come into the tent of my house, nor go up into the bed that is spread for me; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, nor slumber to mine eyelids; until I find out a place for the Lord"* (Ps. 132:1-5). And the Holy One, blessed be He, set his mind at rest, for David found the site, as it is said *Then the angel of the Lord commanded . . . that David should . . . rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshing-floor*

of Ornan the Jebusite. And David went up . . . and . . . said: "This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of burnt-offering for Israel" (1 Chron. 21:18-19, 22:1).

And David was distressed about his taking of Bath-sheba, for men were speaking against him in Israel and saying: "Is it possible that he who took the ewe lamb, murdered its shepherd, and caused the people of Israel to die by the sword can ever have help from God?"⁴ But the Holy One, blessed be He, set his mind at rest, for Nathan said to David: *The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die* (2 Sam. 12:13).

About the third matter, Israel said: "What does David think? That his kingship can be continued through Bath-sheba's son?" But the Holy One, blessed be He, set David's mind at rest, for the word of the Lord came to David, saying: *Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest . . . his name shall be Solomon* (1 Chron. 22:9). Concerning this verse, R. Judah the Levite said: Are not all sons born to their fathers? Why should Scripture say here *born to thee*? Because *To thee* means to heal thee—that is, to heal thee of thy sin. Whence do we know this? From what Nathan the prophet said: *The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die* (2 Sam. 12:13), and Scripture goes on to say *Bath-sheba . . . bore a son, and called his name Solomon. And the Lord . . . sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet, and he called his name Jedidiah*⁵ (2 Sam. 12:25).

3. A further interpretation of *Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness* (Ps. 4:1). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *For what great nation is there, that hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is whensoever we call upon Him* (Deut. 4:7). R. Yudan, in the name of R. Isaac, suggested four ways of expounding this verse: Suppose a man has a patron, and the patron is told: "Thy client⁶ has been imprisoned." The patron replies, "I shall maintain his cause!" Then the patron is told: "Behold, thy client is taken out to be sentenced!" And the patron replies, "I shall maintain his cause!" But when the patron is told: "Behold, thy client is being exe-

cuted by the sword!" what of the man and what of his patron then? On the other hand, the Holy One, blessed be He, delivered Moses from the sword of Pharaoh, as Moses said: *The God of my father . . . delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh* (Ex. 18:4). In this connection, R. Yannai, quoting the verse *Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh* (Ex. 2:15), asked: "How could a man possibly flee from the king's presence?" What the verse really means is that when Pharaoh seized Moses and sentenced him to be beheaded, the executioner's sword sprang back from his neck and was shattered, for the verse *Thy neck is as a tower of ivory* (Song 7:5) refers to Moses' neck. R. Abiathar added: There is more to be said! The sword of Pharaoh springing back from the neck of Moses fell upon the neck of the executioner, and slew him. Thus when Moses said: *The God of my father . . . delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh* (Ex. 18:4), he meant: "God delivered me, but He did not deliver the executioner." To point up this incident R. Berechiah quoted the verse *The wicked is a ransom for the righteous* (Prov. 21:18), and R. Abin quoted the verse *The righteous is delivered, and the wicked cometh in his stead* (Prov. 11:8).

R. Joshua⁷ related in the name of R. Levi: When Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh, some of Pharaoh's guards⁸ were made dumb, some were made blind, some lame, and some deaf. When the blind asked the dumb, "Whither did Moses flee?" the dumb could not answer. And when the lame asked the deaf, "Whither did Moses flee?" the deaf could not hear. And when the deaf asked the blind, "Whither did Moses flee?" the blind could not see. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: *Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?* (Ex. 4:11).

R. Oshaya⁹ related: Pharaoh's guards seized Moses, brought him up on the scaffold, tied him to a post, and had already placed the sword upon his neck when an angel came down and in the likeness of Moses appeared to them so that they seized the angel and let Moses go. Then the Lord divided Pharaoh's guards

into several companies, making some dumb, some deaf, and some blind. When the dumb were asked, "Whither did Moses flee?" they could not answer. And when the deaf were asked, "Whither did Moses flee?" they could not hear. And when the blind were asked "Whither did Moses flee?" they could not see. Hence Moses said: *The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh* (Ex. 18:4), and the Lord said to Moses: *Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?* (Ex. 4:11).

And so when David prayed *Hear me when I call*, he meant: As Thou didst formerly maintain the cause of Moses, wilt Thou not now maintain mine? As Scripture says, *God is nigh . . . whensoever we call upon Him* (Deut. 4:7).

R. Yudan, in the name of R. Isaac, suggested another way of expounding the verse *What nation is there that hath God so nigh*. Suppose a man has a patron, and the patron is told: "Thy client has been imprisoned." The patron replies, "I shall maintain his cause!" Then the patron is told: "Behold, thy client is taken out to be sentenced!" And the patron replies, "I shall maintain his cause!" But when the patron is told: "Behold thy client has been cast into the sea!" what of the man, and what of his patron then? Not such a patron is the Holy One, blessed be He, for He delivered Jonah out of the bowels of the fish, as is said *The Lord spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land* (Jonah 2:11).

R. Yudan, in the name of R. Isaac, suggested still another way of expounding the verse *What great nation is there that hath God so nigh*, etc. Suppose a man has a patron, and the patron is told: "Thy client has been imprisoned." The patron replies, "I shall maintain his cause!" Then the patron is told: "Behold, thy client is taken out to be sentenced," and the patron replies, "I shall maintain his cause!" But when the patron is told: "Behold, thy client has been thrown into the fire!" what of the man, and what of his patron then? But not such a patron is the Holy One, blessed be He, for He delivered Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah

out of the fiery furnace, as is said *The God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego*,¹⁰ . . . *hath sent His angel, and delivered His servants that trusted in Him* (Dan. 3:28).

R. Yudan, in the name of R. Isaac, suggested still another way of expounding the verse *What great nation . . . hath God so nigh*. Suppose a man has a patron, and the patron is told: "Thy client has been imprisoned." The patron replies, "I shall maintain his cause!" Then the patron is told: "Behold, thy client is taken out to be sentenced," and the patron replies, "I shall maintain his cause!" But when the patron is told: "Behold, thy client has been thrown to the wild beasts," what of the man and what of his patron then? On the other hand, the Holy One, blessed be He, rescued Daniel from the lions' pit. Therefore Daniel said: *My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths that they have not hurt me* (Dan. 6:23).¹¹

R. Yudan now offered his own way of expounding the verse *What great nation . . . hath God so nigh*, etc.: A man may have a patron, but when a time of trouble befalls the man he cannot go in unannounced to his patron. Instead he comes and has to stand at the patron's door and call a servant, or a member of the household, who will tell the patron: "So-and-so is standing at the door."¹² But not such a patron is the Holy One, blessed be He, who says: "Whenever a time of trouble befalls a man, he need call neither on Michael nor on Gabriel: Let him but call on Me and I shall hear him." As Scripture says, *It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered* (Joel 3:5).

R. Alexandri related: Once it happened that a magistrate whose name was Alexandros was trying a robber, and when he asked him: "What is thy name?" the robber answered: "Alexandros." Whereupon the magistrate said: "Let Alexandros be freed."¹³ Now, if he was freed only because he happened to have the same name as another mortal, how much more certain is the freeing of those who bear the name of the Holy One, blessed be He—that is to say, the children of Israel whose name is "the upright ones of God."¹⁴

In this connection, R. Phinehas made two comments, one in the name of R. Ze'era, the other in the name of R. Tanḥum bar Ḥanila'i. In the name of R. Ze'era, he said: Suppose a man has a patron and imposes special burdens upon him; his patron says, "I find that So-and-so is unduly burdensome." But not such a patron is the Holy One, blessed be He: He puts up with all the burdens that are imposed upon Him. Of this it is written *Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee* (Ps. 55:23).

And in the name of R. Tanḥum bar Ḥanilai, R. Phinehas said: Suppose a man has a patron, and enemies come and seize him at his patron's door, so that even as he cries out and as his patron is coming to his help, the sword passes across his neck and slays him. On the other hand, the Holy One, blessed be He, delivered Jehoshaphat from under the sword of the captains that were with the king of Syria, as is written *And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said: "It is the king of Israel." Therefore they compassed about him to fight: But Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him* (2 Chron. 18:31-32). The verse shows that Jehoshaphat was just short of losing his head when the Lord saved him.

R. Simeon said in the name of R. Zera: If a man has a rich brother, the man acknowledges him, but if the brother is poor, the man does not acknowledge him. But with the Holy One, blessed be He, it is not so. Even when the children of Israel are, God forbid, most degraded, God continues to call them His brothers and companions, as is said *For My brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say: "Peace be within thee"* (Ps. 122:8), and as it is also written *He shall exalt the horn of His people . . . even the children of Israel, a people near unto Him* (Ps. 148:14). Not only that, but God declares also "I am nigh unto the children of Israel," as is said *What great nation is there, that hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is* (Deut. 4:7).

R. Ze'era said: Suppose a man has a friend who so importunes

him with his needs and his wants that the man comes to dislike him and tries to avoid him. But with the Holy One, blessed be He, it is not so. The more a man importunes God with his needs and his wants, the more God loves him, as is said *Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the second time (while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison) saying: . . . "Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and hidden things, which thou knowest not"* (Jer. 33:1-3).

R. Ze'era said further: Suppose a man has a client: The first time the client comes to visit, he seats him upon a couch; the second time the client comes to visit, he seats him on a chair; the third time he seats him on a bench; but the fourth time, he says of him: "How this fellow forces himself upon me, and how he burdens me!" But with the Holy One, blessed be He, it is not so: The more often the children of Israel throng toward His place of prayer, the greater is His joy. Hence it is said *For what great nation is there, that hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is whensoever we call upon Him* (Deut. 4:7).

R. Phinehas said in the name of R. Judah: Though an idol of gold appear near, yet it is far away. As Scripture says, *It is borne upon the shoulder, it is carried, and set in its place, and it standeth* (Isa. 46:7) so that it is actually with a man in his own house; and yet, as the verse concludes: *Yea, though one cry unto it, it cannot answer, nor save him out of his trouble* (*ibid.* 46:7b). But with the Holy One, blessed be He, it is not so. Although God appears to be far away, He is nearer to man than is an idol of gold. As R. Levi taught: It is five hundred years' journey from earth to heaven, and five hundred years' journey across the circle of heaven, and five hundred years' journey from heaven to heaven, and five hundred years' journey across the circle of each heaven. That the time for each journey is the same is shown by the recurrence of the word *circle* in the following verses: (1) *He walketh in the circle of heaven* (Job 22:14); (2) *He set a circle upon the face of the deep* (Prov. 8:27); and (3) *It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth* (Isa. 40:22).¹⁵ Furthermore, above the heavens are the feet of the celestial creatures,¹⁶ and,

said R. Helbo in the name of R. Abba, it is five hundred and fifteen years' journey across each of their feet, as is shown by adding up the numerical values of the letters in the word *yšrh*.¹⁷ The journey across each of the thighs of the celestial creatures takes as much time as all of the previous journeys together; the journey across each of the backs of the celestial creatures takes as much time as all of the previous journeys together; the journey across each of the faces of the celestial creatures takes as much time as all of the previous journeys together; the journey across each of the horns of the celestial creatures takes as much time as all of the previous journeys together; the journey across the throne of glory takes as much time as all of the previous journeys together. And upon this throne of glory and above all the celestial creatures is *The High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy* (Isa. 57:15). High and lofty as He is, yet He dwells *With him that is of a contrite and humble spirit* (*ibid*). Let a man but come into a synagogue and stand still, and there murmur his prayer, and the Holy One, blessed be He, gives ear to him. Hence it is said *The Lord our God is nigh whensoever we call upon him* (Deut. 4:7).

R. Ḥanina asked R. Samuel: "What is meant by the words *Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, that our prayers should not pass through* (Lam. 3:44)?" R. Samuel replied: There are times when the gates of prayer are thrown open and times when the gates of prayer are shut, but the gates of mercy are never shut, for it is said *The Lord our God is nigh whensoever we call upon Him*.

4. R. Hoshai'a said: Is there another nation like this nation whose decrees God Himself conforms to? Conforms to in what way? When the elders of Israel meet to decree a leap-year, the Holy One, blessed be He, conforms to their decision. With the elders in mind, David said: *I call unto God Most High; unto God that approves the cause I have in hand* (Ps. 57:3). By this he meant, "Praised be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, who conforms to and approves whatever Israel enacts." It is the way of the world that when a mortal king enacts a decree, his

counselors cannot void it even if they wish to; they must carry out the decrees of the king whether the decrees are acceptable to them or unacceptable to them. But the king, if he wishes to carry out his decree, he carries it out, and if he wishes to void it, he voids it. On the other hand, the Holy One, blessed be He, carries out whatever decree the Sanhedrin on earth enacts. When does He do so? At New Year's Day. After the earthly Sanhedrin meets and comes to such decisions as "We proclaim the second day of the week as New Year's Day," or, "the third day of the week," immediately, the Holy One, blessed be He, convokes a heavenly Sanhedrin of ministering angels and says to them: "Go down and see what decision the earthly Sanhedrin has come to and enacted." And the ministering angels reply: "Master of the universe, the Sanhedrin has enacted this: Such-and-such a day will begin the New Year!" Thereupon, on the day decreed, the Holy One, blessed be He, takes His seat upon His throne and judges His world, as it is said *God is gone up amidst the blowing of the trumpet, the Lord amidst the sound of the horn. God hath proclaimed Himself king over the nations, God hath taken His seat upon His holy throne. The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham* (Ps. 47:6, 9-10). The thrones are put in place, the books are opened, and the heavenly Sanhedrin meets with Him, for it is said *I beheld till the thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days did sit . . . and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened* (Dan. 7:9a, 10b). Some of the ministering angels are defenders, and others are accusers. And why all of this? Because *What is a statute for Israel is an ordinance for the God of Jacob* (Ps. 81:5). The day decreed by Israel is the Day of the New Year for the God of Jacob who approves Israel's decrees and conforms to their decisions. Hence *I will call unto God Most High, unto God that approves the cause I have in hand*, unto Him who conforms to the enactments of Israel.

You can see for yourself that He indeed does so. Consider what Scripture says: *In the seventh month is a day of blowing the*

horn [decreed] by you (Num. 29:1). The verse does not say, "decreed by Me," but "*decreed by you.*" And Scripture also says, *The appointed seasons of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are My appointed seasons* (Lev. 23:2).¹⁸ By this, God meant: "I shall have no holy convocations other than those you proclaim, whether you proclaim them in their proper seasons or not in their proper seasons."¹⁹ Hence it is said *Our God is [near] whensoever we call upon Him*: The words *whensoever we call upon Him* clearly refer to our proclaiming of the holy seasons, as is said *ye shall proclaim . . . holy convocations.*

R. Abin said in the name of R. Aha: When a man has a near relative who has been taken prisoner, he is ashamed to admit that the prisoner is his near relative. But the Holy One, blessed be He, though the children of Israel were prisoners and homeless vagabonds when He was bringing them out of Egypt, called them His near relatives, for it is said *He hath lifted up a horn for His people . . . even for the children of Israel, a people near unto Him* (Ps. 148:14).

5. *Answer me when I call* (Ps. 4:2). David meant: Master of the universe, even if a wicked man of Israel comes to call Thee, answer him at once, so that the nations of the earth may not say: "All deities are alike."²⁰ The Holy One, blessed be He, answered: As thou livest, even before the wicked man calls Me, I shall answer him, for it is said *Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me* (Ps. 50:15); and it is said *He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him* (Ps. 91:15); and it is also said *It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear* (Isa. 65:24).

Nevertheless, it is necessary that the call of the wicked man be a sincere one. For though Scripture says, *The Lord is nigh unto all that call upon Him* (Ps. 148:15), the verse concludes with *To all that call upon Him in truth* (*ibid.*). Similarly, though Scripture says *Surely, God is good to Israel* (Ps. 73:1),

the verse concludes with *Only to such as are pure in heart (ibid.)*. Likewise, though Scripture says, *The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble (Nahum 1:7)*, the verse concludes with *And He knoweth them that take refuge in Him (ibid.)*. Again, though Scripture says *The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him (Lam. 3:25)*, the verse concludes with [only] *to the soul that seeketh Him (ibid.)*. And again, though Scripture says *Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good (Ps. 125:4)*, the verse concludes with [only] *to them that are upright in their hearts (ibid.)*.

6. The phrases *For the leader; with string-music. A Psalm* (Ps. 4:1), introduce this Psalm with three varieties of praise: with the leading of the music, with the playing upon the instruments, and with the singing of the Psalm.

The phrase *string music* refers to prophecy, for it is said *And it came to pass, when the minstrel played,*²¹ *that the hand of the Lord came upon him* (2 Kings 3:15). *The leader (mēnaṣṣeah)* refers to him most capable of glorifying (*naṣaḥ*)²² Him whose glory endures for ever and ever.

For the leader [lamēnaṣṣeah], which means literally "To Him who wins, etc." may be read *li-mēnuṣṣah*:²³ "To Him who lets Himself be won over by His creatures." A mortal king, when vanquished by one of his subjects, is angry, but the Holy One, blessed be He, when vanquished by one of His creatures, rejoices, as it is said *He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen stood before Him in the breach, to turn back His wrath* (Ps. 106:23).²⁴

7. *Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness* (Ps. 4:2). According to R. Aḥa, David spoke as follows to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Since Thou art my God, the obligation to vindicate me rests upon Thee." But according to the Rabbis, the congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "If we have merit, deal with us accordingly; but if we have not, then show us righteousness and mercy."²⁵

O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? (Ps. 4:3). In this verse, David was saying to Doeg and Ahitho-

phel,²⁶ "O ye sons of such renowned men as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, how long will ye turn my glory into shame?" We know that Abraham was a renowned man, for God told Abimelech: *He is a prophet* (Gen. 20:7); and that Isaac was a renowned man, for it is said "*What man is this*"²⁷ *that walketh in the field to meet us?*" and the servant said: "*It is my master*" (*ibid.* 24:65); and that Jacob was a renowned man, for it is said *Jacob was a perfect*²⁸ *man* (*ibid.* 25:27).

8. *How long will ye turn my glory into shame?* (Ps. 4:3). That is, How long will you turn the glory of my own name into shame by continuing to call me the son of Jesse, as when Doeg says: *I saw the son of Jesse* (1 Sam. 22:9); or as when Saul says: *Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards . . . that all of you have conspired against me?* (*ibid.* 22:7-8); or as when Saul says to Jonathan: *Do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own shame and unto the shame of thy mother's nakedness* (*ibid.* 20:30); or as when Saul says to Jonathan again: *As long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the earth, thou shalt not be established* (*ibid.* 20:31). Have I no name of my own? *How long will you take pleasure in vanity?* (Ps. 4:3b) That is, David said to Doeg and to Ahithophel: How long will you take pleasure in abusing me with vain and empty words, saying of me "God has abandoned him," "God has forgotten him," "God has taken His presence away from him, and henceforth kingship will never return to him." *You expect the loss to continue for ever?* (*ibid.*)²⁹ David meant: Do you expect that because my kingship was lost to me for a time it will be for ever thus? *But know that the Lord hath set apart for Himself one that He favoreth* (Ps. 4:4). David meant: Long ago, God gladdened me with good tidings through Nathan the prophet who told me: "*The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die*" (2 Sam. 12:13).

A different comment: The congregation of Israel says to the nations of the earth: *O ye sons of man, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? How long will you take pleasure in*

vanity? You expect the loss to continue for ever? (Ps. 4:3).³⁰ Why are the nations of the earth called *sons of man*? Because they are descendants of Noah's children's children. By *man* is meant the renowned Noah, of whom it is said *Noah was a righteous man* (Gen. 6:9). O ye nations of the earth, *How long will you take pleasure in vanity?* How long will you take pleasure in pursuing me with vain words? How long will you be saying of me "The Holy One, blessed be He, has abandoned Israel, and has forgotten Israel, and the Holy Spirit is lost forever to Israel?" God says to the nations of the earth: *You expect the loss to continue for ever?* "Do you think that because I took My Holy Spirit away from Israel for a time, it will be for ever thus?" And the congregation of Israel says to the nations: *But know that the Lord hath set apart for Himself one that He favoreth; the Lord will hear when I call unto Him* (Ps. 4:4)—long ago did God gladden me with good tidings through Isaiah who said: *Comfort ye, comfort ye My people . . . Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her appointed time is accomplished* (Isa. 40:1-2). Hence, when the appointed time comes, *The Lord will hear me when I call unto Him.*

9. *Tremble, and sin not. Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still for ever* (Ps. 4:5). David said to the children of Israel: "How long will you sin and stir up trouble by saying 'There is a blemish in David: he is a descendant of Ruth the Moabite?'"³¹ *Commune with your own heart upon your bed.* From what sort of marriage bed do you come? From the prohibited marriage of a man to two sisters!³² *Regard your own descent, and be still for ever.*"³³

A different comment: According to R. Aḥa, *Tremble, and sin not* means "Make your Tempter tremble with fear, and he will be unable to make you sin." But according to the Rabbis, *Tremble, and sin not* means "Make your Tempter tremble with frustration, and he will be unable to make you sin: thus you will not fall into the grip of sin."³⁴

It is taught in a Mishnah³⁵ that R. Eliezer ben Jacob said:

*The Lord is the hope (mikweh)*³⁶ of Israel (Jer. 17:13) means that as the ritual bath of purification (*mikweh*) cleanses those who are impure, so the Holy One, blessed be He, cleanses Israel. Now which of the two can go to the other—the ritual bath to the unclean person, or the unclean person to the ritual bath? Obviously, the unclean person has to go to the ritual bath, let himself down, and immerse himself in it; so also must Israel go to the Holy One, blessed be He, who will cleanse them.

Hence, the Holy One, blessed be He, declared to Israel: I say unto you: When you would pray, go to the synagogue in your city; when you cannot go to the synagogue in your city, pray in your open field; when you cannot go to your open field, pray in your house; when you cannot go to your house, pray upon your bed; when you cannot pray aloud in your bed, commune with your heart.³⁷ Hence it is written *Commune with your own heart upon your bed* (Ps. 4:5).³⁸ *And be still (ibid.)*. What is meant by *And be still*? R. Yudan said: It means that you must refrain from the sin you might commit. For when you so refrain, what does the Psalm go on to tell you? *Offer the sacrifices of righteousness* (Ps. 4:6), which is as though God were saying to you: "I shall reckon your refraining as if you had built an altar and offered a burnt-offering and many other sacrifices upon it." Note that the Psalm does not speak of only one sacrifice, but of *sacrifices*.

[*Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still*]. The verse means, we are taught, that a man reciting the Shema in the synagogue in the morning has done what he ought; but in the evening, [though he has recited the Shema in the synagogue,] he has not done what he ought³⁹ unless he recites it again at home in his bed. Why? In order to drive demons away from the house.

We are also taught that after a man concludes the Blessing of Redemption which begins with the words "True and firm,"⁴⁰ he may not recite any prayer on his own behalf,⁴¹ [but must go on immediately with the Eighteen Benedictions.]⁴² This teaching applies, however, only to the Blessing of Redemption of the

morning service. For R. Ze'era said in the name of R. Abba bar Jeremiah: There are three occasions that require one action to follow immediately upon another: the slaughtering of the sacrificial animal must come immediately after the rite of laying the hands upon its head; the blessing over the bread must be said immediately after the rite of washing the hands;⁴³ and the Eighteen Benedictions must be said immediately after the Blessing of Redemption.

That the slaughtering of the sacrificial animal must follow immediately after the rite of laying the hands upon its head, is shown by the verses *And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering . . . And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord* (Lev. 1:4, 5). That the blessing over the bread must follow immediately after the rite of washing the hands, is shown by the verse *Lift up your hands in holiness, and bless the Lord* (Ps. 134:2). And that the Eighteen Benedictions must follow immediately after the Blessing of Redemption is shown by the verse *Let the words of my mouth . . . be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord . . . my Redeemer* (Ps. 19:15), and by the verse that follows immediately, *The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble, the name of the God of Jacob defend Thee* (Ps. 20:2).⁴⁴

When a man performing a sacrifice slaughters the animal immediately after the laying on of hands, no fault will mar the sacrifice. When a man pronounces the blessing over the bread immediately after the washing of his hands, Satan will bring no accusations against him during the meal. Finally, when a man says the Eighteen Benedictions immediately after the Blessing of Redemption, Satan will bring no accusations against him in the course of the day.

Another comment on *Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord* (Ps. 4:6). R. Hiyya taught that these words are to be read in the light of the verse *Therefore shall ye keep My charge, that ye practice not any of these abominable customs, which were practiced before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the Lord your God* (Lev. 18:30). The

words *Therefore shall ye keep My charge* mean that God said: "Therefore set up a guard that ye do what I charge you to do."⁴⁵ And what did God intend by saying *I am the Lord your God*? "I shall be close at hand to give you your reward." But R. Nathan asked in the name of R. Aha: Is not this point fully made in Scripture in the verse *Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord*, which is as though the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Reach your hands out to do righteous deeds, and trust Me to give you your reward?"

10. *Many there are that say: "Oh that we could see some good!"* (Ps. 4:7). The *many* are the nations of the earth saying to the children of Israel: "Oh that we could share with you in the good of the world-to-come!" The children of Israel reply: "In how many afflictions, in how many servitudes, and in how many massacres have we given our lives for the hallowing of the Name, and yet you, without any suffering at all, think that the good of the world-to-come is yours for the asking!"⁴⁶

*Lord, like an ensign,*⁴⁷ *lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us.* R. Huna taught in the name of R. Aha, that here the congregation of Israel says: We await the setting up of God's ensign, as it is written *Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations, and set up Mine ensign to the peoples, and they shall bring thy sons in their bosom, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy foster fathers* (Isa. 49:22-23).

But according to R. Johanan the verse is to be read *Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us*. That is, the congregation of Israel says to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, we look for nothing but the shining of Thy countenance, as is said *O Lord God of hosts, restore us; cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved* (Ps. 80:20).

11. *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, since the time that their corn, and wine, and oil increased* (Ps. 4:8). The congregation of Israel says: "Because the nations of the earth have kept only seven laws,⁴⁸ Thou hast enriched them with the good

things of this world as a reward: how many more good things wilt Thou lavish in the world-to-come upon us who are charged with the keeping of six hundred and thirteen laws! Therefore, we rejoice when we behold the prosperity of the nations of the earth." Hence it is said *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, since the time that their corn, and wine, and oil increased.*

R. Joshua ben Levi told a parable of a king who prepared a banquet, assembled the guests, and seated them at the gate of his palace. When the guests saw dogs coming out with pheasants, choice fat birds, and lambs' heads in their mouths, the guests began to say, "If the dogs fare so well, how much more abundant will our banquet be!" According to Scripture, the wicked men of Israel are like the dogs, for it is said *Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough* (Isa. 56:11), and they enjoy prosperity in this world. Surely, then, how much greater the blessings of Israel in the world-to-come. Hence it is said *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, since the time that their corn, and wine, and oil increased.*

12. In the verse *In peace, all together, I lay me down and sleep* (Ps. 4:9), the congregation of Israel is saying: For me alone have the Prophets, all of them, concluded their books with words of peace.

Rabbi said: Although the Prophets begin their books with recitals of Israel's guilt, they end them with words of comfort.

R. Eliezer said: All the Prophets begin their books with words of reproof and end them with words of comfort, except Jeremiah who ends his book with words of reproof, saying *And for his allowance, there was a continual allowance given him of the king of Babylon, every day a portion until the day of his death* (Jer. 52:34).⁴⁹

But R. Johanan replied: The truth is that Jeremiah also concludes his book with words of comfort: Though it might be thought that he who foresaw and predicted the destruction of the Temple would close his book with an account of its destruction, he ends instead with *Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise again . . . Thus far are the words of Jeremiah* (ibid.),⁵⁰

ending in fact with words of doom for the destroyers of the Temple.

But does not Isaiah end his book with words of reproof, as is written *And they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh* (Isa. 66:24)? No, for in this verse he is referring to the heathen.

But does not the Book of Lamentations end with the verse *But Thou hast utterly rejected us; Thou art very wroth against us* (Lam. 5:22)? No, not with the verse *But Thou hast utterly rejected us*, etc., but with the preceding verse *Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.*

For it is Thou, alone, who art with me in this world, and *who makest me dwell in safety* (Ps. 4:9) in the world-to-come.

13. Another comment on *For the leader; with string music* (Ps. 4:1). Elsewhere this is what Scripture says, *When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth; and when the wicked perish, there is joy* (Prov. 11:10). In the preceding Psalm it is written *Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God* (Ps. 3:8), and now that the wicked perish, we are bid to sing with string music before the Holy One, blessed be He.

So, too, you find that directly after the verse *And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians* (Ex. 14:31), there follows *Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spoke saying: I will sing unto the Lord* (Ex. 15:1). What does the verse mean by *and spoke saying*? It tells the coming generations what to say.⁵¹ It tells them: "When you are in straits, do not say, 'We shall fight the battle,' for *The Lord will fight for you* (Ex. 14:14), and then you are to say in song [your gratitude to the Lord]."

Similarly, you find that directly after the verse *And the hand of the children of Israel prevailed more and more against Jabin the king of Canaan* (Judg. 4:24), there follow the words *Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day* (Judg. 5:1).

Likewise, after the verse *Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God* (Ps. 3:8) comes *For the leader; with string-music* (Ps. 4:1).⁵²

For Thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek (Ps.

3:8). Did He do no more to them than smite their cheeks? Has He no fiery serpents? Has He no demons? The verse goes on to say, however: *Thou hast broken the teeth of the wicked (ibid.)*. A parable of two men who were walking along on the highway. One was righteous, and the other was wicked. When they came upon an inn,⁵³ they said to each other: "Let us go into this inn and eat." As they entered the inn, the wicked man saw an abundance of fish⁵⁴ and of other good victuals, and he said to the righteous man: "Why should we not pay a set sum and eat all we want?"⁵⁵ The righteous man answered: "Has this inn just opened today? Only if it has just opened today, could we try out its food for a set sum."⁵⁶ And so the two men went into the inn together, but each sat by himself. The wicked man said to the inn-keeper: "Fetch me spiced wine, fetch me chickens, fetch me something of all the victuals in the inn." Then he sat back and made sport of the righteous man, saying: "Take a look at him who does not have what I am having." For the righteous man had gone to the inn-keeper and said: "Bring me a bowl of lentils and a small round bread." And so, as the two men sat, each by himself, the wicked man was making sport of the righteous man, saying: "Look at that fool: all these abundant victuals before him, and he's eating lentils!" And the righteous man was making sport of the wicked man, saying: "Look at that windbag! He's been devouring all those dainties, but he'll soon have his teeth broken."

Then the righteous man said to the inn-keeper: "Serve me two cups of wine," and the inn-keeper served them to him.⁵⁷ The righteous man said grace, stood up, gave the inn-keeper money for the little he had eaten, and went away in peace.⁵⁸

Then the wicked man stood up to go, and the inn-keeper said: "Settle thy account with me!" The wicked man answered: "What have I eaten? one small round bread?" The inn-keeper said: "No, thou hast eaten two!"⁵⁹ And the wicked man said: "Well, I ate two eggs!" but the inn-keeper declared: "Thou hast eaten five eggs!" The wicked man said: "No, I have not eaten that much." Whereupon the inn-keeper set upon him and broke

his teeth. Hence it is said *Thou hast broken the teeth of the wicked.*

So, too, the wicked think: *How can God know?* (Ps. 73:11). But the righteous say, *There is not a word in my tongue, but what Thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether* (Ps. 139:4).

PSALM FIVE

1. *For the leader; upon the Nehiloth* ("possessions"). *A Psalm of David* (Ps. 5:1). This verse is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *From the wilderness to Mattanah; and from Mattanah to Nahaliel*; ¹ *and from Nahaliel to Bamoth; and from Bamoth to the valley that is in the country of Moab* (Num. 21:18b-20a). R. Judah took *From the wilderness to Mattanah* to mean that by virtue of the kind of place a wilderness is ² the children of Israel were there deemed worthy of having the Torah given ³ to them at the hands of Moses, to whom, it is said "The Lord . . . gave the two tables of testimony" (Ex. 31:18); *from Mattanah to Nahaliel* he took to mean that there the children of Israel possessed themselves of a false god, ⁴ saying: "This is thy god, O Israel" (Ex. 32:8); *from Nahaliel to Bamoth* he took to mean that after they took possession of the false god, the angel of death came out against them, ⁵ as it is said "Surely . . . in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die" (Num. 14:35); and *From Bamoth to the valley that is in the country of Moab* he took to mean that in the valley of Moab they [did that which delayed their entrance into the Land], so that Moses, the servant of the Lord, [having died outside the Land], had to be buried in the valley. Of this, Jeremiah said, "How canst thou say: 'I am not defiled, I have not gone after the Baalim?' See thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done" (Jer. 2:23).

The Rabbis took *From the wilderness to Mattanah* to mean that by virtue of the kind of place a wilderness is the children of Israel were there deemed worthy of having the Torah given (*Mattanah*) to them; but *from Mattanah to Nahaliel* the Rabbis took to mean that there the children of Israel took possession (*nahālu*) of the Holy One, blessed be He, as their God ('El), and God took possession of them as His people.⁶

"Hence," said David, "I shall compose a Psalm about both acts of possession: *For the leader; upon the Nehiloth* ('possessions'). *A Psalm of David.*"

Another comment on *from Mattanah to Nahaliel*. Do not read *from Mattanah* but *because of Mattanah*: "Because of the gift which Thou, O God, hast possessed⁷ us of." That is, because of the well which the Holy One, blessed be He, gave to the children of Israel, they sang a song.⁸ For the water of the well flowed out like a river⁹ (*naḥal*) for them, so that whenever a woman wanted to go from her father's house to her husband's house, she had to go in a boat. As David says: *God . . . opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they had to go in boats (siyyoṭ) as in a river* (Ps. 105:41).¹⁰ What can *siyyoṭ* mean here except "boats," as also in the phrase, "gallant ship" (*si*)? (Isa. 33:21).

A different exposition of *From the wilderness to Mattanah; and from Mattanah to Nahaliel; and from Nahaliel to Bamoth; and from Bamoth to the valley* (Num. 21:18b-20a). R. Yannai said: He who makes himself a pasture¹¹ whereon all may trample, gains the gift (*Mattanah*) of Torah; and after he gains the gift of Torah, God takes possession (*Nahaliel*) of him; and after God takes possession of him, he rises to high places, as it is said *Nahaliel to Bamoth* ("high places").¹² But if he then becomes arrogant, affliction will visit him, for it is said *Bamoth to the valley*.

The congregation of Israel said: Because the Holy One, blessed be He, possessed me of the well as a gift,¹³ I took God as the lot of mine inheritance (*naḥalti*). Hence it is said *From Mattanah to Nahaliel*. As it is written "*The Lord is my portion, saith my soul* (Lam. 3:24); and the Holy One, blessed be He, says to Israel: As I am your portion, so you are My portion, as is said *For the Lord's portion is His people, Jacob is the lot of His inheritance* (Deut. 32:9).

And so David said: You are the inheritance of the Holy One, blessed be He, and He is your inheritance, for it is said *The Lord of hosts hath blessed him, saying: "Blessed be . . . Israel Mine inheritance"* (Isa. 19:25). Note that the first verse of the Psalm does not use the singular *naḥalah*, but the plural *nēḥiloth*,¹⁴ in order to signify two inheritances, the one, your

taking possession of God, and the other, His taking possession of you.

And what phrase proves that only after the gift of the well were the children of Israel ready to take possession of God as their inheritance? *From Mattanah to Nahaliel!* Before the children of Israel drank from the well, even on the very day they were to drink from it, they used to ask, *Is the Lord among us, or not?* (Ex. 17:7) as if to say: "If He is, it is good; if He is not, we shall choose another god for ourselves." But after they drank from the well, they said, *All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do and obey* (Ex. 24:7). Thereby we came into possession of two inheritances: we took Thee, and we took the Torah.¹⁵ As David said, *Thy testimonies have I taken as a heritage for ever* (Ps. 119:111).

In another exposition, *Nehiloth* ("inheritances") is taken to mean the Land of Israel,¹⁶ of which it is said *In those days . . . they shall come together . . . to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers. But I said: "Shall I put thee among the other children? [Nay,] I shall give thee a land of desire, a heritage (nahālah) of beauty desired by the nations (šibē'ot goyim)!"* (Jer. 3:18-19a).¹⁷ Can *šibē'ot goyim* mean anything else except that the Land of Israel was desired and coveted by all the nations? Consider the parable of a king who was seated at his royal table. He had many children, but he loved the youngest one most. He was about to apportion their inheritances. Among the parcels of land there was one of great beauty, which all the children coveted, and so the king said: "Let this parcel of land remain as my own portion." As Scripture says *The Most High apportioned to the nations their inheritance* (Deut. 32:8), but to whom did He finally give His own portion? To His youngest child, for the next verse says, *The Lord's portion to His people,*¹⁸ *to Jacob the lot of His inheritance* (*ibid.* 32:9).

The Temple is also called an *inheritance*, for it is said *Ye are not as yet come to the rest, and to the inheritance (nahālah) which the Lord your God giveth you* (Deut. 12:9). When it is

said *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel* (Num. 24:9), wherein is the goodliness of Jacob's tents? In that *As the waterbrooks (nahal) are they spread forth (ibid.)*. For like a waterbrook into which a man goes down unclean, but comes up clean, so is the Temple into which a man goes laden with sins, but comes forth without sins. Thus when Moses said to the children of Israel: *Ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance* (Deut. 12:9), by *rest* he meant "the Land of Israel," and by *inheritance* he meant "the Tabernacle of Jacob."

Therefore, David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: All that Thou hast given us as inheritance is goodly and fair, as is said *The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground; yea, the heritage beautifies me* (Ps. 16:5-6).

A different exposition of *For the leader; upon the Nehiloth*. Here *Nehiloth* is taken to mean "grievous afflictions," as in the verse *Woe is me for my hurt; my wound is grievous (nahēlah); but I said: "Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it"*¹⁹ (Jer. 10:19). So too, Scripture says, *When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me* (Micah 7:8)—that is, If I had not sat in darkness, the Lord would never have been a light unto me.

And likewise the Holy One, blessed be He,²⁰ says to the people of Israel: Because you willingly suffered my decrees, therefore you are called *Trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified* (Isa. 61:3).

2. In a different exposition, the verse is read *For the leader; upon Hanhiloth*—that is, "For Him who causes to inherit." Elsewhere Scripture says, *I lead in the way of righteousness . . . that I may cause those that love me to inherit (hanhil) substance* (Prov. 8:19-21). In this verse, according to R. Hanin bar Ada, Torah is speaking of herself and saying: *Length of days is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor* (Prov. 3:16), and yet my children are poor. Nevertheless, says the Lord, because they occupy themselves with Torah even in their poverty, I will cause them to inherit the substance of three hundred and ten worlds, for it is said *That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance (yṣ)*; ²¹ *and I will fill their treasuries* (Prov.

8:21). And why are My children poor in this world? So that they might not occupy themselves with vain things, and thus forsake the Torah. Indeed, it is the duty of a man to put aside his own work and to occupy himself with the Torah, for the Torah comes before all else, as is said *The Lord made me as the beginning of His way, before His works of old* (*ibid.* 8:22).

3. Another exposition of *For the leader; upon the Nehiloth* ("inheritances"). This verse is to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?* (Ps. 116:12). R. Samuel taught: There are four Psalms which one would have expected Adam to compose, but which David composed. They are these: (1) *The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof* (Ps. 24). And why would one have expected Adam to compose this? Because the earth and the fulness thereof were created for him. (2) *The heavens declare the glory of God* (Ps. 19). And why would one have expected Adam to compose this? Because he was the first to behold the heavens. (3) *A Psalm or song for the Sabbath day* (Ps. 92). And why would one have expected Adam to compose this? Because the Sabbath saved him from immediate destruction.²² And (4) *For the leader; upon the Nehiloth* ("inheritances"). And why would one have expected Adam to compose this? Because he was the first inheritor of the world.

4. In another exposition of *For the leader; upon Nehiloth* ("inheritances"), R. Samuel bar Nahmani took *Nehiloth* to mean two inheritances, for David inherited kingship both in this world and in the world-to-come. When Scripture says, *I will appoint him first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth* (Ps. 89:28), does it really mean that David was the first-born? Is it not said of him *And David was the youngest* (I Sam. 17:14)? Why then does Scripture speak of him as *first-born*? Because like the first-born who takes a double portion of an inheritance, so David inherited a double portion of kingship: one portion in this world, and the other in the world-to-come. And because of the two portions, David said: I shall compose *For the leader; upon the Nehiloth*.

5. *For the leader; upon the Nehiloth*. R. Joshua ben Levi said

that the phrase *the Nehiloth* is to be interpreted by the numerical values of its letters, *hnhylwt*: *H*, five, stands for the five Books of Moses; *N*, fifty, stands for the fifty days between Passover and the Feast of Weeks; *H*, eight, stands for the eight days that must elapse before an infant is circumcised; *Y*, ten, stands for the Ten Commandments; *L*, thirty, stands for the thirty men righteous as Abraham whom the world is never without, thirty because it was said to Abraham *So shall (yhyh)*²³ *thy seed be* (Gen. 15:5), and also said of him *Abraham shall surely become (yhyh) a great nation* (Gen. 18:18),²⁴ and the numerical value of *yhyh* is thirty.²⁵

When the people of Israel are deserving, eighteen of the righteous men live in the Land of Israel, and twelve outside it. In truth, it is a good omen when the Land of Israel raises up eighteen righteous men.²⁶

R. Ze'era said: Even the everyday talk of those who live in the Land of Israel²⁷ is worthy of study, as when they say in greeting "Mayest thou become as the brother of the seven and the father of the eight." For R. Joshua ben Levi said that the phrase "the father of the eight" refers to Abraham, who was the father of eight children: Isaac, Ishmael, and the six sons of Keturah;²⁸ and the phrase "the brother of the seven" refers to Isaac, brother of Ishmael and of the six sons of Keturah. But R. Samuel said that the phrase "the father of the eight" refers to Jesse, who had eight sons, as is said *Jesse . . . had eight sons* (I Sam. 17:12); and the phrase "the brother of the seven" refers to David who had seven brothers.

W,²⁹ six, stands for the six orders of the Mishnah; and *T*, four hundred, stands for the four hundred years that the children of Israel had to stay in Egypt; at the end of the four hundred years they took the Torah as their inheritance, and the Holy One, blessed be He, took them as His inheritance. Hence it is said *Upon the Nehiloth* ("inheritances").

6. *Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation* (Ps. 5:3); elsewhere Scripture says: *Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, hear me* (Ps. 86:1). God's hearkening to prayer was a gift made to all of David's tribe, for Moses, in blessing the tribe of

Judah, said: *Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah* (Deut. 33:7).³⁰ In the words, *I am poor and needy* (Ps. 86:1), all the children of Israel are the speakers. R. Johanan taught: Whenever the words *poor and needy* occur in Scripture, they refer to the children of Israel, as in the verse *The poor and needy . . . I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them* (Isa. 41:17).

Accordingly, David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, when I have strength enough to stand up in prayer before Thee and to utter my words, *give ear*; but when I do not have strength enough, consider what is in my heart: *Consider my meditation*.

A different exposition of the words *For I am poor and needy* (Ps. 86:1). But was David a poor man? True, he says: *Now, behold, in my poverty*, but adds at once *I have prepared for the house of the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold*, etc. (I Chron. 22:14). Then what could *my poverty* mean? "In the trouble"³¹ I have put myself to for His sake, I have prepared, etc."

R. Judah took the verses *Give ear to my words*, etc. (Ps. 5:2-3) to be the prayers of Israel in exile in the four kingdoms: *Give ear to my words*, in Babylon; *consider my meditation*, in Media; *Hearken unto the voice of my cry*, in Greece; and *unto Thee, O my King and my God, do I pray*, in Edom.³² And why does the prayer in Edom use the words *O my King and my God*? Because the children of Israel were saying to the Holy One, blessed be He: "How many persecutions and evil decrees did they promulgate against us in order to make us forsake our allegiance to Thy kingship and Thy lordship, but we have not forsaken it. Instead we go each and every day into houses of prayer and houses of study, and twice daily proclaim Thy Godhead, saying, *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One* (Deut. 6:4): Do what Thou owest us, and we shall do what we owe Thee, as is said *When my Beloved is mine, I am His*" (Song 2:16).

7. *Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness* (Ps. 5:5): Thou hast no pleasure in inflicting punishment upon the

world of men, for Thou didst say, *I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live* (Ezek. 33:11); God but asks that men turn and pray to Him, and He will receive them.

R. Isaac said: At present we have no prophet, no priest, no offering, no sanctuary, and no altar that can help win forgiveness for us, for since the day that the Temple was destroyed only the power to pray remains with us. *Lord, hear, O Lord, forgive, O Lord, attend and do, defer not; for Thine own sake* (Dan. 9:19). Thou didst say to Solomon: *I have heard thy prayer . . . I have hallowed this house . . . and Mine eyes and My heart shall be there perpetually* (I Kings 9:3). Thou didst also say to the city of Jerusalem: *Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail. Yet though thou wilt go forth in exile out of the city, I shall dwell in the field* (Micah 4:10).³³ And, indeed, His presence has never departed from the site of the Temple.

Neither shall any evil dwell with Thee (Ps. 5:5). Nothing evil dwells with God—neither fire nor hail: all such things are of the earth. As to that which is written *Then the Lord caused to rain upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven* (Gen. 19:24), it may be explained thus: When the stormy wind fulfills His word, the Holy One, blessed be He, ascends above the heavens and descends below the earth.³⁴

Neither shall any evil dwell with Thee: Thou dost not dwell with evil; nor does evil dwell with Thee.

R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Levi: The angel whose charge is God's indignation is kept far away from Him. Of such angels it is said *They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, even the Lord, and the weapons of His indignation to destroy the whole earth* (Isa. 13:5). This verse can be explained by the parable of a mortal king who had two savage legions. (For the rest of the parable, see the Psalm *A prayer of David*.³⁵)

Though you will find that three legions of angels go before

the Holy One, blessed be He, as is intimated by the verses *Righteousness shall go before Him* (Ps. 85:14), *A fire devoureth before Him* (Ps. 50:3), and *Before Him goeth the pestilence* (Hab. 3:5), yet which of the three dwells closest to the Presence? The one whose charge is righteousness, as is shown by the following verse: *And if he be a poor man, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge; thou shalt surely restore to him the pledge when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his garment, and bless thee; and as for thee, this righteousness will be brought into the presence of the Lord thy God* (Deut. 24:13).³⁶ This verse, says R. Yudan, makes plain to you how great a power is righteousness, and also makes plain to you how great the reward of those who practice righteousness.

Hence it is said *Neither shall any evil dwell with Thee*.

8. *The foolish (holëlim) shall not stand in Thy sight* (Ps. 5:6). *Holëlim* may mean "they whose hearts are filled with iniquity." Or it may mean "the woe-makers of the world." Or it may mean "folly," as in the verse *I said of laughter: "It is foolish"* (Eccles. 2:2).³⁷

R. Issachar taught: Even if a man stands up and blasphemes God, and heaps up iniquities, the Holy One, blessed be He, says: "Let him but repent, and it will be considered as if he had never done an iniquity." Of this it is written *For He knoweth false men: He seeth iniquity also, but He considereth it not* (Job 11:11).³⁸

R. Simon interpreted the verse *The iniquities (holëlim) shall not stand in Thy sight*, as referring to Ishmael when he was a lad.³⁹ Scripture relates: *God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water: and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad a drink* (Gen. 21:19). Long afterwards, when Nebuchadnezzar drove the children of Israel into exile—chained together, their hands tied behind their backs, and going naked as beasts—the children of Israel, as they passed by Ishmael's lands, said to Nebuchadnezzar's officers, "Do us the kindness of taking us by way of our kinsmen, the children of Ishmael." And

the officers did so. The children of Ishmael came out with bread dipped in brine and with empty leather bottles distended with air to meet the children of Israel. Thereupon the children of Israel, thinking that the leather-bottles were filled with water, tore with their teeth at the bottles, and because the air ⁴⁰ rushed into their inmost parts they died.

The ministering angels said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, a person who will one day bring death to Thy children by pretending to relieve their thirst, wilt Thou raise up a well for him?" It was to Ishmael's children that Isaiah referred when he said: *The burden is upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye caravans of Dedanites. Unto him that was thirsty, they brought water; the inhabitants of the land of Tema did meet the fugitives with their bread* ⁴¹ (Isa. 21:13, 14). But the Holy One, blessed be He, asked the ministering angels: "At this moment, what sort of person is Ishmael? Righteous or wicked?" And they answered: "Righteous." God said: "I do not judge a man except for what he is at the time I am judging him!" Hence it is said *God hath heard the voice of the lad according to what he was then* ⁴² (Gen. 21:17), and not according to what he was going to be afterwards.

R. Hanina bar Papa read the verse *The iniquities shall not stand in Thy sight* as referring to Jeroboam who at one time was the equal of Ahijah of Shiloh in understanding, ⁴³ for it is written of them *And the two were alone in the field* (I Kings 11:29), as if to say that only these two could make clear the mystery of the divine chariot. ⁴⁴ When the ministering angels stood up before the Holy One, blessed be He, and said: "Master of the universe, a person like Jeroboam who will one day set up two calves for worship,—wilt Thou reveal the mystery of the divine chariot to him?" God asked: "At this moment, what sort of person is he? Righteous or wicked?" They answered: "Righteous!" God said: "I do not judge a man except for what he is at the time I am judging him!"

Thou hatest all workers of iniquity (Ps. 5:6b), such as Doeg

and Ahithophel whose occupation was truth,⁴⁵ but who perverted the truth into falsehood.

9. *Thou shalt destroy them that speak falsehood* (Ps. 5:7): they will not be resurrected, and they will not even be permitted to come up for judgment, for, as a Mishnah teaches, three kings and four commoners have no portion in the world-to-come, the four commoners being Doeg, Ahithophel, Balaam, and Gehazi.⁴⁶

10. *Hold them guilty, O God . . . cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against Thee* (Ps. 5:11). Here the words of Scripture are directed against Nebuchadnezzar and his hosts who destroyed the Temple. Afterwards Nebuchadnezzar was driven out of the world of men, as it is said *There fell a voice from heaven: "O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken: the kingdom is departed from thee. And thou shalt be driven from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field"* (Dan. 4:29).

R. Berechiah and R. Helbo said in the name of R. Samuel: All the praises of God which David elaborated in such detail in the Book of Psalms, wicked Nebuchadnezzar managed to get into a single verse:⁴⁷ *Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven; for all His works are truth, and His ways justice; and those that walk in pride He is able to abase* (Dan. 4:34).

You will find much the same thought in the words of Moses, the greatest of the Prophets. For at the end of his praise of God what did Moses say? *The Rock, His work is perfect* (Deut. 32:4). He said this, lest men should declare that divine justice was too severe with him, because he⁴⁸ was not allowed to enter the Land of Israel, and he went on to say: "Heaven forbid! There is no partiality in the sight of God: *The Rock, His work is perfect.*" So, too, wicked Nebuchadnezzar offered like praise to God, saying: *All His works are truth.*

You will also find a Psalm saying: *Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise Thy God, O Zion* (Ps. 147:12), and concluding, *Praise the Lord* (Ps. 147:20). But wicked Nebuchadnezzar said

[more succinctly]: *I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven.*

David said: *For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness* (Ps. 11:7). But wicked Nebuchadnezzar said: *All His works are truth.*

And Hannah said: *The Lord killeth and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich, He bringeth low, He also lifteth up* (I Sam. 2:6-7), but wicked Nebuchadnezzar said: *Those that walk in pride He is able to abase.*

And so the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Nebuchadnezzar: Only yesterday thou saidst to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, *Who is the God that shall deliver you out of my hands?* (Dan. 3:15), but today thou offerest words of praise and adoration. I want no part of thee nor of thy praise. Who alone are worthy of praising Me? The people of Israel, of whom it is said *The people which I formed for Myself, that they might set forth My praise* (Isa. 43:21).

The verse *Let them fall by their own counsels* (Ps. 5:11) refers to those Babylonians who counseled that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah be cast into the fiery furnace, and that Daniel be thrown into the lions' den. But what they counseled to be done to others was what befell them and what was done to them.

Cast them out because of the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against Thee (Ps. 5:11). R. Alexandri said: What concern had the Babylonians with Jerusalem⁴⁰ [and the sin for which it deserved destruction?] *They have rebelled against Thee* in destroying it—that is, they destroyed it only out of rebellion against Thee.

11. *But let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice* (Ps. 5:12), because Thou didst take vengeance upon Babylon; *let them ever shout for joy* (*ibid.*), because in Media and in Persia Thou didst take vengeance upon Haman and upon his sons; *shout for joy* because Thou didst defend them in the days of the Greeks, when Thou didst surrender the Greeks into the

hands of the Hasmoneans and their sons; *let them also that love Thy name be joyful in Thee* when Thou wilt inflict punishment upon Edom and upon Gog and Magog.

At the time of their departure from this world, Zabdi ben Levi, R. Joshua ben Levi, and R. Jose ben R. Phinehas each quoted one of the following three verses: One quoted, *All those that put their trust in Thee shall rejoice* (Ps. 5:12). Another quoted, *For this let every one that is godly pray unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found* (Ps. 32:6); and the third quoted, *A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand; I had rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness* (Ps. 84:11). But some maintain that he quoted, *O how abundant is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee* (Ps. 31:20).

For Thou, Lord, blessest the righteous; with favor Thou compasses him as with a shield (Ps. 5:13). If a man gives a hundred-weight in gold to his friend, and robbers set upon his friend and take it away from him, what good the giving? But the Holy One, blessed be He, does not only give: *Thou, Lord, blessest the righteous*. Nay more: Thou also makest a shield for him, for *with favor Thou compasses him as with a shield*.

In the Mishnah it is taught that the righteous man need walk abroad neither with sword, nor with bow, nor with shield.⁵⁰

PSALM SIX

1. *For the leader; with string music; on the Sheminith* ("the eighth") (Ps. 6:1). This verse is to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Seven times a day do I praise Thee* (Ps. 119:164).¹ R. Joshua ben Levi taught: *Seven times a day do I praise Thee* refers to the seven prayers: "Who formest light"; "With abounding love"; "Hear, O Israel"; "It shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently"; "The Lord spoke unto Moses"; "True and firm"; and "Blessed art Thou . . . who hast redeemed Israel,"² all seven being obligatory every day, morning and evening, in the saying of the Shema. However, because wearing knotted fringes is not obligatory in the evening, [nor is the recital of the prayer prescribing them, namely, "The Lord spoke unto Moses"³] therefore the prayer "Cause us, O Lord our God, to lie down in peace," is said instead. This prayer on a Sabbath or on a festival eve, ends with "Blessed art Thou . . . who spreadest the tabernacle of peace,"⁴ and on the eve of an ordinary day, with "Blessed art Thou . . . who guardest Thy people Israel."⁵

Seven times a day do I praise Thee also refers to the seven benedictions concluding the several prayers said in the Shema, for in a Mishnah we learn: In the morning two benedictions are said before the Shema, and one benediction is said after it, and in the evening, two benedictions are said before it, and two benedictions⁶ are said after it.⁷ Thus there are seven.

Seven times a day do I praise Thee may also refer to the seven times a day that he who conducts the service recites the Kaddish.⁸

Of *Seven times a day do I praise Thee*, R. Abin said: This refers to the seven religious duties which a man is obliged to perform every day: the recitation of the Shema twice during the day, the recitation of the Eighteen Benedictions⁹ three times during the day, and the recitation of Grace after meals¹⁰ morning and evening. Thus there are seven.

Finally, R. Meir used to say: When a man wears the Tefillin upon his head and upon his arm, as prescribed, and his four knotted fringes enclose him on all four sides,¹¹ and when as he

enters his house there is a Mezuzah at the entrance, you find that seven testimonies of his fear of God surround him like a wall. It was of such a man that David said: *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them* (Ps. 34:8).¹² And when this man goes into a bathhouse and looks at himself, he says "Here I am stripped of all the testimonies of the fear of God." But then he sees upon himself the testimony of circumcision which equals all the other testimonies, and his mind is set at rest.

Thinking of circumcision, David said: I shall compose a Psalm concerning it: *For the leader; with string music; on the eighth (Sheminith)*—that is, on the eighth testimony, circumcision, which is performed on the eighth day.

Precious is circumcision, for the Holy One, blessed be He, made a covenant with Abraham that any man who is circumcised will not go down into Gehenna, as is said *In that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, unto thy seed have I given this land* (Gen. 15:18).¹³ Who will go down into Gehenna? The uncircumcised [heathen], as noted in the following verse: *The Kenite, the Kenizzite, and the Kadmonite, etc.* (Gen. 15:19-21). And see what Ezekiel says to Egypt: *Unto the nether parts of the earth . . . go down, and be thou laid with the uncircumcised* (Ezek. 32:18, 19). And Isaiah said: *Therefore the nether-world hath enlarged her desire, and opened her mouth for him that is without a seal* (Isa. 5:14):¹⁴ that is to say, "for him upon whose flesh there is no seal of the covenant." Whence do we know that circumcision is called a "seal?" Because it is said *The covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath unto Isaac, He established unto Jacob as a seal . . . to Israel as an everlasting covenant* (Ps. 105:10).

But heretics and apostates who renounce the Root of the world, that is, the Holy One, blessed be He, will be cast into Gehenna, for God . . . *hath put forth His hand*¹⁵ *against them that were at peace with Him: He hath profaned His covenant* (Ps. 55:21).¹⁶

It is true of every precept we are obliged to follow that we do

not observe it according to its proper manner and rule. Were we to examine the way each of them is observed among us, it would be difficult to understand why the Holy One, blessed be He, continues to sustain us or continues to sustain His world. For we hold fast to no precept except the precept of circumcision and the precept of the study of Torah by school children who are without sin. Hence God said: *If not for My covenant [and for what is to be studied] day and night, I would not sustain the ordinances of heaven and earth* (Jer. 33:25-6).

2. A different interpretation of *For the leader; with string-music; on the Sheminith* ("the eighth"): The phrase *on the Sheminith* alludes to the four dispersions of Israel under eight kingdoms, Edom being the eighth. Of the eight kingdoms it is written *Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This image, which was mighty, and whose brightness was surpassing, stood before thee; and the appearance thereof was terrible. As for this image, its head was of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of brass, its legs of iron, its feet part of iron and part of clay* (Dan. 2:31-33). By *arms* is meant two kingdoms; by *thighs*, two kingdoms; by *legs*, two kingdoms; and by *feet*, two kingdoms—eight in all: Babylon, Chaldaea, Media, Persia, Greece, Macedon, Ishmael,¹⁷ and Edom.

According to R. Aibu, the congregation of Israel says to the Holy One, blessed be He: On the day when Thou wilt have gathered us out of the eight dispersions, on the day of which it is said *The Lord will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people, that shall remain from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea* (Isa. 11:11), on that day we shall sing a Psalm of praise unto Thee. And because eight kingdoms are named in this verse, therefore it is said *For the leader; with string-music; on the Sheminith* ('eight').

Concerning another interpretation of *on the Sheminith*, two Amoraim differed. One said: The phrase refers to eight laws: six laws that were given to Adam, as intimated by the verse

And the Lord God commanded Adam, saying: of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat (Gen. 2:16); ¹⁸ a seventh law that was given to Noah, forbidding the eating of flesh cut from a living animal; ¹⁹ and an eighth law that was given to Abraham, concerning circumcision.²⁰

The other Amora maintained: The phrase *on the Sheminith* refers to circumcision which is obligatory on the eighth day after an infant's birth.

3. *O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger, neither chasten me in Thy wrath* (Ps. 6:2). R. Yudan taught in the name of R. Ammi: The congregation of Israel says to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe! Although it is written "Whom the Lord loveth, He rebuketh" (Prov. 3:12), *rebuke me not in Thine anger*; and although it is written "Happy is the man whom Thou chastenest" (Ps. 94:12), *chasten me not in Thy wrath*.

Hereto, R. Johanan told the parable of a king who had two cruel inquisitors. Whenever the king was angry at a province he used to chastise it with them. One day the king's own province provoked his displeasure, and as he was about to summon his inquisitors to chastise it, the people of the province began to plead with him: "Our lord, O king, we beseech thee, chastise us in any way thou desirest to chastise us, other than with those two." Even so, the people of Israel say to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, *Rebuke me not with Thine anger, neither chasten me with Thy wrath*." But the Holy One, blessed be He, replies: "If not, what am I to do with anger and with wrath?" Thereupon the people of Israel say: "Thou hast nations upon whom to pour these out, as it is written *Pour out Thy wrath upon the nations that know Thee not, and upon the kingdoms that call not upon Thy name* (Ps. 79:6)." And heeding the people of Israel, the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: *I will execute vengeance in anger and wrath upon the nations* (Micah 5:14). Of Israel, however, what does Scripture say? *I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger. I will not return to destroy Ephraim . . . and I will not come in wrath* (Hos. 11:9); *Wrath is not in Me* (Isa. 27:4).

R. Eleazar said: With whom may God in His punishment [of Israel] be compared? With a king who became angry at his son, and at that moment, holding in his hand an unsheathed Indian sword, swore that he would whip it across his son's head. But then the king softened and said: "If I whip it across my son's head, his life will go, and there will be no one to inherit my kingdom. And yet it is impossible for me to revoke my royal word." What did the king do? He put the sword back into its sheath, and then whipped it across his son's head, and so his son was spared, and his royal word was kept.

R. Hanina taught: God may be compared with a king who became angry at his son, and seeing at that moment a large stone before him, swore that he would throw it at his son. But then the king said: "If I throw it at my son, then his life will go." What did the king do? He ordered that the stone be broken up into small stones and that these be thrown, one by one, at his son, so that the king spared his son and yet kept his royal oath.

R. Simeon ben Lakish said: God may be compared with a king who became angry at his son, and there being at that moment a rope near him, swore that with the rope in his hand he would give his son a hundred blows. But then the king said: "If my sons receives a hundred blows, then his life will go." What did the king do? He coiled the rope a hundred times and struck his son once with the coiled rope, so that he spared his son and yet kept his royal word.

The Rabbis taught: The king took the rope and wrapped it gently around his son's neck. By these comparisons may we interpret the verse *O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger, neither chasten me in Thy wrath.*

4. *Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed* (Ps. 6:3). A parable of a man who was seized by robbers. Everyone of them struck him with whatever weapon he had—one with his hand, another with his fist, another with a stone, and another with a stick—until he managed to slip away from them. Only when he reached his house and fell into his bed did he cry out: "O my bones! O my bones!" Even so do the nations of the world subject the children

of Israel to all kinds of cruel servitude, persecutions, and evil decrees [which the children of Israel suffer in silence]. Only when the time for the rebuilding of the Temple comes—may it be soon and in our own days—will Israel speak out before the Holy One, blessed be He, *Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed.*²¹

5. *My soul is also sore troubled, but Thou, O Lord, how long?* (Ps. 6:4). That is, according to Rabbi,²² *Thou* hast promised me deliverance, saying, *I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him* (Ps. 91:15).

What is meant by the words *How long?* In answer, R. Kahana told the parable of a sick man who was in need of treatment by physicians. The sick man kept saying: When will the physician come—at the fourth hour, the fifth hour, the sixth, or the seventh? But the physician did not come. The eighth, ninth and tenth hours passed by,—still none came, and only as the sun was setting was a physician seen approaching. The sick man said: “If thou hadst delayed thy coming by another instant, my soul would have left me!” So, too, David cried out. When he saw the cruelty of the kingdoms continuing in affliction of the people of Israel, he exclaimed: *And Thou, O Lord, how long?* Thou who art my healer delayest Thy coming to me.

6. *All mine enemies shall be put to shame and sore troubled; they shall turn back, they shall be put to shame suddenly* (Ps. 6:11). The Rabbis taught: In the time-to-come the Holy One, blessed be He, will take the righteous and let them see Gehenna with empty places in it, saying: “These empty places were held ready for you; it is only by good deeds that you have won merit and have inherited the Garden of Eden.” God will also take the wicked and let them see the Garden of Eden with empty places in it, saying: “These places were held ready for you; but by your evil deeds you have condemned yourselves and have inherited Gehenna.”

R. Joshua ben Levi taught: The Holy One, blessed be He, will curse the wicked with no more than awareness of their shame. Nay more! He will double this curse of His upon them,

as it is said *All mine enemies shall be put to shame and sore troubled; they shall turn back, they shall be put to shame suddenly.* But when He blesses the righteous, He will double His blessing of them, as is said *And ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied . . . and My people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel . . . And My people shall never be ashamed* (Joel 2:26-27).

7. Another comment on *O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger, neither chasten me in Thy wrath.* Elsewhere, this is what Scripture says: *Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beatest him with the rod, he will not die* (Prov. 23:13)—that is, when you beat your child, beat him with nothing heavier than a rod, lest he die; as the next verse says, *Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from the nether-world* (Prov. 23:14). When not given in anger, chastisement is good. As Jeremiah said: *O Lord, correct me, but in measure; not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing* (Jer. 10:24). Hence *Rebuke me not in Thine anger; neither chasten me in Thy wrath.* For anger and wrath are two executioners. As Scripture says, *The wrath of the King is as messengers of death* (Prov. 16:14). And as Moses said: *I was in dread of the anger and wrath, wherewith the Lord was wroth against you to destroy you* (Deut. 9:19). Hence *Rebuke me not in Thine anger, neither chasten me in Thy wrath* means: chastisement is good, but I have not enough strength to withstand anger or wrath.

8. A comment on the verse *I am weary with my groaning; every night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears* (Ps. 6:7). To the Sages, R. Zechariah ben haḳ-Ḳaṣṣab spoke thus: "By this Temple I swear that from the time that the heathen came into the sanctuary until the time that they left it, my wife's hand did not leave my hand."²³ But the Sages said to him: "No man may testify in his own behalf." He then began to weep, so that he watered his couch with his tears: For he knew that though his wife was undefiled, yet because of the Sages' edict he would never again be alone with her.²⁴ And he applied to himself the verse *I am weary with my groaning;*

every night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.

9. A different interpretation of *I am weary with my groaning*, etc. David said these words of himself at the time of the incident of Bath-sheba, and went on: *Mine eye is consumed because of grief* (Ps. 6:8)—great grief. For people were saying of him: "Look at this man who murdered the shepherd, took his ewe lamb, and made Israel die by the sword of the children of Ammon, and yet he is a prince in Israel." I wept so much that my vision was dimmed, and my eye was consumed "like a garment eaten up by age" (Job 13:28). *Mine eye . . . waxeth old ('atēkah) because of all mine enemies.* By 'atēkah is meant that the light of the eye "went out," as in the verse *He went out (wayya'tek)*²⁵ *from thence to the mountain* (Gen. 12:8).²⁶

10. *The Lord hath heard my supplication* (Ps. 6:10). David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe! A mortal king has servants²⁷ who receive the petitions which are handed in to him. But I pray that God Himself will receive my petition.²⁸ Hence he concluded the verse with *The Lord will receive my prayer.*

PSALM SEVEN

1. *Shiggayon* ("impulsive speech") of David which he sang unto the Lord, concerning the matter of Cush the Benjamite¹ (Ps. 7:1). This verse is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought* (Eccles. 10:20)—that is, curse not the king who lives in thine own time. *And curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber* (*ibid.*)—that is, not even to thyself curse the rich man who lives in thine own time, *for a bird of the air shall carry the voice* (*ibid.*). According to R. Jeremiah, whatever thou sayest of the king or of the rich man will be carried to them by the raven,² or revealed to them by divination from the flight of birds, *and that which hath wings shall tell the matter* (*ibid.*). Indeed, for such curses even walls have ears.

The Holy One, blessed be He, asked David: In saying *Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed* (Ps. 6:11), why dost thou curse Mine anointed? Dost thou not call Saul "enemy," as is said *David . . . spoke . . . the words of this song in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, from the hand of Saul* (Ps. 18:1)? David replied: Master of the universe, do not fetch up against me words spoken impulsively, as though they had been spoken deliberately.³ As Scripture says *who can understand his impulsive words* (šġi'ot)? (Ps. 19:13).

2. Of *Shiggayon* ("impulsive speech") of David (Ps. 7:1), R. Judah said in the name of R. Levi: David let slip three imprecations against Saul, and each one of the three afflicted Saul: David said, *As the Lord liveth, nay, but the Lord shall smite him* (1 Sam. 26:10), and so it befell Saul. David said, *Or his day shall come to die* (*ibid.*), and so it befell Saul. And David said, *Or he shall go down into battle and be swept away* (*ibid.*), and so it befell Saul, for it is written *So Saul died and his three sons* (1 Sam. 31:6).

Why did David swear "*As the Lord liveth?*" According to R. Eleazar, David took the name of the Lord to help him resist his evil inclination, declaring "*As the Lord liveth, I shall not do this thing.*"⁴ According to R. Samuel bar Naḥmani, David

took the name of the Lord to restrain Abishai, the son of Zeruiah,⁵ declaring: "As the Lord liveth, if thou strikest and sheddest the blood of this righteous man, I shall mingle thy blood with his blood."

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to David: *Saul had one concubine* (2 Sam. 3:7)—only one,⁶ as if to say: Even after Saul was made king, he continued to be a humble man. But Scripture says of thee, *David took more concubines . . . out of Jerusalem* (2 Sam. 5:13). And thou likenest thyself to Saul! Saul sacrificed his possessions for the sake of Israel's war, as it is said *He took a yoke of oxen, and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout . . . Israel* (1 Sam. 11:7). And thou likenest thyself to Saul! Of Saul it is said *Swifter than eagles . . . stronger than lions* (2 Sam. 1:23). (R. Levi said: These words mean that Saul ran sixty miles in one day. According to R. Simon, he ran one hundred and twenty miles. And according to the Rabbis, he ran one hundred and eighty miles. When? When the Ark was taken by the Philistines. As Scripture relates: *There ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head* [1 Sam. 4:12], the *man of Benjamin* being Saul). And thou likenest thyself to Saul! A man who goes to a house where a feast is going on does not take his sons with him, because he is afraid of the evil eye;⁷ yet though Saul knew that the measure of divine justice was about to strike him, when he went to war he took his sons with him.⁸ But thy men said to thee: *Thou shalt go no more out with us to war, that thou quench not the light of Israel* (2 Sam. 21:17). And thou likenest thyself to Saul! Saul observed the Levitical precautions of purity even when he ate common food, as is implied by the verse *And the cook took up the thigh and that which was upon it ('lyh) and set it before Saul* (1 Sam. 9:24). (The word '*lyh*', according to R. Johanan, has the same meaning as '*lyh*' in the phrase "the thigh together with the fat-tail [*'lyh*];" but according to R. Eleazar, '*lyh*' means "that which was upon it.") Thus this verse proves that even when Saul ate common food, he observed the

Levitical precautions of purity.⁹ And thou likenest thyself to Saul!

3. Another comment on *Shiggayon of David*. This phrase is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *With Him is strength and wisdom (tušiyah), the deceived and the deceiver (šoḡeḡ umašgeh) are His* (Job 12:16). Here *strength* refers to Torah, of which it is said "The Lord will give strength unto His people" (Ps. 29:11), and *wisdom (tušiyah)* also refers to Torah. R. Joshua ben Levi said that the Torah is called *tušiyah*¹⁰ ("the weakener") because its study depletes the strength of the body and of the eyes. What does the phrase *šoḡeḡ umašgeh* mean? According to R. Simeon ben Lakish, it means "prophets and their prophecies."¹¹ According to R. Joḥanan, it means "the madman and the madness." According to the Rabbis, it means that if a man occupies himself with the Torah, the Torah will occupy him, as is said *Be it indeed that I am occupied (šaḡiti), that wherewith I am occupied will stay with me* (Job 19:4),¹² and as is also said *Because of thy love of her, thou art always occupied (tišgeh)* (Prov. 5:19).¹³ Moreover, the Torah stays with such a man not only during his lifetime; it will be with him even in the hour of his death.

Said David: For that hour I pray. *Shiggayon of David* accordingly means "the occupation of David."

What do the words *Concerning the matter of Cush the Benjamite* mean? According to R. Ḥinena bar Papa, David said: "As the wife of Joseph's master accosted Joseph saying *Lie with me* (Gen. 39:7), and then complained: *The Hebrew servant, whom thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me* (Gen. 39:17), so Saul complained: *My son hath stirred up my servant against me to lie in wait* (1 Sam. 22:8)." And David went on: "Even as the Cushite woman, the wife of Joseph's master, used lies against him, so Saul the Benjamite used lies against me." R. Aḥa replied: "But is it not true that when a man requests God to rebuff the insult offered to him, he will not be punished for such a request.¹⁴ Why, then, should David have spoken of his request as *Shiggayon*, 'impulsive

speech'?" R. Hinenai answered: Because David rejoiced in song at the fall of Saul, as is said *He sang unto the Lord, concerning the matter of Cush the Benjamite*, though it is written *Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth* (Prov. 24:17).

Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, said to David: If Saul's fate had been thy fate, or if thy fate had been his fate, how many Davids would I have caused to perish for his sake!

4. *O Lord, my God, in Thee (bk) do I take refuge* (Ps. 7:2). R. Jacob said: Since the numerical value of the letters in the word *bk* (in *Thee*) equals twenty-two,¹⁵ the word refers to Thy Torah which is written with the twenty-two letters of the [Hebrew] alphabet.

Save me . . . lest they tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver (Ps. 7:2b-3). David said: Like the lion who crouches over his prey and tears it to pieces, so Doeg and Ahithophel crouch over me to tear me to pieces. And *there is none to deliver*: In all the hosts of Saul, not even one man pleaded for my deliverance.

O Lord my God, if I have done this; if there be iniquity in my hands; if I have requited him that did evil unto me; if without cause I oppressed him that was mine enemy; let the enemy pursue my soul, and overtake it (Ps. 7:4-6). In Scripture, such phrases as *If I have done this, if there be iniquity in my hands* regularly introduce an oath, as in the verse "If my land crieth out against me, and the furrows thereof weep together; if I have eaten the fruits thereof without money, or have caused the owners thereof to lose their life—let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockles instead of barley" (Job 31:38-40). In *If I have requited him that did evil unto me*, the word *him* refers to an Israelite; in *if without cause I oppressed him that was mine enemy*, the word *enemy* refers to any of the [hostile] nations of the earth.

In another comment the verse is read *If without cause I stripped¹⁶ him that was mine enemy*: These words refer to the incident when *David arose, and privily cut off the skirt of Saul's robe* (1 Sam. 24:5). Immediately *David's heart smote him, be-*

cause he had cut off Saul's skirt (*ibid.* 24:6). According to R. Judah, David said contritely: "So modest is Saul, is there much difference to him between having his skirt cut off or his head cut off?"¹⁷ According to R. Nehemiah, David said contritely: "In cutting off Saul's skirt, I prevented Saul for a time from wearing knotted fringes."

Unaware that the skirt of his robe had been cut off, Saul looked for it, and not finding it, asked Abner: "Where is the skirt of my robe?" and Abner replied: "It was torn off by a thornbush." It is said that upon hearing Abner say this, David cried after Saul: *My father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand* (*ibid.* 24:11). From this we learn that honoring one's father-in-law is as much of a duty as honoring one's father. R. Nehemiah taught that David spoke the words, *My father, see*, to Saul, and the words, *Yea, see*, to Abner. But the Rabbis taught that he said *My father, see* (*rē'eh*)¹⁸ to Abner who was mighty as a lion (*'aryeh*) in understanding of Torah, and that he said, *Yea, see*, to Saul.

When David took away the spear and the cruse of water from near Saul's head¹⁹ in the barricade where Saul lay, David cried to Abner: "*Answerest thou not, Abner?*" (*ibid.* 26:14), as if to say, "Art thou not he who declared: 'The skirt of Saul's robe was torn away by a thornbush?' The spear and the cruse, have they also been torn away by thornbushes?" Of this it is written *Joab came . . . and said [to David:] "Why hast thou sent him away . . . ? Thou knowest Abner . . . came to deceive thee . . ."* At once *Joab . . . sent messengers, and they brought [Abner] back on account of Bor-sirah*²⁰ (2 Sam. 3:24-26): It was *Bor-sirah*, Abner's deception of Saul with the story of the pit (*bor*) and the thornbush²¹ (*sirah*), which brought it about that Abner was smitten by Joab.

5. *If without cause I oppressed [and smote] him that was mine enemy.* These words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *David . . . smote the Moabites. Making them to lie flat on the ground, he measured them with a line: he measured two lines to put to death, and one full line to*

keep alive (2 Sam. 8:2). For, said R. Joshua ben Levi, the Moabites murdered David's father and mother,²² and forced Ruth.²³ But, according to R. Judah, the Moabites murdered David's father, mother, and also his brothers, and forced Ruth.²³

In *Let the enemy pursue . . . and lay my glory in the dust for ever* (Ps. 7:6), *glory* stands for David's dynasty.

6. *Arise, O Lord, against Thine anger* (Ps. 7:7). R. Samuel bar Nahmani said: When Moses went up to heaven, and the children of Israel meantime provoked God's displeasure, five angels of punishment, '*Af*, *Keṣef*, *Hemah*, *Hašmed*, and *Mašhiṭ*, confronted Moses: '*Af*, the angel of anger; *Hemah*, the angel of fury; *Keṣef*, the angel of wrath; *Mašhiṭ*, the angel of destruction; and *Hašmed*, the angel of annihilation. In dread of these angels, Moses held up the merit of the Patriarchs before God and said: "Master of the universe, *Turn from Thy sore displeasure, and repent of this evil against Thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel Thy servants* (Ex. 32:12b-13a)." But the Holy One, blessed be He, replied: The Patriarchs? What is My obligation to them? On the contrary, they are under obligation to Me. Abraham is under obligation to Me because he asked [in mistrust of Me], "*O Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?*"²⁴ (Gen. 15:8). Isaac is under obligation to Me because he loved the son who hated Me, as is said *Isaac loved Esau* (Gen. 25:28), of whom I said: *But Esau I hated* (Mal. 1:3).²⁵ And Jacob is under obligation to me because he, too, said [in mistrust] *My way is hid from the Lord, and the justice due to me is passed away from my God* (Isa. 40:27). But Moses replied to God: *Remember . . . Thy servants, to whom Thou didst swear by Thine own self* (Ex. 32:13),—that is, "by Thine own name." Then the Holy One, blessed be He, was filled with compassion, as it is said *The Lord repented of the evil which He said He would do unto His people* (*ibid.* 32:14); and at once three of the angels of punishment *Keṣef*, *Mašhiṭ*, and *Hašmed*, were called away from Israel. Whence do we know that the angels '*Af* and *Hemah* had already been sent against Israel? Because Moses said: *I was in dread of the anger ('Af) and hot fury*

(*Hemah*), *wherewith the Lord was wroth against you to destroy you* (Deut. 9:19). Thereupon Moses said to God: "I am unable to withstand the two. Do Thou rise up against one and I shall rise up against the other." Hence it is said *Arise, O Lord, against Thine anger ('Af)* (Ps. 7:7).

Whence do we know that Moses stood up by himself against *Hemah*? Because it is written *They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped a molten image . . . Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away His fury (Hemah)* (Ps. 106:19, 23). Hence God said: *Fury (Hemah) is not in Me* (Isa. 27:4a).²⁶

Arise, O Lord, in Thine anger. Lift up Thyself against the rage of mine enemies, and awake for me; Thou hast commanded judgment (Ps. 7:7).²⁷ Where in the Books of the Prophets is it said that Thou didst command judgment? In the verse *The Lord will require it at the hand of David's enemies* (1 Sam. 20:16). And where in the Five Books of Moses is it said that Thou didst command judgment? In the verse *But if thou shalt indeed hearken unto his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries* (Ex. 23:22). And where in the Writings is it said that Thou didst command judgment? In the verse *Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me* (Ps. 35:1).

7. *So shall the congregation of the people compass Thee about* (Ps. 7:8): When a band of wicked informers encompasses Thee, Thou causest Thy presence to return on high, as is said at the conclusion of the verse: *For their sakes therefore return Thou on high*.

R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Judah bar R. Ilai: Upon their entrance into the [Holy] Land, the children of Israel were charged to do three things.²⁸ Two of these things they did; but they did not build the Holy Temple because there were informers in their midst.

It was because of such men that David said: *My soul is among lions; I lie among them that lick,²⁹ even the sons of men, whose*

teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens (Ps. 57:5-6). By *lions*, David meant Abner and Amasa who were mighty as lions in their understanding of Torah.³⁰ By the phrase *among them that lick*, David meant Doeg and Ahithophel whose lust was the licking up of slander. By the phrase *sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows*, he meant the men of Keilah, concerning whom he asked: "Will the men of Keilah deliver up me and my men into the hand of Saul?" and concerning whom the Lord replied: "They will deliver thee up" (1 Sam. 23:12). And by the phrase *their tongue a sharp sword*, David referred to the Ziphites who "came and said to Saul: 'Doth not David hide himself with us?'" (Ps. 54:2)."

R. Jose and R. Joshua ben Levi said: Even before they grew their pubic hair, the children who lived in the days of Saul and Samuel knew those subtle distinctions of the law that elaborate forty-nine³¹ arguments by which a thing may be proved clean and forty-nine other arguments by which it may be proved unclean. It was in behalf of these children that David prayed: *Keep them, O Lord, preserve them from this generation for ever* (Ps. 12:8). In saying *Keep them, O Lord*, David meant "Keep understanding of Torah in their hearts"; and in saying, *preserve them from this generation for ever* he meant "Preserve its children out of this generation which deserves complete destruction." For despite their superior learning, when the men of this generation went into battle they perished because of the informers among them. Accordingly, David said: "Master of the universe, why should Thy presence be on earth among informers? Withdraw Thy presence from their midst. *Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens* (Ps. 57:6)."

But though the men of Ahab's generation, all of them, worshipped idols, yet they were victorious when they went into battle and not even one of their number perished, because there were no informers among them. Therefore, Obadiah was able to say to Elijah: *Was it not told, my lord, what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid a hundred men*

of the Lord's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? (1 Kings 18:13).³² (In mentioning bread before water what does Scripture imply? That it was harder for Obadiah to get water than to get bread.³³) Moreover, when Elijah said to the people on Mount Carmel: "*I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord*" (1 Kings 18:22), all the people knew otherwise,³⁴ but they did not disclose it to the king.

Because of the informer's tongue the Divine Presence withdraws from the earth, and hence it is said *So shall the congregation of the people compass Thee about: for their sakes therefore return Thou on high* (Ps. 7:8).

8. O Lord, minister judgment to the peoples (Ps. 7:9): Turn the severity of Thy judgment against the peoples of the earth. But pronounce sentence upon me not according to my wickedness, but *according to my righteousness (ibid.)*, not according to my perversity but *to that integrity within me (ibid.)*.

Lord, remove wickedness and the wicked (Ps. 7:10) from the earth, and establish Thou, O Righteous (*ibid.*): Establish Thy kingdom, O Righteous One of the world! And since Thou art One who *proveth minds and hearts (ibid.)*, we know that Thou art a *benevolent God (ibid.)*.

R. Phinehas said: Since we are in debt to Thee, because every night we leave our souls in pledge with Thee and Thou restorest them to us, we know that Thou art a benevolent God. Therefore every morning, we say, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who restorest souls unto dead bodies."³⁵

No one is truly good unless he does good. R. Tabyome said: With what may we compare a man who does good and whose impulses are good? With a bell of gold, whose tongue is a jewel. And with what may we compare a man who does evil and whose impulses are evil? With an ill-favored woman who has a fetid tumor growing out of her nose. As for the man who does good but whose impulses are evil, and the man who does evil but whose impulses are good, one is neither better nor worse than the other.

9. God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry every day (Ps. 7:12). In a Mishnah, R. Simeon ben Gamaliel declared: Ever

since the Temple was destroyed, no day is without its evidence of ³⁶ God's anger. The dew of daily blessing comes down no more, so that the tang of fruit as well as its juices are gone. R. Simeon [ben Eleazar] maintained: "Ever since the Levitical rules of purity ceased to be observed in Israel the tang and aroma are gone out of all fruit; and ever since the giving of tithes ceased in Israel fatness is gone out of all corn." The Sages declared: "Fornication and witchcraft have done for all blessings." ³⁷ All this since the Temple was destroyed, as it is said *God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry every day.*

R. Ze'era said: "Although God's anger is renewed every day, yet each of His previous shows of anger continues." When R. Aḥa asked: "If this is so, by what merit do we remain alive?" [R. Ze'era replied:] "By the merit of the Priestly Benediction." ³⁸

10. *He [the wicked] hath prepared for him the instruments of death* (Ps. 7:14)—that is, prepared them for himself. Who then are *those who burn*, referred to in the verse's conclusion, *arrows against those who burn (dolēḳim)* ³⁹ *doth he also provide?* R. Aibu said: They are the wicked men who burn with lust all their lives. But R. Jose said: They are the ones who set fire to the Temple. The Rabbis maintained: They are the persecutors of the children of Israel, as is said *Our pursuers . . . chased us (dēlaḳunu) upon the mountains, they lay in wait for us in the wilderness* (Lam. 4:19).

11. *Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, yea, he conceiveth vexation, and bringeth forth falsehood* (Ps. 7:15). R. Levi taught: When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Noah: "Gather unto thee two living creatures of every kind into the ark," the creatures came and all of them went into the ark, as is said *And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh wherein is the breath of life* (Gen. 7:15). When they came unto Noah, they went into the ark, each with his proper mate. Falsehood also came and wished to enter, but Noah said: "Thou canst not enter, unless thou find a proper mate." Thereupon Falsehood went looking for a mate, and encountered Vexation.⁴⁰ Vexation asked:

"Whence art thou come?" And Falsehood replied: "From Noah. When I came and wished to enter the ark, Noah would not allow me to, unless I had my proper mate with me. If thou desirest, be thou my mate." Vexation asked: "What wilt thou give me?" and Falsehood replied: "I pledge thee that all that I may lay by, thou shalt take." And so it was arranged between them that all that Falsehood might bring in, Vexation would take, and they both went into the ark. When they went forth out of the ark, Falsehood fetched everything that he had laid by, but Vexation took them, one by one, so that nothing remained for Falsehood. And so Falsehood said: "I shall set to and demand something from my companion, Vexation." But when Falsehood went to Vexation and said: "Give me what I laid by," Vexation replied: "Was it not so agreed, that I would take everything thou couldst lay by?" Falsehood had nothing more to say.

Yea, he conceiveth vexation, and bringeth forth falsehood: Falsehood breeds falsehood.

12. *He hath made a pit, and digged it* (Ps. 7:16). All the pits that the wicked dig, they dig for themselves; the wicked man finally falls *into the ditch which he made* (*ibid.*).

His mischief shall return upon his own head (Ps. 7:17)—that is, Haman's mischief, for everything which he contrived against Mordecai was returned upon his own head.⁴¹

I will give thanks unto the Lord according to His righteousness; and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High (Ps. 7:18). R. Levi said: When Thou fulfillst the promise made to us in the words *The Lord thy God will set thee on high above all the nations of the earth* (Deut. 28:1), praise will be sung in all the earth to the greatness of Thy glory.

R. Joshua ben Levi said: Whenever you find a Psalm describing the downfall of the wicked, words of thanksgiving come before the Psalm, and words of thanksgiving after it. And the proof? After the words *I will give thanks unto the Lord according to His righteousness* (Ps. 7:18), comes the Psalm *For the leader; upon Gittith* (Ps. 8), describing the downfall of Edom;⁴² and

after this Psalm, come the words *I will give thanks unto the Lord with my whole heart* (Ps. 9:2). Thus, before and after, words of thanksgiving.

13. Another comment on *Shiggayon of David, which he sang unto the Lord concerning the matter of Cush the Benjamite* (Ps. 7:1). R. Tarfon said that David psalmed the Holy One, blessed be He, with many songs and outpourings⁴³ of praise. For David said: Master of the universe, only after Thou didst bring them out of Egypt and after Thou didst bring them up again from the Red Sea did the children of Israel sing to Thee. As for me, though Saul still pursues me, my song of praise to Thee does not cease.

Why did David call Saul *Cush*? Because, as David said: Although Saul's mood toward me changes constantly, yet he continues to pursue me.⁴⁴

R. Isaac said: Even as David prayed that he should not fall into Saul's hand, so he also prayed that Saul should not fall into his hand. When he said: *It is He that giveth salvation unto kings* (Ps. 144:10), by *kings* he meant Saul and David; and in saying *who delivereth David His servant from the hurtful sword* (*ibid.*), he meant that he had not put forth his hand against Saul.⁴⁵

David also said: Master of the universe, I had many enemies and they were all mighty men, but none except Saul was able to stand up against me. Hence David *spoke unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul* (Ps. 18:1) to show that he considered Saul as being equal in might to all of his enemies put together.

14. Another comment on *concerning the matter of Cush*. *Cush* refers to the congregation of Israel. For when the children of Israel differ with the Holy One, blessed be He, by sinning, He calls them Cushites, as when He said: *Are ye not as the children of the Cushites unto Me, O children of Israel?* (Amos 9:7).

In similar use of the word *Cushite* Scripture says: *Moses . . . had married a Cushite woman* (Num. 12:1). Did he really marry a Cushite woman? Was it not Zipporah⁴⁶ whom he married? She is referred to as a Cushite, however, because just as a Cushite

woman is different in that her skin is black, so Zipporah was different in that her deeds were good.

Likewise, Saul was different from other men both because of his deeds and because of his beauty, for Scripture says: *Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly . . . from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people* (1 Sam. 9:2). If you want to know how great Saul's beauty was, then read closely the passage where it is said of Saul and his servant: *As they went up the ascent to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them: "Is the seer here?" And they answered them, and said: "He is; behold, he is before thee; make haste now, for he is come today into the city; for the people have a sacrifice today in the high place. As soon as ye are come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat; for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that are bidden. Now therefore get you up; for at this time ye shall find him"* (1 Sam. 9:11-13). Note that although he had asked a simple question, the maidens answered him at great length, thus delaying him until Samuel came,⁴⁷ in order that they might gaze upon Saul's beauty.

Accordingly, Saul was called Cush.

15. Another interpretation of *Shiggayon of David which he sang unto the Lord concerning the matter of Cush a Benjamite* (Ps. 7:1) by way of a parable. A man was walking along a road, and another pursued him, but he escaped from his hand; then another seized him, but again he escaped; but hardly had he escaped from the second, when a third made to seize him. Only then did the man cry out to his friend to rescue him from the other's hand. So it was with David. Saul pursued him, and the Holy One, blessed be He, performed a miracle for him, so that he was able to escape⁴⁸ from Saul's hand, as is said *David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah* (1 Sam. 19:18). But after he had escaped from Saul, Doeg stood up against him, and spoke to Saul, saying: *I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech . . . And he . . . gave him victuals* (1 Sam. 22:9-10).

But the Holy One, blessed be He, asked Saul: "Was it any of thy victuals that Ahimelech gave to David? Did not Ahimelech give David part of the showbread that is placed before Me?"⁴⁹ Doeg said further to Saul: *He also gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine . . . and he inquired of the Lord for him* (1 Sam. 22:10). At this the Holy One, blessed be He, silenced wicked Doeg, for of such it is written *Let the lying lips be put to silence, which cruelly, disdainfully, and despitefully speak against the righteous* (Ps. 31:19). In this way, David was rescued from Doeg. But when Ahithophel came, David cried out, saying: *O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness* (2 Sam. 15:31). And so after God had rescued him from the three men, David began to sing the *Shiggayon of David which he sang unto the Lord concerning the matter of Cush* (Ps. 7:1).

16. Another interpretation of *Shiggayon of David*. David said to God: "Master of the universe, forgive me and pardon me for all the impulsive acts (*šēḡi'ot*) I committed." And David excused himself to God pleading: *Who can understand his impulsive acts (šēḡi'ot)? Clear Thou me from hidden faults* (Ps. 19:13). It is revealed and it is known in Thy sight that I have not deliberately done evil to any man. Even those men who have done evil to me, I have neither repaid nor requited with evil: *If I have requited him that did evil unto me* (Ps. 7:5); *If I have done this; if there be iniquity in my hands* (Ps. 7:4); *then an enemy should have pursued my soul* (*ibid.* 7:6). God asked David: "Where did an enemy pursue thee?" David replied: "In the cave in the wilderness of En-gedil"⁵⁰ Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said to David: "In that cave did I not open a way for thee, and did I not deliver thee out of Saul's hand?"⁵¹ and David answered: Because Thou didst so, therefore I sang a song unto Thee, as it is said *He sang unto the Lord, concerning the business of Cush the Benjamite* (Ps. 7:1).

17. Another comment on *Shiggayon* ("impulsive speech") of David (Ps. 7:1). Solomon said in his wisdom: *Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles* (Prov. 21:23). And though he also said: *Be not rash with thy mouth, and*

let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God (Eccles. 5:1), nevertheless the Prophets asked the Holy One, blessed be He: Why dost Thou bestow worldly wealth upon the nations of the earth? God replied: Have I not told you in Scripture that *The Lord thy God . . . repayeth them that hate Him to their face, to destroy them* (Deut. 7:10)?⁶² Of those who question God, Isaiah said: *Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker—a potsherd among the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him that fashioned it: "What makest thou?"* (Isa. 45:9). Yet when Habakkuk came, he said defiantly: *I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the fenced place (maṣor), and will watch to see what He will say unto me* (Hab. 2:1). What is meant by *the fenced place (maṣor)*? It means that Habakkuk drew a figure (*surah*)⁶³ on the ground, stood in the middle of it, and said: "I will not depart hence until Thou answerest this complaint of mine." The Holy One, blessed be He, assured Habakkuk: "I shall give thee an answer, the answer I give to anyone whose strength has been broken⁶⁴ by his labors on My behalf." Habakkuk then began to complain: *How long, O Lord, shall I cry, and Thou wilt not hear? Why dost Thou show me iniquity, and look upon perverseness?* (Hab. 1:2, 3). Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, replied to Habakkuk: "Thou art not an ignorant man, but art a learned man. And so go write [thy vision of iniquity and perverseness] plainly on thy tablets,⁶⁵ and then say, 'Cause me to know the time of redemption.'" As God said: *Write the vision, and make it plain upon tablets* (Hab. 2:2). And The Holy One, blessed be He, also said to Habakkuk: "At the time of the first exile into Babylon I said: *After seventy years are accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you . . . to give you an expected end* (Jer. 29:10, 11), but the children of Israel did not believe that they would have to wait for the time of their redemption, and Jeremiah had to urge them,⁶⁶ *Build ye houses, and dwell in them* (Jer. 29:6). But mark that it is written that as soon as seventy years had ended, *The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation . . . 'The Lord . . . hath charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem'* (2 Chron.

36:22, 23). This time also, when the year of redemption comes, I shall redeem the children of Israel, for it is written *The day of vengeance that was in My heart, and My year of redemption are come* (Isa. 63:4)." As soon as Habakkuk heard this, he fell upon his face, and supplicating, said: "Master of the universe, punish me not as one who was wilful, but rather as one who was impulsive." Of this it is written *A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigyonoth* ("impulsive speech") (Hab. 3:1). David used the same word of his speech: *Shiggayon of David, which he sang unto the Lord concerning the matter of Cush the Benjamite*; see the comment above on this verse.⁵⁷

But was Saul a Cushite? No, for the word *Cush* merely shows that Saul was different from other men in his actions and in his looks. For example, when Samuel said to Saul: *Thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt-offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace-offerings* (1 Sam. 10:8), Saul did not do as he was told. Instead he said: "*Bring hither to me the burnt-offering and the peace-offerings.*" And he offered the burnt-offering. And it came to pass that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt-offering, behold, Samuel came . . . And Samuel said: "*What hast thou done?*" (*ibid.* 13:9, 10). Note that this is one instance of Saul's being different, and adding to it the sparing of the king of Amalek⁵⁸ you have two instances.

18. *Shiggayon* ("impulsive speech") of David, which he sang unto the Lord concerning the matter of Cush the Benjamite (Ps. 7:1). When did David speak impulsively of Saul? When Saul was pursuing David, as it is said *Then Saul arose, and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph* (1 Sam. 26:2). Now, as Saul was seeking David in order to kill him, Abishai said to David: "Let me go, and I will kill Saul, for God hath delivered up thine enemy into thy hand this day; now therefore let me smite him" (1 Sam. 26:8). But David did not let Abishai kill Saul, but said impulsively: "*As the Lord liveth, nay, but the Lord shall smite him*" (*ibid.* 26:10). After Saul⁵⁹ went

down to the battle of Gilboa,⁶⁰ David, beseeching God concerning the imprecation which he had let slip, said: "Master of the universe, punish me not as one who spoke wilfully, but as one who spoke impulsively," as is said *Shiggayon* ("impulsive speech") of David.

Concerning the matter of Cush the Benjamite (Ps. 7:1). But was Saul a Cushite? Is it not written *A man of Benjamin . . . had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly. And there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he* (1 Sam. 9:2)? What is meant in calling him a Cushite is that he was different from other men in his actions and his looks, as a Cushite is different in the color of his skin.

In similar use of the word *Cushite*, Scripture says: *Because of the Cushite woman whom he had married* (Num. 12:1). Did Moses really marry a Cushite woman? No, but in a manner of speaking she was a Cushite in her deeds and a Cushite in her reputation. For a woman may be chaste but not beautiful, or a woman may be beautiful but not chaste: Zipporah,⁶¹ however, was both beautiful and chaste. A woman may be beautiful in the eyes of other men, but not beautiful in the eyes of her own husband; or a woman may be beautiful in the eyes of her own husband, but not beautiful in the eyes of other men: Zipporah, however, was beautiful in the eyes of her husband and in the eyes of all other men.

In similar use of the word *Cushite*, Scripture says, *Are ye not as the children of the Cushites unto Me, O children of Israel?* (Amos 9:7). Yet elsewhere in Scripture Israel is told *Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah* (Song 6:4).⁶² What is meant in calling Israel *Cushites* is that as a Cushite is different in the color of his skin, so the children of Israel are different from all other nations. As Scripture says, *Their laws are different from those of every people; neither keep they the king's laws* (Esther 3:8).

In similar use of the word *Cushite*, Scripture says, *Now when Ebed, an officer of the Cushite king*⁶³ . . . heard that they had put Jeremiah in the pit . . . Ebed went . . . and spoke to the king (Jer. 38:7,8). But was the king a Cushite? Was he not

Zedekiah? Calling him a *Cushite* merely means that Zedekiah was different in his actions from other kings.

For the same reason Saul is called a *Cushite*. For when Samuel said to Saul: "*Thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt-offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace-offerings; seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come unto thee, and tell thee what thou shalt do*" (1 Sam. 10:8), Saul did not do as he was told, for God gave him another heart (*ibid.* 10:9). Then when Samuel said: "*What hast thou done?*" . . . Saul said: "*Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines assembled themselves together against Michmas; therefore said I: Now will the Philistines come down upon me to Gilgal, and I have not entreated the favor of the Lord; I forced myself therefore, and offered the burnt-offering*" (1 Sam. 13:11, 12). This is one instance of Saul's being different. Then when Samuel said to him: *Go and smite Amalek* (1 Sam. 15:3), Saul did not do as he was told: *but Saul and the people spared Agag* (1 Sam. 15:9).

The reason David said: *Shiggayon* ("an outpouring of song") of David concerning the matter of *Cush the Benjamite*, is that Saul was equal in might to all of David's enemies put together. Therefore he said also: *For the leader. A Psalm of David the servant of the Lord, who spoke unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul* (Ps. 18:1).

O Lord my God, in Thee do I take refuge; save me from all them that pursue me, and deliver me (Ps. 7:2). What is the reason for his saying both *save me* and *deliver me*? Do not the two mean the same? What David meant, however, was: "*Save me, lest I fall into Saul's hand,*" and "*Deliver me, lest Saul fall into my hand.*" If Thou compliest with my prayer, *All my bones shall say: "Lord, who is like unto Thee, who deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?"* (Ps. 35:10).

PSALM EIGHT

1. *For Him who triumphs; at treading the winepress (Gittith)* ¹ (Ps. 8:1). The phrase *treading the winepress* is to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe; come, tread ye, for the winepress is full, the vats overflow* (Joel 4:13). To whom will God say *Put ye in the sickle . . . tread ye, for the winepress is full*? R. Phinehas taught in the name of R. Hilkiyah: God will say this to the angels.² But the Rabbis maintained that God will say it to the children of Israel. Songs are not sung at the season of harvest, nor at the season of grape-gathering, nor at the season of olive-picking, but only at the season of treading the winepress, as it is said *For Him who triumphs; at treading the winepress (Gittith). A Psalm of David*.

By "harvest" is meant the fall of Babylon, as is said *The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time when it is trodden . . . the time of harvest shall come for her* (Jer. 51:33); by "grape-gathering" is meant the fall of Greece, as is said *For I have bent Judah for Me, I have filled the bow with Ephraim . . . against thy sons, O Greece* (Zech. 9:13); by "olive-picking" is meant the fall of Media, as is said *So they hanged Haman on the tree* (Esther 7:10);³ by "treading the winepress" is meant the fall of Edom, as is said *I have trodden the winepress alone* (Isa. 63:3).⁴

In Scripture, you find redemption described by four metaphors: as a grape-gathering, as a harvest, as a pregnant woman, and as spices. If any of these be taken prematurely, the owners will get no profit from them. Hence it is written of a harvest: *Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe* (Joel 4:13); it is written of grape-gathering: *When grape-gatherers come to thee. . . O Esau* (Jer. 49:9, 10); of a pregnant woman: *Therefore will He give them up, until the time that she who travaileth hath brought forth; then the remnant . . . shall return* (Micah 5:2); and of spices: *Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a gazelle or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices* (Song 8:14).⁵

Come, tread ye; for the winepress is full (Joel 4:13). All the

Prophets saw the winepress [as the symbol of redemption]. So the prophet Joel saw it, for he said: *Put ye in the sickle . . . the winepress is full*. So Isaiah saw it, for he said: *In that day: "A vineyard of wine, sing ye unto it"* (Isa. 27:2). So Asaph⁶ saw it, for he said: *For Him who triumphs; at treading the winepress (Gittith). A Psalm of Asaph* (Ps. 81:1). And so David saw it, for he said: *For Him who triumphs; at treading the winepress (Gittith). A Psalm of David* (Ps. 8:1).

2. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth, yet surely above the heavens set Thy glory (Ps. 8:2). Rabbi said: We find that on three occasions—at the making of man, at the giving of Torah, and at the building of the Tabernacle—the angels remonstrated with the Holy One, blessed be He. They remonstrated at the making of man: when the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to create man, He consulted the angels and said to them: *Let us make man* (Gen. 1:26). They asked: *What is man that Thou art mindful of him?* (Ps. 8:5). God replied: "Soon you will see his wisdom." And after He created man, what did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He assembled all beasts and cattle and fowl before the ministering angels and began asking them what the name of each creature was. The ministering angels did not know, and then God said to them: "You desire proof of the wisdom of man? As I ask him, he will tell Me the names—indeed, he will call out the name of each one." What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do then? He assembled all beasts and cattle and fowl and brought them before man,⁷ for it is said *And out of the ground the Lord God assembled (wayyišer)⁸ every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air* (Gen. 2:19). Is it not already said in a previous verse, asked R. Aḥa, *God made (wayya'as) the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind* (Gen. 1:25)? In what sense, then, does Scripture use the word *wayyišer*? Having said by *wayya'as* in the previous verse that "He made," by *wayyišer* in this verse Scripture cannot mean "He formed," but "He assembled," as in the phrase "When thou shalt assemble (*tašur*) against a city" (Deut. 21:19a). Having said that God assembled the creatures, Scripture goes on to

say that He *brought them unto the man to see* (*lirē'ot*) *what he would call them* (Gen. 2:19). Is not everything foreseen by the Holy One, blessed be He? Yet the verse says *to see* (*lirē'ot*) as if God could not foresee. How, then, are we to understand *lirē'ot*, unless we read it as *larē'ot*, "to cause to see?" That is, God caused the ministering angels to see ⁹ man's wisdom.

And what is meant by the conclusion of the verse, *And whatsoever the man called every living creature that was the name thereof*? It means that whatever name God had ordained for every living creature, that was the name which the first man gave it, and thereby named every living creature.¹⁰

Then the Holy One, blessed be He, asked the man: "And thou? What is thy name?" The man answered: "It is fitting that I be called Adam since I was fashioned out of the earth (*'ādamah*)."

And God asked: "And I? What is My name?" Adam answered: "It is fitting that Thou be called Lord (*'Adonay*), since Thou art Lord of all!" Therefore, it is said *I am the Lord, that is My name* (Isa. 42:8), by which God meant: "That is My name by which Adam called Me." And so the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the angels: "Behold how great is man's wisdom, and yet you say: *What is man that Thou art mindful of him?*"

Similarly, the angels began remonstrating with the Holy One, blessed be He, at the giving of the Torah. When the Holy One, blessed be He, was about to set forth the Torah on Sinai for Israel, they said: *What is man that Thou art mindful of him? O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth, yet surely above the heavens set Thy glory* (Ps. 8:2, 5). By this they meant: "Master of the universe! It would be more fitting for Thee to set forth the Torah in heaven. Why? Because we are holy and pure, and it, too, is pure and holy. We are eternally alive, and Thy Torah is the tree of life. It would be better if the Torah were with us." God replied: "The Torah cannot find fulfillment among heavenly beings, for it is said of the Torah *Neither is it found in the land of the living* (Job 28:13). Is there land in heaven? Where can Torah find fulfillment? Among earthly beings, as it is said *I, even I, have made the land, and created man upon it: I, even*

My hands, have stretched out the heavens; and all their host have I commanded" (Isa. 45:12).¹¹

In the name of R. Judah, R. Nehemiah told the parable of a man whose son had a finger missing. The father sent his son away to have him taught the weaving of silk garments and whatever appertains to this craft—a craft requiring the use of all the fingers. After a time, the father came to the master-weaver and asked: "Why hast thou not taught my son the craft?" The master-weaver replied: "This is a craft that requires the use of all the fingers, but thy son has a finger missing. Yet thou desirest that he should learn weaving!"¹² So, too, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the angels: "The Torah cannot be taught to you, for there is no procreation among you, no uncleanness, no death, and no disease. All of you are holy." Yet in the Torah such things are said as *When a man dieth in a tent* (Num. 19:14); *This shall be the law of the leper* (Lev. 14:2); *If a woman be delivered* (Lev. 12:2); *If a woman have an issue* (Lev. 15:25); *These may ye eat* (Lev. 11:9); and *These shall ye not eat* (Lev. 11:4). Hence it is said of the Torah *Neither is it found in the land of the living* (Job 28:13).

As soon as He finished saying all these things to the angels, the Holy One, blessed be He, performed His deed of love, and gave the Torah to Moses. But when Moses was gone up the mountain and did not soon come down, the children of Israel wrought that thing of theirs so that the Tablets of Testimony were smashed.¹³ Then the ministering angels rejoiced and said: "Now the Torah will be restored to us." And when Moses went up a second time to receive the Torah, the ministering angels asked: "Master of the universe! Only yesterday, did not the people of Israel sin against the Torah in which Thou hast written *Thou shalt have no other gods before me*" (Ex. 20:3)? Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "As accusers, you have always stood between Me and Israel. And yet when you went down to Abraham, did you not eat meat and milk together, as it is said *And Abraham . . . took curd, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them . . . and they did*

eat (Gen. 18:7-8)? But even a child in Israel, after coming home from his teacher's house, will say if his mother sets out bread, meat, and cheese for him to eat: "This day my teacher taught me: *Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk*" (Ex. 34:26). The angels found no answer for God. And in that instant, while the angels had no answer and no rejoinder, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: *Write thou these words* (Ex. 34:27).

Again, when the Holy One, blessed be He, desired His presence to dwell in the Tabernacle, the angels said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the Universe! *What is man that Thou art mindful of him?*"

R. Judah—in the name of R. Aibu—and R. Judah bar Simon both deduced this remonstrance of the angels from the one verse *Kings of heavenly hosts cast (yiddodun), they cast*¹⁴ (Ps. 68:13), taking it to mean figuratively that the angels cast stones in remonstrance, *yiddodun* having the same sense as *yaddu* in the verse *Against My people they cast (yaddu) lots* (Joel 4:3). The Holy One, blessed be He, then said to the angels: "By your lives, I will do as you say," and *His glory covered the heavens only* (Hab. 3:3). But David said to the ministering angels: "By your lives, the glory shall be with me," for the verse concludes, *The earth shall be full of His praise (ibid.)*. The angels replied: "Only His praise,¹⁵ not His glory, will be on earth." David said: "Nevertheless, His glory will be on earth," as you can see from the Psalm which begins with *Praise ye the Lord from the heavens* (Ps. 148:1), and goes on, *His glory shall be upon earth and heaven (ibid. 148:13)*; thus the glory will be first upon earth, and then will be in heaven.

Hence it is said *O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth where Thou hast set Thy glory which was in heaven* (Ps. 8:2).

3. *Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength* (Ps. 8:3). Consider this verse in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *My son, if thou art become surety for thy friend* (Prov. 6:1). These words are addressed to young

disciples, to each of whom, at the time that he is ordained as a scholar, the Holy One, blessed be He, says "Before thou wast ordained, thou wast not answerable for the entire community. But now that thou art ordained, thou art become a surety for the community," as it is said *My son, if thou art become surety for thy friend* (Prov. 6:1). Who is spoken of as *thy friend*? The Holy One, blessed be He, of whom it is said "This is my beloved, and this is my friend" (Song 5:16), and of whom it is also said "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend forsake not" (Prov. 27:10). And what art thou to do as surety? Of what is clean, thou art not to say it is unclean, and of what is unclean, that it is clean; of what is permitted, thou art not to say it is forbidden, and of what is forbidden, that it is permitted; otherwise thou wilt be snared into guilt by the words of thy mouth, as is said *Thou art snared by the words of thy mouth* (Prov. 6:2). What more art thou to do as surety? Go and occupy thyself with Torah, for the next verse says, *Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend* (Prov. 6:3). Here the word *this* clearly refers to Torah, of which it is said "And *this* is the Torah which Moses set before the children of Israel" (Deut. 4:44). The verse continues *Go humble thyself* (Prov. 6:3)—that is, get thee a master who will tread on thee as on earth, and humble thyself at his feet, but it is God whom thou must set as king over thee, as the verse concludes: *And let thy friend be king (rēhaḥ) over thee* (Prov. 6:3). Here the word *rēhaḥ* pertains to kingliness as does *rahaḥ* in the verse "I will make mention of the kingdom (*rahaḥ*), and of Babylon" (Ps. 87:4). If thou settest God as king over thee, *Thou wilt deliver thyself as a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler* (Prov. 6:5).

4. Another comment. The words *My son, if thou art become surety for thy neighbor* (Prov. 6:1) are addressed to children in Israel who became sureties for one another at the time of the giving of Torah. How so? When the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to give the Torah to the people of Israel, He said to them: "Give Me sureties that you will live by the Torah." And when

the people of Israel said: "Behold the Patriarchs will be sureties for us," God replied: "As ye live, the Patriarchs themselves are in debt to Me. Would that they were able to stand surety for their own persons!" A parable is told of a man who needed to borrow money, and was told "Bring surety, and thou wilt receive as much money as thou desirest." The man went and brought another who himself was in debt, and he was told: "Thou hast brought one already in debt to me. Would that he were able to stand surety for his own person! Go now and bring some one not in debt to me, and then receive what money thou desirest." Likewise, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the people of Israel: "You bring Me the Patriarchs, sureties against whom I already hold many pledges! Bring Me sureties who are not in debt to Me!" Whence do we know that God spoke thus? Because it is written *The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day* (Deut. 5:3). When the people of Israel asked: "Who are those not in debt to Thee?" God answered: "Infants." Whereupon the people of Israel brought sucklings at their mothers' breasts, and pregnant women¹⁶ whose wombs became transparent as glass so that the embryos in the wombs could see God and speak with Him. And the Holy One, blessed be He, asked the sucklings and the embryos: "Will you be sureties for your fathers, so that if I give them the Torah they will live by it, but that if they do not, you will be forfeited because of them?" They replied: "Yes." When God said to them: *I am the Lord Thy God* (Ex. 20:2), they replied: "Yes." When God said to them: *Thou shalt have no other gods before Me* (Ex. 20:3), they replied: "Yes." And so, as sureties for their fathers, at every utterance they replied "Yes," when God said *Thou shalt*, and replied "No," when God said *Thou shalt not*. Thereupon God declared: Out of your mouths, then, I give the Torah, as is said *Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength* (Ps. 8:3), *strength* here meaning Torah, of which it is said "The Lord will give strength unto His people" (Ps. 29:11). Accordingly, when fathers in Israel—God forbid!—reject the Torah, their children are forfeited on account of them,

as it is said *My people are cut off for lack of knowledge; because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to Me; seeing thou hast forgotten the Law of thy God, I also will forget thy children* (Hos. 4:6). What did God mean in saying *I also will forget thy children*? The Holy One, blessed be He, meant: I also—in a manner of speaking—will make Myself forget that thy children blessed Me. Hence it is said *I also*.

5. A further comment on *Out of the mouths of babes* ('olēlim) and *sucklings* (yonēkim) *hast Thou ordained strength* (Ps. 8:3). Rabbi and R. Jose the Galilean differed. Rabbi said: The word 'olēlim means children old enough to play in the street, as is shown by the verse "To cut off the children ('olal) from the streets" (Jer. 9:20), and also by the verse "The young children ('olalim) ask bread. . . . They . . . are desolate in the streets" (Lam. 4:4b-5a). And the word yonēkim means embryos in their mothers' wombs. R. Jose the Galilean said: The word 'olēlim means embryos still in the womb, as in the verse "Embryos ('olēlim) that never saw light" (Job 3:16); the word yonēkim means infants just out of the womb, as in the verse "O that thou wert as my brother that sucked (yonek) the breasts of my mother!" (Song 8:1).

Rab and R. Levi commented further [on the infants' offering of themselves as sureties]. Rab said: Their mothers' wombs became like transparent glass, and at once the embryos let go of their navel strings, and the sucklings let go of the nipples. R. Levi added: Even greater than the first miracle was the one that followed: The mothers' wombs became opaque again; the embryos rejoined themselves to the navel strings, and the sucklings went back to the nipples, after having opened their mouths in song, as is said *Out of the mouths of embryos and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength*.

The verse concludes *Because of Thine adversaries, that Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger*, the term *adversaries* implying two adversaries, and the phrase *the enemy and the*

avenger implying two more adversaries in allusion to the four kingdoms.

A different comment. By the words *Because of Thine adversaries* God meant: On account of your adversaries, I have given you the Torah.

6. *When I behold Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained* (Ps. 8:4). R. Aibu taught: There are three kinds of men. The first kind says, "Had I been created to do no more than behold the stars and the heavenly bodies, it would have been enough for me," as is said *When I behold . . . the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained.*" The second kind says, "All that Thou hast to give me, give it to me in the world-to-come." The third kind, the slothful laborers, says: "Give us now what is ours and also what was our fathers'," as is said *The work of Thy fingers* (*ibid.*).¹⁷

R. Joshua ben Levi taught: In saying to mankind, *Do I not fill heaven and earth?* (Jer. 23:24), the Holy One, blessed be He, meant: "Know ye that the upper worlds and the lower worlds were filled merely by *The work of [My] fingers.*"¹⁸

7. *What is man that Thou art mindful of him?* (Ps. 8:5). R. Berechiah taught: As the Holy One, blessed be He, was creating His universe, He sought to show the angels the excellence of the deeds of the righteous. But the angels said to God: *What is man that Thou art mindful of Him? and the son of man that Thou rememberest him?*, etc. (Ps. 8:5).¹⁹ In saying *What is man that Thou art mindful of him?* (Ps. 8:5), they were referring to Abraham, of whom it is said "God was mindful of Abraham" (Gen. 19:29). In saying *And the son of man that Thou rememberest him?* (Ps. 8:5), they were referring to Isaac who was begotten by God's remembering Sarah, as is said "And the Lord thought of Sarah" (Gen. 21:1). In saying *that Thou makest him less only than God* (Ps. 8:6), they were referring to Jacob who commanded the flocks to bring forth streaked, speckled, and spotted young, as is said "And thus the flocks conceived at the sight of the rods, and . . . brought forth streaked, speckled, and

spotted" (Gen. 30:39), thereby proving that Jacob was less than God only in that he had not the power to put the breath of life into them. In saying *And crownest him with glory and honor* (Ps. 8:6), they were referring to Moses, of whom it is said "Moses knew not that the skin of his face sent forth beams by reason of His speaking with him" (Ex. 34:29). In saying *And makest him to have dominion over the work of Thy hands* (Ps. 8:7), they were referring to Joshua who caused the luminaries to stand still by saying: "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, in the valley of Aijalon" (Josh. 10:12), and it is written that "The sun stood still, and the moon stayed" (Josh. 10:13). In saying *Thou puttest all things under his feet* (Ps. 8:7), they were referring to David, all of whose enemies fell before him, so that he said: "Then did I beat them small as the dust of the earth" (2 Sam. 22:43). In saying *Sheep and oxen, all of them* (Ps. 8:8), they were referring to Solomon, of whom it is said "He spoke also with beasts, with fowl, and with creeping things, etc." (1 Kings 5:13). In saying *Yea, and the beasts of the field* (Ps. 8:8), they were alluding to Samson. According to R. Hanina bar Papa, God let the angels see Samson as he was capturing the three hundred foxes.²⁰ According to R. Simon, God let the angels see Daniel go down into a pit of lions, ride upon their necks, and suffer no injury. In saying *The fowl of the air* (Ps. 8:9), they were alluding to Elijah who flies about the world like a bird. Of Elijah it is also said²¹ "And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning" (1 Kings 17:6). In saying *And the fish of the sea* (*ibid.*), they were alluding to Jonah, of whom it is said "and Jonah was in the belly of the fish" (Jonah 2:1). In saying *Whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas* (Ps. 8:9), they were referring to the children of Israel, of whom it is said "But the children of Israel walked on dry land in the midst of the sea" (Ex. 15:19). Finally, in saying *O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Thy name in all the earth* (Ps. 8:10), the angels meant: [Do what pleaseth Thee!] ²² Thy glory is to sojourn with Thy people and with Thy children.

8. Another comment on *For Him who triumphs; at treading*

the winepress (Gittith) (Ps. 8:1). The verse refers to the punishment of Gog and Magog and of the four kingdoms upon whom God will tread as in a winepress, as it is said *Wherefore art Thou red in Thine apparel, and Thy garments like him that treadeth in the winepress?* (Isa. 63:2).

The prophet Isaiah said: *The Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment* (Isa. 5:16). When will the Holy One, blessed be He, be exalted? When He executes judgment upon the nations! For what is said in a preceding chapter? *The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted* (Isa. 2:11). At such a time, *The Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment* (Isa. 5:16). Similarly, God said: *And it shall come to pass in that day, when Gog shall come against the Land of Israel. . . . I will call for a sword against him throughout all My mountains. . . . And I will cause to rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many peoples that are with him, an overflowing shower, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify Myself . . . and they shall know that I am the Lord* (Ezek. 38:18, 21-23).

Similarly, Joel, the son of Pethuel, says, *Proclaim ye this among the nations. . . . Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye nations, and gather yourselves together round about. . . . Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there will I sit to judge all the nations round about* (Joel 4:9, 11-12). But there is no valley named Jehoshaphat. What then is meant by *the valley of Jehoshaphat*? It is the valley in which *Jeho*, the Lord, *shaphat*, will make decisions concerning all the nations. So it is described in the verse *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision* (*ibid.* 4:14). The *multitudes* are not the multitudes of the living, but the multitudes of the dead, as is intimated in the verse: *Behold . . . a great storm shall be raised up from the uttermost parts of the earth. And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth* (Jer. 25:32-33a). Thus, after saying *There will I*

sit to judge all the nations round about (Joel 4:12), God declared: *Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe* (Joel 4:13). And after that, He says: *So shall ye know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain* (Joel 4:17). And when will He be known as the Lord God? When the Holy One, blessed be He, is seen in the winepress (gaṭ). When God says, *Come, tread ye, for the winepress is full* (Joel 4:13), His triumph will be acknowledged, as is said *For Him who triumphs; at treading the winepress (Gittith)*.

The term *Gittith*, occurring four times in Scripture, stands for the four periods of exile: (1) *For Him who triumphs; upon the Gittith. A Psalm of the sons of Korah* (Ps. 84:1); (2) *For Him who triumphs; upon the Gittith. A Psalm of Asaph* (Ps. 81:1); (3) the gaṭ in the Book of Joel: *Come, tread ye, for the winepress (gaṭ) is full* (Joel 4:13); and (4) *For Him who triumphs; upon the Gittith. A Psalm of David* (Ps. 8:1).

PSALM NINE

1. *For the leader; 'alēmuṭ libban* (Ps. 9:1). The phrase *'alēmuṭ libban* is to be understood in the light of the verse *He hath made every thing beautiful in its time; also He hath set ha'olam (the world) in their heart (bēlibbam)* (Eccles. 3:11). R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Jonathan: Do not read *ha'olam*, "the world," but *ha'olēlim*, "the little children"; the verse means therefore that God has set love of little children in their fathers' hearts. For example, there was a king who had two sons, one grown up, and the other a little one. The grown-up one was scrubbed clean, and the little one was covered with dirt, but the king loved the little one more than he loved the grown-up one.¹

In a different reading of *He hath set ha'olam (the unknown) in their heart*, R. Jonathan said: God has set the fear of the unknown angel of death in their hearts.²

Rab,³ the son of Samuel, said in the name of Samuel: In the verse *And God saw every thing that He had made, and behold, it was very good* (Gen. 1:31), the words *very good* refer to the Inclination-to-evil⁴ in a man's heart. But how can the Inclination-to-evil be termed *very good*? Because Scripture teaches that were it not for the Inclination-to-evil, a man would not take a wife, nor beget children with her, and so the world could not endure.⁵

In another interpretation, the verse is read *He hath caused to be hidden (ha'olam) from their heart*. The word *ha'olam* being written defectively, without the letter *waw*, is to be read *he'elim* ("caused to be hidden")—that is, the Holy One, blessed be He, hid the day of death and the day of judgment from the hearts of His creatures. Therefore David said: "Because Thou hidest them from me, I shall sing a Psalm, *For the leader; 'alēmuṭ libban* (Ps. 9:1), in praise of Thy hiding of the day of death and the day of judgment from the heart."

2. Another comment on *'alēmuṭ libban* ("concealed from the heart"). The phrase is to be read in the light of the verse *Koheleth sought to understand the ordinances of delight* (Eccles.

12:10).⁶ This verse means that Solomon sought to have God explain to him the Scriptural ordinances concerning the red heifer whose ashes were used for lustration,⁷ especially the ordinance which R. Isaac stated as follows: "All that have the care of the heifer make their garments unclean, but the heifer itself makes clean the unclean." Whereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, quoted the conclusion of the verse *That which was written was upright, even ordinances of truth* (*ibid.*), and said: "For thy benefit, I wrote long ago in the Book of the Upright, as it is said *Is not this written in the Book of the Upright?* (Josh. 10:13): Live uprightly. Live simply. Live faithfully. When I have issued a decree, or established an ordinance, it is not to be questioned, as it is said *This is an ordinance of the Law which the Lord hath commanded* (Num. 19:2)."

What is meant here by *This*? *This* is meant to stress the fact that the series of ordinances concerning the red heifer differs from that concerning the sacrificial heifer which the elders of a city are ordained to take into a rough valley, and there break its neck.⁸

Another comment on *Koheleth sought to understand*, etc. Solomon sought to have God explain to him the reward for study of Torah, of which we are told *She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her* (Prov. 3:15).

The Holy One, blessed be He, quoted to Solomon the conclusion of the verse *That which was written was upright, even words of truth* (Eccles. 12:10), and said: "For thy benefit I wrote long ago in the Book of the Upright *Since the beginning of the world men have not heard. . . . neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside Thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him* (Isa. 64:3)."

Another comment: Solomon sought to have God explain to him what is the reward of men who fear God and who trust in Him, men to whom Scripture says: *Ye shall be a delightful land* (Mal. 3:12). Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, quoted to Solomon, *That which was written* etc., and said:

"Long ago I wrote: *O how abundant is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee* (Ps. 31:20)."

Another comment: Solomon sought to have God explain to him what is the reward of acts of mercy, of which God says, *I desire mercy and not sacrifice* (Hos. 6:6). Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, quoted to Solomon *That which was written* etc., and said: "Long ago I wrote: *Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God; the faithful God who keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments* (Deut. 7:9)."

Another comment: Solomon sought to have God explain to him when the year of redemption would come, the year of which we read, *I charge you . . . not to stir up, nor awake love, till He desire* (Song 3:5). Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, quoted *That which was written* etc., and said: "Long ago I wrote: *The day of vengeance shall be in My heart until My year of redemption will come* (Isa. 63:4)."

R. Samuel taught in the name of R. Judah: If a man tells you when the day of redemption is coming, do not believe him, for it is written *the day of vengeance shall be in My heart* (Isa. 63:4). If the heart does not disclose its secrets to the mouth, how can the mouth disclose anything? ⁹

R. Berechiah and R. Simon, in the name of R. Joshua ben Levi, maintained that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Solomon: For thy benefit I supplied three clues to the sepulcher of Moses, as it is said *And He buried him in the valley, in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor* (Deut. 34:6). Yet in spite of all, *No man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day* (ibid.). Though I provided so many clues in this matter, no man has been able to solve it: how much more unlikely, then, is the discovery of the time of redemption of which it is said *The words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end* (Dan. 12:9).

3. A further comment on *'alēmuṭ libban* ("concealed from the heart"). R. Abba bar Kahana said: The verse *Lest thou shouldst ponder the path of life* (Prov. 5:6) means that you are not to sit down and ponder the precepts of the Torah to pick out

the one precept whose reward is most abundant, and then heed that one alone; for the verse goes on to say *Her ways have been moved, that thou canst not know them* (*ibid.*)—that is, the ways of [reward] in the Torah have been moved out of sight. R. Hiyya related the parable of a king who had an orchard into which he brought workmen, without revealing to them the reward for planting the orchard. Had he revealed to them the reward for planting its several kinds of trees, the workmen would have picked out the kind of tree for whose planting there was the greatest reward and would have planted that kind only: Thus the work in the orchard would have been neglected at one end, and heeded only at the other. So the Holy One, blessed be He, did not reveal the reward for heeding the different precepts to the children of Israel, in order that they should not choose the most rewarding precept and heed that one only. For then the Torah would be heeded at one end and would be neglected at the other. Therefore the Sages taught in the style of the Mishnah: "Be as heedful of a minor precept as of a major one, for you do not know the reward for the heeding of the different precepts."¹⁰ Hence it is said *Her ways have been moved, that thou canst not know them* (Prov. 5:6).

R. Aḥa taught in the name of R. Abba bar Kahana: In this world the Holy One, blessed be He, concealed the reward for the heeding of the various precepts, so that the children of Israel will respect and observe the Torah as a whole. Thus when the Holy One, blessed be He, comes to give them their reward, He will give them the reward for faith and the reward for observance, and will also reveal to them the meaning and purpose of the various precepts. Hence the phrase *'alēmuṭ libban* means that the rewards for the various precepts are concealed from their hearts (*mē'ulemet millibban*).

4. Another comment: *'Alēmuṭ labben* ("faults hidden from a son")¹¹ refers to the sins a son [of Israel] commits unwittingly; for these his Father in heaven, as He cleanses men of their iniquities on the Day of Atonement, pardons and forgives him.

Another comment: *'Alēmuṭ labben* ("hidden for the son") means that God hid the day of comfort from David.

Another comment: Read as '*Al muṭ labben* ("concerning death for the son"), the phrase refers to the death which the Father decrees for the son, though if the son repents God will purify him of his iniquities. Here "son" (*ben*) clearly refers to the people of Israel, of whom God said: *Israel is My son, My first-born* (Ex. 4:22).

Another comment: '*Al muṭ labben* ("Concerning the son's death"), refers, according to R. Abba, to the death of David's son.¹² But the Rabbis say: As long as that [other] son of his¹³ was alive, David knew that the heart of the Holy One, blessed be He, was angry with him, but when the son died David knew that the heart of the Holy One, blessed be He, became tender toward him.

5. *I will give thanks unto the Lord with my whole heart* (Ps. 9:2)—that is, both with my Inclination-to-good and with my Inclination-to-evil, so that my heart should not be in conflict. The phrase *my whole heart* is to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king who knoweth not to be admonished* (Eccles. 4:13). The phrase *a poor and wise child* stands for the Inclination-to-good. Why is it called *wise*? Because it directs men into right paths. Why is it called *poor*? Because not all people pay attention to it. Why is it called a *child*? Because it becomes part of a man when the child becomes thirteen.¹⁴ The phrase *an old and foolish king* stands for the Inclination-to-evil. Why is it called *king*? Because all parts of the body heed it. Why is it called *old*? Because it is part of a man from his youth to his old age, as it is said "For the disposition of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21)—that is, from the time that he was expelled from his mother's womb.¹⁵ Why is it called *foolish*? Because it directs men into evil paths.

*For out of the bushes*¹⁶ *he came forth to be king* (Eccles. 4:14)—that is, like one lurking among bushes the Inclination-to-evil comes forth to entangle men. The verse concludes, *Whereas also in his kingdom the poor is brought forth (ibid.)*—that is, the Inclination-to-good is brought forth in the very kingdom of the Inclination-to-evil.

I will tell of all Thy marvellous works (Ps. 9:2). What a marvel it is, that of Thy works there have been sufficient for the past, and there will be sufficient for the future; sufficient for this life and sufficient for the world-to-come.

6. *I will be glad and rejoice in Thee* (*bk*) (Ps. 9:3)—that is, in Thy Torah which is written in an alphabet of twenty-two letters, 22 being equal to the sum of *b* (2) and *k* (20). Or, *I will be glad . . . in Thee*—that is, “in Thy deliverance.”

I will sing praise to Thy name Most High (*ibid.*)—to Thy name, highest among all names.

The words *When mine enemies are turned back* (Ps. 9:4), mean, according to R. Yudan, “When Mine enemies in their backsliding show how really corrupt they are.” But according to R. Phinehas, these words mean “When mine enemies are made to turn back, by the means described in the verse *There came a messenger unto Saul, saying: ‘Haste thee and turn back; for the Philistines have made a raid upon the land’* (1 Sam. 23:27)—that is, the messenger came from above, his coming being referred to by David in the verse *He sent from above, He took me* (2 Sam. 22:17).”

Another comment on *When mine enemies are turned back* (Ps. 9:4). R. Huna took the words to mean, “When mine enemies turn back because of the shame ordained for them in the time-to-come.” This interpretation is the same as Samuel’s, for Samuel used to say: “In the time-to-come, the nations of the earth will come and prostrate themselves before their idols in whom there will be no power to save them, as it is said *Mine enemies . . . will cry, but there will be none to save them* (Ps. 18:41-42); and then they will turn away and cry to the Holy One, blessed be He, but He will hide His face from them, as it is said *Even unto the Lord, but He will not answer them*” (*ibid.*).

The end of the verse, *They shall fall and perish in Thy presence* (Ps. 9:4), means that Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: “Master of the universe! Even if mine enemies had no sin other than that of going into Thy House and speaking brazenly in Thy presence, *they shall fall and perish.*”

7. *Thou hast maintained my right and my cause* (Ps. 9:5). The phrase *my right and my cause* is one of five instances in Scripture where two words identical in meaning are used, namely, *Thou hast maintained my right and my cause* (Ps. 7:5), *My Witness . . . and He that testifieth of me is on high* (Job 16:19), *Who hath sent out the wild ass . . . hath loosed the bands of the swift ass?* (Job 39:5), *His bones . . . his gristles are like bars of iron* (Job 40:18), and *Even unto old age and hoary hairs, O God, forsake me not* (Ps. 71:18).

R. Joshua, in the name of R. Idi, read the verse *Thou hast imposed judgment on me, but Thou wilt also maintain my cause* (Ps. 9:5)¹⁷—that is, the congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: “Master of the universe! I confess my guilt, for I am soiled with the filth of the wicked deeds I have done; but the nations of the earth are also guilty in that they crush and enslave me.” Likewise, another verse says, *I will bear the indignation of the Lord* (Micah 7:9). Why? *Because I have sinned against Him* (*ibid.*). Yet *He will plead my cause* (*ibid.*) against the nations of the earth.

Thou hast rebuked the nations, Thou hast destroyed the wicked (Ps. 9:6). *Thou hast rebuked the nations*—that is, rebuked Amalek, of whom it is said “Amalek was the first of the nations” (Num. 24:20); *Thou hast destroyed the wicked*—that is, destroyed Esau, of whose descendants it is said “Men shall call them the border of wickedness” (Mal. 1:4). For in a single day Esau did five wicked deeds: he forced a betrothed maiden; he killed a man; he denied the resurrection of the dead; he denied the Root of the world;¹⁸ and he rejected his birthright. Each of Esau’s five wicked deeds can be proved by the rule of “inference by analogy.”¹⁹

Thou hast blotted out their name (Ps. 9:6): God promised, “I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek” (Ex. 17:14).

R. Levi taught that in the verse *The Lord said unto her: Two nations*²⁰ *are in thy womb* (Gen. 25:23), the words *unto her* imply that the Lord said to Rebekah: “I shall reveal a mystery to thee: From thee shall [Israel], the foremost of the nations, come

forth." Hence [of Isaac to whom this mystery was not revealed] Scripture says *Now Isaac loved Esau* (Gen. 25:28), whereas of Rebekah the verse goes on to say *Rebekah loved Jacob* (Gen. 25:28), because she knew what the Holy One, blessed be He, had revealed to her.

But R. Johanan²¹ said in the name of R. Eleazar: The Holy One, blessed be He, never engaged in speech with any woman except [Sarah],²² that completely righteous woman, and with her only in a roundabout way. Accordingly, R. Eleazar in the name of R. Jose, taught that it was through Shem, the son of Noah, that God's word came to Rebekah, as is implied by the words *And she went to inquire of the Lord* (Gen. 25:23).²³

A different comment on *And the Lord said to her: Two nations are in thy womb* (Gen. 25:23). The Lord said to Rebekah: I raised up seventy nations out of Noah and his sons—*These three were the sons of Noah, and of these was the whole earth overspread* (Gen. 9:19). How seventy? Fourteen out of Japheth, as is said *The sons of Japheth: Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan*, etc. (Gen. 10:2-4); thirty out of Ham, as is said *And the sons of Ham: Cush, and Mizraim, and Put, and Canaan*, etc. (Gen. 10:6-18); and twenty-six out of Shem, as is said *The sons of Shem: Elam, and Asshur, and Arpachshad, and Lud, and Aram*, etc. (Gen. 10:22-29). Hence seventy, of whom it is written *Of these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood* (Gen. 10:32). But thou, Rebekah—*Two nations are in thy womb* (Gen. 25:23): From one of them I shall raise up seventy persons, as it is said *Thy fathers went down into Egypt with three-score and ten persons* (Deut. 10:22), and these shall be fruitful and shall multiply as the sand of the sea, as the dust of the earth, and as the stars of heaven.

Another comment on *Two nations (goyim) are in thy womb*. Note that the word *goyim* is actually spelled *geyim*, by which is meant "the two exalted ones," one being exalted in his world, and the other being exalted in his world: Hadrian among the nations of the earth, Solomon among the people of Israel. Or, *Two exalted ones* may refer to Rabbi [Judah] and to Antoninus,

from whose tables radishes in summer and cucumbers in winter never disappeared.²⁴

Another comment on *Two nations are in thy womb* (Gen. 25:23): "In thy womb are those that will be hated²⁵ by the nations, for all nations hated Esau [for his savagery], and all [heathen] nations hate Israel."

Another comment: *Two nations are in thy womb*, nations that will hate each other; one will be exalted because of its riches, and the other will be exalted because of its Torah.

And two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels (Gen. 25:23), one circumcised, and the other not circumcised. From this verse you can learn that Jacob was born circumcised; he was one of thirteen, who were born circumcised, and they were: Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Terah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, and Jeremiah: Adam, born circumcised because he was the first of God's creation; Seth, of whom it is said *Adam . . . begot a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth* (Gen. 5:3); Enoch, who, we are told, *walked with God* (Gen. 5:24)—since it is said also of Noah that he *walked with God* (Gen. 6:9), Enoch's circumcision is proved by the rule of "inference by analogy"; Noah, who, it is said, *was a righteous man and perfect*²⁶ (Gen. 6:9); Shem, for it is said *These are the generations of Shem, Shem* (Gen. 11:10), and whenever a man's name is so repeated in Scripture, it means that he was born circumcised,²⁷ e.g., *Shem, Shem* (Gen. 11:10), *Noah, Noah* (Gen. 6:9), *Terah, Terah* (Gen. 11:26); Jacob, for it is said *Jacob was a perfect man* (Gen. 25:27), and it is further said *God spoke unto Israel . . . and said "Jacob, Jacob"* (Gen. 46:2); Joseph, for the text *These are the generations of Jacob, Joseph* (Gen. 37:2) hints that Joseph, like Jacob, was born circumcised; Moses, to whom *God . . . said: "Moses, Moses"* (Ex. 3:4); moreover, the words *He was a goodly child* (Ex. 2:2) intimate that Moses was born circumcised; Samuel, for it is said *The Lord . . . called as at other times: "Samuel, Samuel"* (1 Sam. 3:10); Isaiah, who said: *The Lord hath called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother hath He made mention of*

my name (Isa. 49:1); Jeremiah, to whom God said: *Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee* (Jer. 1:5); David, for the words *Michtam of David* (Ps. 16:1) hint that at his birth his wound was whole.²⁸

The Lord said unto her . . . the one people shall be stronger than the other people (Gen. 25:23)—that is, in the time-to-come, *Thy mighty men, O Teman,*²⁹ *shall be dismayed* (Ob. 1:9). These words mean that after they have been dismayed, there will be no restoration of their strength. The end of the verse, *And the elder shall serve the younger* (Gen. 25:23), means, according to R. Huna, that if Jacob is worthy, the elder³⁰ shall serve, but if Jacob is not worthy, the elder shall be served.³¹

When David foresaw that the wicked³² would oppress the righteous, he besought the Holy One, blessed be He: *Rebuke the nations, destroy the wicked, blot out their name for ever and ever* (Ps. 9:6).

8. *As for the enemy, they are come to an end, yet the fallen cities endure for ever* (Ps. 9:7). That is, Israel's enemies have perished, but their cities which deserve to fall remain. Enemies such as Constantine who built Constantinople, Philippos who built Philippa,³³ Antiochus who built Antioch, Romulus who built Rome, Alexander who built Alexandria, Seleucus who built Seleucia—these enemies are come to an end, but the cities which deserve to fall and which they built endure forever. But Thou—if one dare speak reproachfully—the cities which Thou didst destroy, their memorial is perished with them (*ibid.*): Even the ruins of Jerusalem and Zion are perished, as it is written *Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation* (Isa. 64:9).

But the Lord endures for ever (Ps. 9:8) means that the Holy One, blessed be He, replies: Those enemies were mortal. They are come to an end. They have been destroyed. A time will come when the cities which deserve to fall and which they built will also be destroyed, for ever and ever. But the Lord, immortal and enduring for ever, having *prepared His throne for judgment*

(*ibid.*), will rebuild Jerusalem and Zion and the cities of Judah, and, as Scripture says, *At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord* (Jer. 3:17).

9. Another comment on *As for the enemy, they are come to an end, yet their fallen cities endure for ever*, cities such as Caesarea and Rome; but on the day of judgment, they will be destroyed, as it is said *Thou wilt destroy the cities, their memorial shall perish with them* (Ps. 9:7). Indeed it is written *Edom saith: "We were impoverished, but now we will return and build the cities lying in ruins"* (Mal. 1:4); but what does Scripture go on to say? *Thus saith the Lord of hosts: They shall build but I will destroy* (*ibid.*).

A sophist³⁴ asked R. Elasaḥ: "Did not the prophet declare, *Edom saith: 'We were impoverished, but now we will return and build the cities lying in ruins?'* And did not the prophet continue *Thus saith the Lord of hosts: They shall build, but I will destroy?* And yet all that they built still stands!" R. Elasaḥ replied: "Scripture does not speak in reference to your building, but in reference to your schemes. For whenever you sit down to scheme and take counsel against us, resolving to build yourselves up and make an end of us, the Holy One, blessed be He, ruins your schemes." The sophist said: "As thou livest, it is so. Every year, as we come to make an end of you, a certain venerable being³⁵ comes and blocks us."

10. In a still different exposition, the verse is rendered *The destructions of the enemy shall come to a perpetual end* (Ps. 9:7). It is taught in the name of R. Eliezer: The Holy One, blessed be He, took an oath upon the throne of His glory, that under the whole heaven there should be left neither sprig nor sprout of the seed of Amalek among his people. It is God's command that *Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven* (Deut. 25:19), so that it can no longer be said "This tree is Amalek's," "This camel is Amalek's," "This ewe is Amalek's": *Their cities wilt Thou destroy; their remembrance will perish with them* (Ps. 9:7).

R. Levi taught in the name of R. Aḥa: The name of God will

not be complete and the throne of the Lord will not be whole until the remembrance of Amalek will have perished: Scripture says, *The hand of Amalek is against the thron' of the Lor'* (Ex. 17:16), where one would naturally expect it to say *against the throne of the Lord*.³⁶ But not until the remembrance of Amalek perishes will the throne of the Lord be whole and the name of God complete. Thus it is said *The destructions of the enemy shall come to a perpetual end* (Ps. 9:7), and directly after, follow the words *The Lord is enthroned for ever; He hath prepared His throne for judgment* (Ps. 9:8). Here, behold, the name is complete, and the throne is whole.³⁷

11. *And He will judge the world in righteousness, He will minister judgment to the peoples with equity* (Ps. 9:9). R. Levi taught: When God ministers judgment to the peoples, He will minister it to them at night as they sleep, away from their sins, for it is said *The peoples shall be troubled at midnight* (Job 34:20). To Israel, however, He will minister judgment by day, as they are engaged in good works. R. Alexandri taught that when God ministers judgment to the peoples, He will ask: Did not Ruth, Rahab, Zipporah, and Jethro come out of them? ³⁸

R. Joshua ben Levi taught: One verse reads, *Amasa was the son of . . . Ithra the Israelite* (2 Sam. 17:25), but elsewhere Scripture says, *The father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmaelite* (1 Chron. 2:17).³⁹ R. Samuel bar Nahman explained the contradiction: Ithra was, in truth, an Ishmaelite. Why, then, is he called an Israelite? Because one time, as he came into the house of study, he heard Jesse quote the verse *Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth* (Isa. 45:22) and immediately became a convert, and Jesse afterwards gave him his daughter. But the Rabbis taught: Ithra was an Israelite to begin with. Why then is he called an Ishmaelite? Because like an Ishmaelite he pointed to his sword, which he had driven into the floor of the house of study, and declared, "Whether I kill, or be killed, I shall maintain the precept of my teachers: An Ammonite but not an Ammonitess, a Moabite but not a Moabitess."⁴⁰

Whence do we know that Jesse gave his daughter to Ithra?

Because it is written *Jesse begot his first born Eliab . . . Ozem the sixth, David the seventh: whose sisters were Zeruiah and Abigail . . . And Abigail bore Amasa; and the father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmaelite* (1 Chron. 2:13-17).

And He will judge the world in righteousness (Ps. 9:9). All that come seventh are beloved: ⁴¹ first came *Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, and then Enoch* (1 Chron. 1:1-2), of whom it is written *And Enoch walked with God* (Gen. 5:24). First came Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram, and then Moses, of whom it is written *And Moses went up unto God* (Ex. 19:3). Of the sons of Jesse, first came *Eliab . . . Ozem the sixth one, and then David the seventh one* (1 Chron. 2:15). First came Saul, Ishbosheth, David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, and then Asa, of whom it is written *And Asa cried unto the Lord his God* (2 Chron. 14:10). And so it is with years: *Six years thou shalt sow thy land, and gather in the increase thereof; but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie fallow* (Ex. 23:10-11). And so it is with days: *And God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it* (Gen. 2:3). And so with months: *In the seventh month . . . shall be a solemn rest unto you, a memorial proclaimed with the blast of horns* (Lev. 23:24). And so with heavens: "expanse," "empyrean," "firmaments," "habitation," "dwelling," "residence," and then "skies," ⁴² of which it is written *Extol Him that rideth upon the skies* (Ps. 68:5). And so with regions: "land," "sod," "earth," "valley," "desert," "place of forgetfulness," and then "world," of which it is written *And He will judge the world in righteousness*.

12. *The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed* (Ps. 9:10). R. Johanan said: Whenever such phrases as "We are brought very low," "the oppressed," "the impoverished," "the neediest among men," "he that is waxen poor," "the poor of the flock," "the bruised," and "the helpless" occur in Scripture, they refer to Israel: As to "we are brought very low," it is written *Remember not against us the iniquities of our forefathers; let Thy tender mercies speedily come to meet us; for we are brought very low* (Ps. 79:8); as to "the oppressed," it is written *The Lord also*

will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble (Ps. 9:10); as to "the impoverished," it is written *The indigent and the impoverished*⁴³ *meet together; the Lord giveth light to the eyes of them both* (Prov. 29:13); as to "the neediest among men," it is written *The neediest among men shall exult in the Holy One of Israel* (Isa. 29:19); as to "he that is waxen poor," it is written *If thy brother be waxen poor* (Lev. 25:25); as to "the poor of the flock," it is written *The poor of the flock that gave heed unto me knew of a truth that it was the word of the Lord* (Zech. 11:11); and as to "the helpless," it is written *Unto Thee the helpless committeth himself; Thou hast been the helper of the fatherless* (Ps. 10:14).⁴⁴

Ever since the Holy Temple was destroyed, we have no sacrifices nor burnt-offerings; we have only *The Lord . . . a refuge in times of trouble*.

And they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee (Ps. 9:11). And why put their trust in Thee? Because the verse concludes, *Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee* (*ibid.*).

Sing praises to the Lord, who dwelleth in Zion (Ps. 9:12). R. Johanan taught: "Sing praises to the Lord because of what was done in Zion. For it can be said: If God, in the hour of His wrath, did not spare His own house, how much less will He spare when He comes to punish its destroyers."

But R. Hanina took the verse to mean: "Sing praises to the Lord. When? When He comes to restore His presence to Zion."⁴⁵ Thereupon R. Johanan said to R. Hanina: Scripture supports you: *When the Lord will build up Zion, He will appear in His glory* (Ps. 102:17).

13. *When He maketh inquisition for blood, He remembereth them* (Ps. 9:13): When the Holy One, blessed be He, comes to avenge the suffering of the righteous and demands requital for the blood of Rabbi Akiba, He will also remember the blood of Ben Kufya.⁴⁶

What is meant by the end of the verse *He forgetteth not the*

cry of the afflicted (ibid.)? God will not forget Israel's blood shed by the nations of the earth—not only the blood of the righteous, but the blood of any one of Israel slain in times of persecution—; will not forget the blood of those ten executed by Rome: R. Simeon ben Gamaliel, and R. Ishmael ben Elisha the High Priest, and R. Yeshebab the Scribe, and R. Huzpit the Translator, and R. Jose, and R. Judah ben Baba, and R. Judah the Baker, and R. Simeon ben Azzai, and R. Hanina ben Teradion, and R. Akiba. Of them it is said *He forgetteth not the cry of the afflicted*.

And the Holy One, blessed be He, will also demand requital for the blood of R. Judah the Baker and of Ben Kufya. It happened during a religious persecution that wicked Rome decreed that R. Judah the Baker be put to death. What did Ben Kufya do? He had himself appointed a judge and issued the writ that R. Judah be executed, but then ordered that in R. Judah's stead another be slain and the body be dismembered,⁴⁷ so that R. Judah would be spared. But wicked tongues hastened to report that R. Judah had not been put to death. Whereupon Rome ordered that both Ben Kufya and R. Judah be put to death, and that the body of Ben Kufya be dismembered because he had had pity on R. Judah the Baker.

And the Holy One, blessed be He, will demand requital for their blood, for it is said *When He maketh inquisition for blood, He remembereth: He forgetteth not the cry of the afflicted*.

R. Abbahu taught in the name of R. Elazar: The Holy One, blessed be He, records upon His purple robe the name of every righteous man whom the nations of the earth put to death, for it is said *He that is enrobed with [the names of the martyred] dead shall spread doom among the nations* (Ps. 110:6). And the Holy One, blessed be He, will demand of the nations of the earth: "Wherefore have ye put to death My righteous men like R. Hanina ben Teradion and all the others who were killed for the hallowing of My name?" And when the nations of the earth claim ignorance and reply: "We did not put them to death," the

Holy One, blessed be He, will at once fetch His royal robe, will judge them and decree their doom. Hence it is said *He forgetteth not the cry of the afflicted* (Ps. 9:13).

14. *Have pity upon me (hanēneni), O Lord* (Ps. 9:14). Here Scripture does not say *haneni*, but *hanēneni* with three *nun's*, to intimate that the prayer *Have pity upon me* is said with reference to the three kingdoms.⁴⁸

Behold mine affliction which I suffer of them that hate me (Ps. 9:14), [because of what I am]; as elsewhere in Scripture God says, "But Esau I hated [because of what Esau is]"⁴⁹ (Mal. 1:3). *Thou that liftest me up from the gates of death* (Ps. 9:14)—that is, from Gehenna. And wherefore dost Thou lift me up? *So that I may tell of all Thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion* (Ps. 9:15) when Thou restorest Thy presence to the gates in the houses of Zion.

That I may rejoice in Thy salvation (Ps. 9:15). R. Abbahu taught: This is one of five difficult verses teaching that the salvation of Israel is also the salvation of God. Another of these difficult verses is *And Hannah prayed, and said . . . My horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in Thy salvation* (1 Sam. 2:1).⁵⁰

The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made (Ps. 9:16): Sunk down were Pharaoh and the Egyptians, of whom it is said "In the thing wherein they dealt proudly, He was above them" (Ex. 18:11).⁵¹ *In the net which they themselves hid (ibid.)* were caught Sisera⁵² and Jabin the king of Hazor. *Their own foot is taken*: Sennacherib was taken.⁵³

The Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth (Ps. 9:17). He is known by the judgment executed upon the Egyptians, for it is said "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord" (Ex. 14:4). Or, *The Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth* upon Pharaoh, and upon Amalek, and upon the Amorite kings and the Canaanite kings, and upon Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar.

The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands (Ps. 9:17): Haman was thus snared, as it is said *So they hanged Haman on*

the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai (Esther 7:10). And we, on account of this, what ought we to do? On account of this, we ought to thank God *with gentle sound of the harp, for ever* (Ps. 9:17), as of like occasions Scripture says, *Then sang Moses* (Ex. 15:1); *Then spoke Joshua to the Lord* (Josh. 10:12); and *Then sang Deborah* (Judg. 5:1).

15. *The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God* (Ps. 9:18). R. Eliezer taught: "None of the nations has a portion in the world-to-come." But R. Joshua replied: "If the verse said 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations,' and said no more, you would have taught well. But what of the words *that forget God*? You must admit that with these qualifying words the verse refers only to the wicked among the nations of the earth."

R. Nehemiah taught: When the letter *lamed* is not used at the beginning of a place-name to indicate *toward* or *into*, then the letter *he* is used at the end of the name to stand for *toward* or *into*, as in the word *Ḥaranah* which means *toward Haran* (Gen. 18:22), or as in the word *Miṣraimah*, which means *into Misraim* (Gen. 12:10). When it was asked of him, "But does not the verse say *Lišē'olah*,⁵⁴ *into hell*?" R. Abba bar Zabda replied: "The use of both *lamed* and *he* in this word shows that the wicked will be compelled to return to the nethermost compartment of hell."

Similarly, in the word *ham-mizbeḥah*, *upon the altar* (Ex. 29:18), the *he* is put both at the beginning and at the end of the word to indicate that the ram of the offering may be smoked upon the ramp as well as upon the altar.⁵⁵ In the words *Ḥaranah*, *toward Haran* (Gen. 18:22), *Miṣraimah*, *into Misraim* (Gen. 12:10), *Yērušalaimah*, *to Jerusalem* (1 Kings 10:2), the *he* is put at the end to indicate that the outskirts of the city are considered part of the city. In the word *hay-yamah*, *at the sea* (Num. 34:5), the *he* is put both at the beginning and at the end to indicate that the harbor is considered part of the sea. In the word *haš-šamaimah*, *toward heaven* (Gen. 15:5), the *he* is put both at the beginning and at the end to indicate that the clouds attached to the heavens are considered part of the heavens.

For the needy shall not always be forgotten (Ps. 9:18): Israel, needy in exile, will not always be forgotten. R. Yudan said: What does the verse mean by its conclusion, *The expectation of the poor perish for ever* (*ibid.*)? It means that as the needy will not always be forgotten, so the expectation of the poor will not perish for ever.

16. *Arise, O Lord, let not men prevail* (Ps. 9:19): Arise, O Lord; let not men prevail because of their royal power or because of their persuasive speech. *Let the nations be judged for brazenness in Thy sight* (*ibid.*), for making their own petty gods.⁵⁶

Put them in fear (morah), O Lord (Ps. 9:21): "Put them in fear of Thee." Or, taking "authority" to be the sense of *morah*, the verse means "Put Thy lordship over them." Or, taking "folly" to be the sense of *morah*, the verse means "Put folly into them," and resembles in intent such verses as *Destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau* (Ob. 1:8), and *Every man is more brutish than to know* (Jer. 10:14). So, too, in Greek, a fool is called "mōros." Or, taking "blindfold" ⁵⁷ to be the sense of *morah*, the verse means "Put blindfolds over their eyes, as over the eyes of millers' asses."

Let the nations know that they are but men ('ēnoš) (Ps. 9:21). Wherever one finds in Scripture the word 'ādam, it refers to a man of low degree, for example, *Man ('ādam) and beast* (Ps. 36:7), *man* here denoting one whose understanding is like a beast's. But *geḇer* in the sense of "man" denotes a good man. And 'ēnoš denotes a foolish man.⁵⁸

17. Another comment: The phrase *Upon Muth labben* (Ps. 9:1), is read "Upon Muth Laban," and taken to mean "Upon the death (*muth*) of Nabal," ⁵⁹ for Laban is an anagram for Nabal. If so, why does Scripture say *Laban* and not "Nabal?" Because in his deeds Nabal was like Laban.

Another comment: *Upon Muth labben* is taken to mean "Upon the death of the righteous," who are the children of the living God, ready to suffer death for their belief in the oneness of God: Nevertheless, they are not like men about to die but like men who

are sick, in the sense of which Solomon speaks when he says *I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my Beloved, that ye tell Him that I am sick with love* (Song 5:8). What sickness does he refer to? Not to a sickness of the head! nor to a sickness of the bowels! To what kind of sickness then? To being sick with love for the Holy One, blessed be He, for by *sick with love* no ordinary sickness is meant, but a sickness *'al muṭ*, "unto death." Hence it is said *Because of the savor of Thy good ointments Thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do they love Thee ('al muṭ)*⁶⁰ *unto death* (Song 1:3): They love Thee so much as to be willing to be killed for Thy sake, as is said "Yea, for Thy sake are we killed all the day long" (Ps. 44:23).

No other people in the world, if commanded by the Holy One, blessed be He, "Go down into the sea," would have gone as willingly as this people, ready to suffer death for the sake of its God. David said: How much does the child love the Father? So much that he is ready to suffer death for the sake of His glory. Thus when Nebuchadnezzar said: *At what time ye hear the sound of the horn . . . and all kinds of music, fall ye down and worship the image which I have made* (Dan. 3:15), *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego answered and said to the king* (Dan. 3:16): "Even if God does not deliver us, *we will not serve thy gods*" (Dan. 3:18). Later, after Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego had come out of the fiery furnace, *Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said: "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent His angel, and delivered His servants that trusted in Him"* (Dan. 3:28). These were willing to give up their lives, not expecting to be delivered, but to be burned. How could they be willing? Because *Love is strong as death* (Song 8:6). "See, then, how much the child loves Thee!" Hence David said, *For the leader. Upon Muth labben* ("the death of the child") (Ps. 9:1).

PSALM TEN

1. *Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord, why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble? . . . For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and the covetous renounceth, yea, contemneth the Lord. The wicked in the pride of his countenance, [saith:] "He will not require"; all his thoughts are: "There is no God" (Ps. 10:1, 3-4).* These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High; and he shall think to change the seasons and the law; and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time (Dan. 7:25).* R. Jose taught: The wicked never attack without first renouncing and contemning the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said first *And he shall speak great words against the Most High (Dan. 7:25)*, against the Holy One, blessed be He; and then the verse goes on to say of the wicked that he *shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High (ibid.)*, that is, the children of Israel, to whom it is said *Ye shall be holy (Lev. 19:2)*. By this command the Holy One, blessed be He, meant: Since you were hallowed for My purpose even before I created the earth, therefore ye are to be holy, as I am holy: *Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6)*. As I am higher than all the world, so shall ye be: for like the letter *lamed*¹ highest of all the letters, so shall ye be the highest of all the peoples of the earth, even though at the beginning, like the letter *yod*,² least of all the letters, ye were least, as is said *Ye were the least of all peoples (Deut. 7:7)*. In what verse is Israel said to be the highest? In the verse *The Lord thy God will set thee on high above all the nations of the earth (Deut. 28:1)*.

A parable of a man who had a vineyard. Thieves tried to enter it, but could not because it was surrounded by a fence. What did the thieves do? They broke down the fence and then entered the vineyard. Likewise the nations of the earth come to attack Israel, the vineyard of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel" (Isa. 5:7):

First they renounce the Holy One, blessed be He, and then they attack Israel, as is said first of the wicked, *he shall speak great words against the Most High*, and then is said *he shall wear out the saints of the Most High*. Next, the nations of the earth try to change the Torah, as is said *he shall think to change the seasons and the law* (Dan. 7:25), *seasons* referring to festival seasons, and *law* to Torah, of which it is said "From His right hand went a fiery law for them" (Deut. 33:2).

Now, because this verse goes on to say, *And they shall be given into his hand*, does the verse mean for ever? No, for the verse concludes, *until a time and times and half a time* (*ibid.*). In the meantime, we suffer all sorts of oppressions, because Thou hast removed Thyself far from us. Hence it is said *Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble?*

2. Another comment on *Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble?* (Ps. 10:1). Consider what Scripture says elsewhere: *And it came to pass that, as He called, and they would not hear . . .* (Zech. 7:13). R. Jonathan taught that for three and a half years the Presence announced and had it proclaimed: *Seek ye the Lord while He may be found* (Isa. 55:6), and no one heeded. As God said: *I would be sought of them that ask not for Me, I would be found of them that seek Me not* (Isa. 65:1). R. Hanina told a parable of a traveler journeying on the highway. As it grew dark, he came to a military post. The commander said to him: "Come into the post away from wild beasts and away from robbers!" But the traveler replied: "It is not my custom to go into a military post." As he went on his way, midnight and thick darkness overtook him, and he returned to the post and cried and prayed to the commander that he open up for him. The commander answered: "It is not customary for a military post to be opened at night, nor is it the commander's custom to receive at such an hour. When I asked you in, you were unwilling; now I cannot open up for you." Even so, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the children of Israel: *Return, O backsliding children* (Jer.

3:14, 22), and *Seek ye the Lord while He may be found* (Isa. 55:6), but not one of them was willing to turn to Him. Whereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said: *I will go and return to My former place* (Hos. 5:15). Then, when the children of Israel were surrendered to the kingdoms and to the principalities, they cried out to God: *Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord?* The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "When I sought you, you did not heed me. Now that you seek Me, I will not hear you. Measure for measure!" Hence it is said *It came to pass that, as He called, and they would not hear; so they shall call, and I will not hear, said the Lord of hosts* (Zech. 7:13). Will not hear for ever? By God's mercy, no! ³ Only *Until a time and times and half a time* (Dan. 7:25).

3. The verse *Through the pride of the wicked the poor is hotly pursued* (Ps. 10:2) refers to Lot, who was taken captive through his being among the people of Sodom.

The end of the verse *They are taken in the devices that they have imagined* (Ps. 10:2) refers to the sons of Jacob. R. Yudan taught: He who says that the Merciful One is loose in the administration of justice gets loose bowels. The truth is that God long withholds His anger, but finally collects His due. Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the sons of Jacob: In the midst of eating and drinking, you sold your brother, as is said *They sat down to eat . . . and . . . said: . . . Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites* (Gen. 37:25, 26). Behold, in the midst of eating and drinking, your own children will be sold in Shushan,⁴ as is said *The king and Haman sat down to drink* (Esther 3:15).

R. Issachar said: Joseph forgave his brothers, saying to them, *It was not you that sent me hither* (Gen. 45:8): But mark for how long their wicked device was remembered against them. How much longer is a wicked device remembered against him who has not been forgiven!

R. Hanin taught that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the sons of Jacob: "You sold Joseph for a servant, as it is said *Joseph was sold for a servant* (Ps. 105:17): By your lives, year after year

you will be reciting *We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt* (Deut. 6:21)." ⁵

R. Phinehas taught in the name of R. Hoshaia: The sons of Jacob caused their father to rend his clothes. And where were they requited? In Egypt, where *They rent their clothes* (Gen. 44:13). Joseph caused the sons of Jacob to rend their clothes, and so when the son of Joseph's son arose, he was requited therefore, as it is said *And Joshua rent his clothes* (Josh. 7:6).⁶ Manasseh caused the sons of Jacob to rend their clothes,⁷ and so his portion in the Land was rent in two, half of it on the other side of the Jordan, and half of it in the land of Canaan. Because of Benjamin, the sons of Jacob rent their clothes,⁸ and so when the son of Benjamin's son arose he was requited therefor, as it is said *Mordecai rent his clothes* (Esther 4:1).

4. *The wicked praises for his heart's desire* (Ps. 10:3a) ⁹—that is, the wicked do not praise the Lord ¹⁰ until their heart's desire has been granted to them. Thus Nebuchadnezzar said: ¹¹ *Of a truth it is, that your God is the God of gods* (Dan. 2:47).

Another comment: The wicked do not sin until they have persuaded themselves their sins are permissible.¹²

And plundering, he blesses, but contemns the Lord (Ps. 10:3).¹³ R. Eliezer ben Jacob taught: Behold a man who steals a measure of wheat; he mills it, kneads it into dough, and sets aside a portion of it as the priest's share;¹⁴ but how can such a man say a blessing? If he says a blessing over the bread, he blesses not, but contemns the Lord: Of such a man Scripture says, *And plundering, he blesses, but contemns the Lord*.

In another comment, the verse is read: *The wicked, because of his heart's desire, profaned*¹⁵ *that which brought pleasure* (*boše'a*) *and imparted blessing: he contemned the Lord* (Ps. 10:3). Here *boše'a* has the sense of "pleasure," being derived from the noun *beša'*, as in the verse "What pleasure (*beša'*) is there in my blood?" (Ps. 30:10). Thus the verse implies that the congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, there was a house which Thou hadst pleasure from, but enemies rose up and destroyed it, and they still stand, while

it lies waste. There were righteous men whom Thou hadst pleasure from, but the wicked rose up and slew a great many of them and thus contemned Thy name, yet the wicked still stand." Hence it is said *The wicked, because of his heart's desire, profaned that which brought pleasure, and imparted blessing: He contemned the Lord.*

5. Of the word *ydkh* in the sentence *He is cast down* (*ydkh*), and brought low (Ps. 10:10), R. Isaac said: The *kētiḥ*¹⁶ is *wdkh* "he will cast down," implying that the wicked casts down¹⁷ only one [more or less] like himself.

The end of the verse, *but when the number of his victims is full, he shall fall* (*ibid.*),¹⁸ means, according to R. Ḥanina bar Papa: The wicked man does not fall until the measure of his wickedness is full, as is said *The shattering of the wicked shall be their fulness* (Job 34:26),¹⁹ and also as is said *In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits* (Job 20:22).

According to R. Simon, the end of the verse implies that the wicked man drafts²⁰ only mighty men like himself into his armies, as is said of Nebuchadnezzar *And he commanded certain mighty men that were in his army* (Dan. 3:20), men, R. Simon added, like that executioner²¹ who could break both rib and vertebra with one blow.

The wicked saith . . . in his heart: "God hath forgotten; He hideth His face; He will never see" (Ps. 10:11): Like the judge who cannot see what is going on if a curtain²² is hung before him, so God, the wicked *saith . . . in his heart*, hath forgotten: "Thick clouds are a covering to Him, that He seeth not" (Job 22:14). Hence the wicked say—if one dare repeat this—that God *hideth His face; He will never see* (Ps. 10:11).

6. *Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Thy hand* (Ps. 10:12). R. Yudan in the name of R. Judah took the verse to mean that Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, troubles rise like a flood upon our life; we are like a man drowning in the sea."²³ Reach down Thy hand, and lift us up." The verse concludes, *The afflicted shall not be forgotten* (*ibid.*)—that is, God answered Israel: "Thou art not forgotten." Simi-

larly, the verse *Zion said*: "*The Lord hath forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me,*" [is followed by God's answer:] *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, these may forget, yet will not I forget thee* (Isa. 49:14-15).

Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God, and say in his heart: "Thou wilt not require?" (Ps. 10:13): The wicked say, "There is no judgment, and there is no Judge. The Holy One, blessed be He, has left His earth, has gone away, and sits in heaven."

Thou hast seen, for Thou beholdest mischief and spite to reveal by Thy hand (Ps. 10:14)—hast seen that the wicked Esau would come, would destroy Thy sanctuary, take Israel away in chains, and exile them from their land. *To reveal by Thy hand* (*ibid.*), read in the light of the verse "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and the Lord carried me out in a spirit" (Ezek. 37:1), means: "Thou didst cause Thy Holy Spirit to rest upon Isaac who knew that the wicked Esau would inherit Gehenna by provoking Thee, and therefore said to him: 'Behold, thy dwelling shall be tracts rich in booty . . . and by thy sword shalt thou live'" (Gen. 27:39-40).

The poor commiteth himself unto Thee (Ps. 10:14): The poor of Israel must put their trust in Thee. When wicked Rome says to Israel: "Bring in thy head-tax," and Israel answers: "I have fatherless children to feed!" the wicked kingdom replies: "Hast ever heard it said of me that I would feed thy fatherless children? Go unto the God of Jacob, of whom your Scripture speaks as 'a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows' (Ps. 68:6), and let Him feed thy fatherless children, and let Him provide for you."

On behalf of Remus and Romulus, at the death of their mother, God summoned a she-wolf to give suck to them, and it gave suck to them until they grew up and built two huts on the site of Rome. Hence it is said *Thou hast been the helper of the fatherless* (Ps. 10:14).

A different comment on *Thou hast seen*, etc. (Ps. 10:14): Thou hast seen that the wicked Nebuchadnezzar would come, would

destroy Thy sanctuary, take Israel away in chains, and exile them from their land. *To reveal by Thy hand (ibid.)* means that Thou didst cause Thy presence to rest upon Jeremiah who prophesied of Nebuchadnezzar: "All the nations shall serve him, and his son" (Jer. 27:7). *Unto Thee the helpless must commit himself (ibid.)*, for after casting Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah into the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar said: "Who is the God that shall deliver you out of my hand?" (Dan. 3:15).

Thou hast been the helper of the fatherless (ibid.): Vashti,²⁴ a fatherless child of the stock of Nebuchadnezzar, Thou madest queen in a royal house not her own, as intimated in the verse *Also Vashti the queen* (Esther 1:9).²⁵

And what does the Psalm go on to say? *Break Thou the arm of the wicked and of the evil man, seek out his wickedness, till thou find none* (Ps. 10:15)—that is, when Thou seekest him to make requital for his wickedness, Thou wilt find no extenuation for him.

7. *The Lord is king for ever and ever* (Ps. 10:16). When? *When the nations will have perished out of His land (ibid.)*.

Lord, Thou hast heard the desire of the meek (Ps. 10:17). R. Yudan taught in the name of R. Aḥa: Here *the meek* refers to Moses who was very meek, as is said *The man Moses was very meek* (Num. 12:3). When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: *Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at any time ('et) into the holy place within the veil* (Lev. 16:2), Moses was troubled. He said: "From these words, it seems to me that my brother Aaron is never to come within the sacred precincts. For *time* may designate an hour; *time* may designate a day; *time* may designate a year; *time* may designate twelve years; *time* may designate seventy years. Thus, in this verse *that he come not at any time* (Lev. 16:2), *time* designates an hour. In the verse *Thou shalt drink also water by measure . . . from time to time shalt thou drink* (Ezek. 4:11), *time* designates a day.²⁶ In the verse *It came to pass at the time of the return of the year* (1 Chron. 20:1), *time* designates a year. In the verses *Joseph was sold for a servant . . . his person was laid in iron; until the time*

that his word came to pass (Ps. 105:17, 19), *time* designates twelve years.²⁷ And since God said: *After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon I will remember you* (Jer. 29:10), therefore in the verse *They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be, until the time that I remember them* (ibid. 27:22), *time* designates seventy years. Moreover, in the verses *In the time that their corn and their wine increased* (Ps. 4:8),²⁸ and *Their time should have endured for ever* (Ps. 81:16), *time* designates eternity."

Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, answered Moses: "It is not as you think. It is not *time* designating a day, nor *time* designating an hour, nor *time* designating a year, nor *time* designating twelve years, nor *time* designating seventy years, nor *time* designating eternity. For this verse means that Aaron need not come at any fixed time,²⁹ but may come within the sacred precincts at any time he chooses." Thereupon Moses said: *Thou hast heard the desire of the meek* (Ps. 10:17).

Thou wilt direct their heart, Thou wilt cause Thine ear to attend (Ps. 10:17): According to R. Joshua ben Levi, whenever a man's lips are fluent in prayer, let him be assured that his prayer is being heard, for it is said *I create fluent speech of lips . . . and I will heal him* (Isa. 57:19).

Or, according to R. Samuel bar Nahman, whenever a man prepares his heart beforehand for prayer, let him be assured that his prayer is being heard, for it is said *Thou wilt direct their heart, Thou wilt cause Thine ear to attend* (Ps. 10:17).³⁰

8. Another comment on *Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord?* (Ps. 10:1). This verse is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *With their flocks and with their herds they shall go to seek the Lord, but they shall not find him. He hath drawn off (halaṣ) from them* (Hos. 5:6). A certain sophist asked Rabban Gamaliel:³¹ "Is it possible that you still say, 'We wait for the Lord who will deliver us?'" Rabban Gamaliel answered: "Yes." The sophist said: "You are uttering a lie. God will never return to you, for does not Scripture say, *He hath drawn off (halaṣ) from them* (Hos. 5:6)? Can a childless widow

who, performing the ceremony of *Hālišah*,³² draws the shoe off her brother-in-law's foot, expect to have her dead husband return to her? And therefore does it not follow that God will not return to you?" Whereupon Rabban Gamaliel asked the sophist: "In the ceremony of *Hālišah*, who draws off the shoe, the woman or the man?" The sophist answered: "The woman draws the shoe off." Rabban Gamaliel then said: "God has drawn off from us, but we have not drawn off from Him. If the surviving brothers drew the shoe off the woman's foot, what validity would such an act have? Therefore, does Scripture say, 'He hath allowed them to draw off from Him?' Not at all! It says only, *He hath drawn off from them*.³³ Thus also Scripture says, *I opened to my Beloved; but my Beloved had drawn away, and was gone* (Song 5:6)."³⁴ Accordingly, the children of Israel cried: *Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord?* (Ps. 10:1).

PSALM ELEVEN

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David. In the Lord have I taken refuge* (Ps. 11:1). These words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *The Lord is for me; I will not fear; what can man do unto me?* (Ps. 118:6). A parable: A king had a servant whom he befriended more than any of his other servants, so that the king's household were envious of him. But the servant said: With my master befriending me, what ordinary mortal can prevail against me? ¹

"Flee thou! As birds to your mountain!" (Ps. 11:1). R. Aḥa taught: As the children of Israel went into exile, the nations of the earth, intending also to exile God from His place, said: "Let the Master as well as His disciple flee into exile." Note that the *kēṭib* is *nuḏu*, "flee ye," while the *kēri*² is *nuḏi*, "flee Thou": thus the nations said to God above, as well as to the children of Israel below: *Flee ye*. To God above? Yes, for Scripture says *As a bird that fleeth from her nest, so is a Man that fleeth from His place* (Prov. 27:6), *Man* here referring to the Holy One, blessed be He, as in the saying "The Lord is a Man of war" (Ex. 15:3), and *place* here referring to the Holy Temple, of which God said: "This is My resting-place for ever" (Ps. 132:14).

2. *The wicked . . . made ready their arrow upon the string* (Ps. 11:2). R. Berechiah taught in the name of R. Abba [bar Kahana]: Here *the wicked* are Shebna and Joah,³ who wrote a letter, inserted it into a notch in an arrow, and shot the arrow to Sennacherib through a port. In the letter they had written: "Hezekiah and Isaiah do not allow us to make peace with thee." The verse concludes *That they may privily shoot at the upright in heart (ibid.)*—that is, at the two *upright in heart*, at Hezekiah and Isaiah.

If the foundations be destroyed, what great work, O Righteous One, hast Thou wrought? (Ps. 11:3): If wicked men rising up against the righteous are to destroy them—they upon whom the foundation of Thy world is laid, as is written *The righteous is the foundation of the world* (Prov. 10:25)—then, O Righteous

One of the world, Holy One, praised be He, what great work of Thine do the wicked leave Thee in Thy world?

Or, if wicked men rising up against the foundation stone⁴ of the Temple, which is to say, rising up against the foundation that the world is established upon, are to destroy it, then what pleasure canst Thou, O Righteous One of the world, have out of Thy world and out of Thy great work?⁵

Or, if wicked men rising up against the foundation pits⁶ of the altar that are more ancient than the great abyss, are to destroy them, then, O Righteous One of the world, what great work hast Thou wrought?

3. *The Lord is in His Holy Temple* (Ps. 11:4): All during the time that the Holy Temple stood the Presence dwelt within it, but after the sins of Israel had brought it about that the Holy Temple was destroyed, God removed His presence into heaven, for the verse concludes *The Lord, His throne is in heaven (ibid.)*. R. Eleazar ben Pedat maintained, however, that regardless of whether the Holy Temple is destroyed, or is not destroyed, the Presence has not departed from the site, for it is said *The Lord is in His Holy Temple*. Even though *His throne is in heaven*, yet His presence continues in the Temple, for He said: *Mine eyes and My heart shall be there perpetually* (1 Kings 9:3). So, too, Scripture says: *He answereth me out of His holy mountain perpetually* (Ps. 3:5)—even though the mountain be now bare, its holiness endures. R. Eleazar ben Pedat went on to say: Mark what Cyrus declared: *Whosoever there is among you of all His people . . . let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord, the God of Israel, He is the God who is in Jerusalem* (Ezra 1:3)—that is, He is the God who did not depart from Jerusalem even after the Holy Temple was destroyed.

R. Simon taught: Mark that in the verse *For now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and shalt dwell (šakant) in the field* (Micah 4:10), the *kētib* is *šekinati*, meaning "My presence shall dwell."⁷ Here *field* refers to the field in which the Holy Temple stood, as is evident from Isaac's saying "See, the smell of my

son is as the smell of the field which the Lord hath blessed" (Gen. 27:27).⁸

R. Aḥa declared: The Presence will never depart from the Western Wall, for it is said *Behold, He standeth behind our wall* (Song 2:9).

R. Yannai taught: Once a mortal king enters his reception room, he cannot see what is done in his sleeping chamber. Not so the Holy One, blessed be He, for it is said *The Lord is in His Holy Temple, the Lord, His throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men* (Ps. 11:4): The glory of God both on earth and in heaven watches and considers every mortal, though no eye has the power to see Him.

4. *The Lord trieth the righteous* (Ps. 11:5). Whom does God try? The righteous who stand firm under the trials He imposes. A parable of a farmer who has many heifers: Which heifer does the farmer try out—by setting the yoke upon its neck—for plowing? Clearly the heifer with a stout neck and great strength is the one taught to plow. Why does not God try the wicked? R. Jose said: Because the wicked cannot stand firm under His trying of them.

R. Jose bar R. Ḥanina taught: When flax is stiff, the flax worker does not beat it vigorously because it might break, but when the flax is soft, he beats it vigorously because it improves thereby. Even so the Holy One, blessed be He, does not try the wicked because they will break out in reviling of God in heaven, as is said *The wicked are like the troubled sea . . . whose waters cast up mire and dirt* (Isa. 57:20). But whom does God try? The righteous.

The Lord trieth the righteous; but the wicked and him that loveth violence His soul hateth (Ps. 11:5): *the wicked* is Ishmael, and *him that loveth violence* is Esau, of whom God said: "But Esau I hated" (Mal. 1:3).

5. *Upon the wicked He shall rain pəḥim* (Ps. 11:6)—that is, "quick burning coals," as in the phrase *As quick burning coals (pəḥam) are to live coals, and wood to fire* (Prov. 26:21).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Whoever exalts himself

in pride will finally be punished in fire, as were the people of the generation of the flood, for it is said *What time they are cut off, they vanish; in the fire thereof they are consumed out of their place* (Job 6:17);⁹ so, too, the people of the Tower of Babel were punished in fire, for it is said *And their abundance the fire hath consumed* (Job 22:20);¹⁰ and so, too, were the people of Sodom, for it is said *Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire* (Gen. 19:24); and so, too, was Pharaoh, for it is said *So there was hail, and fire flashing up . . . very grievous, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt* (Ex. 9:24); and so, too, was Sennacherib, for it is said *And under his magnificence He shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire* (Isa. 10:16)—the phrase *under his magnificence* shows that God consumed Sennacherib with fire from within, but left the magnificence of his outer apparel unburnt because Sennacherib belonged to the family of Shem, as it is said “The sons of Shem: Elam, and Asshur” (Gen. 10:22);¹¹ and so, too, was Sisera, for it is said *They fought from heaven, the stars [which are fire] fought in their paths against Sisera* (Judg. 5:20); and so, too, was Nebuchadnezzar, for it is said *The flame of fire slew these men* (Dan. 3:22); and so, too, was Edom, for it is said *The beast . . . was given to be burned with fire* (Dan. 7:11);¹² and so, too, were Gog and Magog, for it is said *And I will send a fire on Magog* (Ezek. 39:6); and so, too, the other [heathen] nations, for it is said *For in fire will the Lord punish . . . all flesh* (Isa. 66:16); and so, too, was Hiram, for it is said *Therefore have I brought forth a fire from the midst of thee* (Ezek. 28:18).¹³

Another comment: *Upon the wicked He shall rain pahim* (Ps. 11:6)—that is, “snares,” as in the phrase *As a bird hasteneth to the snare (pah)* (Prov. 7:23).

Upon the wicked He will rain quick burning coals, fire and brimstone, and tempest and flames (Ps. 11:6). In this verse are enumerated the seven pyres of Gehenna: *quick burning coals*: two; *fire and brimstone*: two; *tempest*: one; and *flames*: two. Behold here the seven pyres of Gehenna!

Fire and brimstone . . . this shall be the portion of their cup (Ps. 11:6). R. Yudan said: Whenever a man smells brimstone, his soul is distraught, for the soul knows that it will be punished in brimstone, as is said *I will distract them with an east wind* (Jer. 18:17).¹⁴

The portion of their cup (Ps. 11:6). The Holy One, blessed be He, will give the nations of the earth four cups of punishment to drink: *For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine . . . the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall . . . drink* (Ps. 75:9); *Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken* (Jer. 51:7); *Take this cup of the wine of fury . . . and cause all the nations . . . to drink it* (Jer. 25:15); and *Burning tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup* (Ps. 11:6). But God will give the children of Israel four cups of deliverance to drink: *The Lord is the portion of . . . my cup* (Ps. 16:5); *My cup runneth over* (Ps. 23:5); and *I will lift up the cup of deliverances* (Ps. 116:13). This verse does not say "deliverance" but *deliverances*, thus implying two cups.

6. *For the righteous Lord loveth a man of righteousness* (Ps. 11:7). R. Judah, the son of R. Simon, said: Every craftsman hates the rivals in his craft. Not so the Holy One, blessed be He: *The righteous Lord loveth a man of righteousness*.

What is meant by the end of the verse, *The upright shall behold His face* (Ps. 11:7)? It means that in the time-to-come seven companies will attend the Holy One, blessed be He. And which company is to be the foremost of these, the one beholding the face of the Presence? The company of the upright, for it is said *The upright shall behold His face*.

Actually, the verse does not say *panaw*, "His face," but *panemo*, "their faces"—that is, the upright will behold the face of the Presence and the faces of His household who, in the verse *The upright shall dwell in Thy presence* (Ps. 140:14), are likewise termed *the upright*.

Another comment: Rendered literally, the verse reads *As for the upright one, they shall behold each other's faces* (Ps. 11:7).

One would have expected the verse to say "The upright ones shall behold each other's faces," or, "The Upright One shall behold the face of each [of them]." What then is the meaning of the verse *As for the upright one, they shall behold each other's faces?* The upright ones shall behold the face of the Upright One of the world, and the Upright One of the world shall behold the faces of the upright ones. For *the Upright* is the Holy One, blessed be He, of whom it is said *He is Just and the Upright* (Deut. 32:4).

Another exposition: If the verse is read, *As for the upright, their faces shall shine*¹⁶ (Ps. 11:7), it means that the faces of the upright will become shining orbs in heaven, giving light to the earth. It is the seven companies of the upright who will give light to the world, their faces shining like the sun, like the moon, like the firmament, like the stars, like the lightnings, like *Shoshannim* ("lilies"), and like *Lappidim* ("torches")—like the sun, for it is said *But they that love Him shall be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might* (Judg. 5:31); like the moon, for it is said *His seed . . . shall be established for ever as the moon* (Ps. 89:37-38); like the firmament, for it is said *And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament* (Dan. 12:3); like the stars, for it is said *And they that turn the many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever* (*ibid.*); like the lightnings, for it is said *They run to and fro like the lightnings* (Nahum 2:5);¹⁸ like *Shoshannim*, for it is said *For the leader; upon Shoshannim*¹⁷ (Ps. 45:1); like *Lappidim*, for it is said *The appearance of them is like Lappidim*¹⁸ (Nahum 2:5). The first company of the upright will dwell in the presence of the King and behold the face of the King, for it is said *The upright shall dwell in Thy presence* (Ps. 140:14), and also *The upright shall behold His face* (Ps. 11:7). The second company will dwell in the house of the King, for it is said *Happy are they that dwell in Thy house* (Ps. 84:5). The third company will ascend the mountain to meet the King, for it is said *Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord?* (Ps. 24:3). The fourth company will dwell in the court of the King, for it is said *Happy is the man whom*

Thou choosest, and bringest near, that he may dwell in Thy courts (Ps. 65:5). The fifth company will sojourn in the tent of the King, for it is said *Lord, who shall sojourn in Thy tent?* (Ps. 15:1). The sixth company will dwell upon the holy mountain of the King, for it is said *Who shall dwell upon Thy holy mountain?* (Ps. 15:1). The seventh company will stand in the holy place of the King, for it is said *Who shall stand in His holy place?* (Ps. 24:3). Thus each company shall have a dwelling-place of its own in the Garden of Eden.¹⁹

Over against the righteous, the wicked shall have seven habitations in Gehenna, namely: *sheol*, nether-world; *'abaddon*, destruction; *šel mawet*, shadow of death; *'ereš tahtit*, underworld; *'ereš nēšiyah*, realm of forgetfulness;²⁰ *gehinnom*; and *dumah*, realm of silence.

R. Levi said: *Dumah* is also called Hazarmaveth.²¹ Why is it called Hazarmaveth? Because it is a courtyard (*hašer*) for the spirits of the dead (*mawet*). Although it looks like a building, it is, in fact, a courtyard encircled by a wall. In front of the courtyard runs a brook, and beyond the brook lies an open field. And every day, [at twilight], *Dumah* lets the spirits out, and they eat in the open field and drink at the brook. Thus when a mortal drinks water at twilight, he is robbing his dead kinsmen. Why is the guardian of the spirits called *Dumah*? Because he guards *domēmoṭ*, "the silent," who eat but do not speak; even when they drink, the sound of their drinking is not heard.

How does the spirit differ from the soul? ²² The soul has the semblance of a butterfly; ²³ it is attached to a man's spine ²⁴ by a chain tied to its foot. When a man sleeps, his soul goes abroad and roams about on the earth. Hence come the dreams that a man sees. And so, too, when a man is asleep, though he be called many times, he does not answer; but when he is touched, he answers forthwith.²⁵ And when the time comes for a man to depart from the world, and the angel of death enters to take up his soul, the soul has the semblance of a kind of reed filled with blood, with smaller reeds distributed through the entire body. The angel lays hold of the upper part of the reed and pulls it,

but pulls it gently out of the body of the righteous man, as though taking a hair out of milk. But out of the body of the wicked man, it is as though he were pulling tangled rope through a narrow opening. Some say it is like working a nail out of the gullet. Some say it is like pulling thorns out of fleece, or a crooked stick ²⁶ out of silk-floss. Some say, it is like pulling wool shearings out of thorns.

[Once the angel draws the soul out of a man's body] the man dies right away, but his spirit comes out and sits on the tip of the nose until the body begins to decay. As decay sets in, the spirit, weeping, cries out to the Holy One, blessed be He, saying: "Master of the universe, whither am I to be taken?" Immediately *Dumah* takes the spirit and carries it to the courtyard of the dead, to join the other spirits. If the man was righteous, the words "Clear a place for such-and-such a righteous man" are spoken before him, and he passes from dwelling-place to dwelling-place until he beholds the face of the Presence. Therefore it is said *The upright shall behold His face* (Ps. 11:7).

Behold! There are seven habitations for the righteous and seven habitations for the wicked—for the wicked according to their works and for the righteous according to their works.

7. *The upright shall behold his face* (Ps. 11:7). The Sages say that during a time of religious persecution a decree was issued for the hanging of Jose ben Joezer. Jakum of Şerorot, the nephew of Jose ben Joezer of Şereḡah, rode by on a horse, as Jose ben Joezer, bearing the beam for the gallows, was going forth to be hanged.²⁷ Jakum said: "Look at the horse that my master gives me to ride, and look at the horse that thy Master gives thee to ride." Jose ben Joezer replied: "If so much is given to such as thee who provoke Him, how much more shall be given to those who obey His will!" Jakum asked: "Has any man been more obedient to the will of God than thou?" Jose ben Joezer replied: "If so much is done to those who are obedient to His will, how much more shall be done to those who provoke Him!" This answer went into Jakum like the venom of a snake: He went away and imposed upon himself the four death penalties of stoning,

burning, beheading, and strangulation. How did he do it? He got a beam and drove it into the ground. To the beam, he firmly tied a rope. He placed sticks of wood in a row and built a wall of stones over them. Then he piled up fuel in front of the beam and put a sword, pointing upward, in the midst of the fuel. After lighting a fire under the sticks of wood beneath the stones, he hanged himself from the beam and thus strangled himself. The rope broke, and he fell into the fire, the sword met him, and the wall of stones tumbled upon him. The soul of Jakum departed, and because of his repentance he was received. Jose ben Joezer, in the drowse of death, spied Jakum's bier flying through space and said: "See ye, this man by a brief hour precedes me into the Garden of Eden."

PSALM TWELVE

1. *For the leader; on the Sheminith. A Psalm of David. Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men* (Ps. 12:1-2). Elsewhere this is what Scripture says: *The godly man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men* (Micah 7:2). Hadrian—may his bones crumble to dust¹—inquired: “By what merit does this people of Israel endure?” He was told: “There are godly men among them; there are upright men among them who labor diligently in Torah and are occupied with good works.” Thereupon Hadrian imposed a capital levy² on the Land of Israel. After this burden was laid upon the Jews, they ceased to occupy themselves with Torah. With reference to this, David said: *Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.*

A story of a godly man: A Roman lady lost a box full of denarii, and the godly man found it. When he brought it, they said to her: “He had no idea of its value, and so he brought it back to thee.” She answered: “The box is all gold on the outside, and yet you say that he did not know its value!” Then she said to the godly man: “May thy mother be mated to thee!”³ They asked: “Dost thou curse the man who brought back thy lost box?” and she replied: “If there were more of his kind among his people, we would not last in the world.” And the Roman lady gave orders that the godly man might, without asking leave, come and go as he pleased. Thereupon certain men were found to be engaged in a plot, and the godly man cast them out of there. When he died, his contemporaries applied to him the verse *Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth*. The end of the verse, *For the faithful fail from among the children of men*, implies, according to R. Phinehas, that while the faithful fail from among the children of men, they do not fail from among the angels.⁴

For how do the children of men conduct themselves? *They speak falsehood every one with his neighbor; with smooth lip, and with a double heart do they speak* (Ps. 12:3).

A tale of a city that had no salt. In the city there was a band of muleteers who said: "Let us go to such-and-such a place, fetch salt, and sell it before others come." Now the muleteers had a chief of the band, and when they said: "Let us go to such-and-such a place," he replied: "I have to plow early tomorrow morning. Wait until I have plowed, and then we shall get going." They said: "As thou sayest." But then what did the chief of the band do? He whispered to his wife: "Make sure of this code: When I say, 'Fetch me the yoke,' give me the saddle; when I say, 'Fetch me the plowhandle,' give me the sack."⁶ [She obeyed him.] Then what did he do? He put the sack upon the mule and went away [that night], while his fellows slept until morning. When they got up in the morning, they called him, and the neighbors said: "Whom are you seeking? So-and-so has been gone since yesternight." The muleteers left the same morning, and on the road met their chief on his way back. They asked: "Why hast thou done this to us?" He replied: "Do you really not know why I did thus? If we had all gone, salt would have at once declined greatly in price. But now I am the only one to bring salt [for sale]. Before you come back, mine will have been sold. And when you come back, you too will sell at a good price." Hence it is said of such men *They speak falsehood every one with his neighbor; with smooth lip, and with a double heart do they speak*. And so it goes: If you will not call the yoke "saddle," and will not call the plow-handle "sack," you cannot make out.

A story about R. Jonathan at a time when lentils were scarce. He had a kinsman in a certain city, and he went down to him, saying: "I seek lentils. Are there any to be had in the city?" His kinsman replied: "Yes, there are." R. Jonathan asked: "At what price?" His kinsman answered: "At such-and-such a price. Any time that thou comest here, I shall get them for thee." After a while R. Jonathan went to the city and up to his kinsman's house inquiring after him. His kinsman's wife said: "He is in the field." R. Jonathan waited for him, but since he did not appear R. Jonathan asked one of the men of the city: "Are there lentils

to be had here?" The man answered: "No. Wilt thou take wheat instead?" R. Jonathan said: "I desire lentils." The man replied: "There are no lentils here. But if there were, they would fetch such-and-such a price," and the man named a price higher than the one R. Jonathan's kinsman had given him. Nevertheless, R. Jonathan bought lentils from him. When his kinsman came back from the field, R. Jonathan said to him: "Didst thou not tell me that lentils sold at such-and-such a price? Yet thy townsman asked of me a price higher than what thou didst name." His kinsman asked: "Didst thou perhaps say: 'I desire lentils?'" R. Jonathan answered: "Yes." His kinsman said: "Hadst thou said to the men of the city, 'I desire wheat,' they would have asked thee, 'Hast thou any desire for lentils?' But since thou hast said to them: 'I desire lentils,' they asked thee, 'Hast thou any desire for wheat?'" Hence it is said of such men *They speak falsehood every one with his neighbor; with smooth lip, and with a double heart do they speak* (Ps. 12:3).

R. Hyya of Sepphoris went to Syria⁶ to buy wheat. R. Jonathan said to him: "When thou desirest wheat, say, 'I desire barley.' And when thou desirest barley, say, 'I desire wheat,' so that the price will not be increased for thee." Hence it is said *They speak falsehood every one with his neighbor* (Ps. 12:3). *With smooth lip*—that is, they flatter smoothly with their lips; *with a double heart do they speak*—that is, there is one word in their mouths, and a different one in their hearts.

2. *May the Lord cut off all smooth lips, the tongue that speaketh great things* (Ps. 12:4). Bar Kappara taught in the name of R. Nathan: So vicious is slander that long ago David, in the name of the Lord's Holy Spirit, cut off the slanderer by excommunicating him, as is said *May the Lord cut off . . . the tongue that speaketh great things* (Ps. 12:4).

Slander is more vicious than the three transgressions which are called "great," namely, idolatry, adultery, and murder. Moses said of idolatry: *Oh, this people have sinned a great sin* (Ex. 32:31); Joseph exclaimed of adultery: *How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?* (Gen. 39:9); Cain said

of murder: *Mine iniquity is more great than that it may be forgiven* (Gen. 4:13); but it is written of slander: *May the Lord cut off . . . the tongue that speaketh great things.*⁷

Who have said: "*With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?*" (Ps. 12:5). R. Jose ben R. Hanina said: A man cannot speak slander against his fellow without denying the existence of the Lord,⁸ for it is said *With our tongue will we prevail . . . Who is lord over us?* (Ps. 12:5).

The defective spelling of *lēšonenu* ("our tongue")⁹ implies that should your tongue become perverse and speak slander of your neighbor, go to, and instruct it diligently (*lēšannēno*) with words of Torah.

God Himself—if one dare speak thus—cries out concerning slanderers, for in saying *Who will rise up for Me against those that speak evil* (Ps. 94:16) He meant: "Who can abide those that speak evil—unless it be Gehenna?" But Gehenna cries out: "Even I cannot abide them." And so the Holy One, blessed be He, says to Gehenna: "I from above will punish them, and thou from below," as it is said *What [punishment] shall be inflicted upon thee, O slanderous tongue?—Sharp arrows from the Mighty One [above], with coals of juniper [from below]* (Ps. 120:3-4).

Which man is worse: He that smites with a sword or he that smites with an arrow? He that smites with a sword is unable to kill except at close quarters, but he that smites with an arrow shoots it forth, so that it kills far away, as is said *Their tongue is an arrow shot out; it speaketh deceit* (Jer. 9:7); and also as is said, *sons of men whose teeth are spears and arrows* (Ps. 57:5).

R. Samuel bar Naḥman¹⁰ said: Why is the evil tongue called a triple-slaying tongue? Because it slays three persons: the person speaking, the person spoken to, and the person spoken of.

R. Bebai said in the name of R. Joshua: We find that in the times of Saul an evil tongue killed four persons: Doeg who spoke deceit; Saul who heeded deceit; Nob, the city of priests, of which deceit was spoken; and Abner. Abner—why was he killed? Because he had an opportunity to protest, but did not protest.

R. Ze'era sent word to R. Simon:¹¹ "Where thou art, the op-

portunity for protest lies to hand. Why dost thou not protest?" R. Simon replied: "I am merely one of those men *that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof*" (Ezek. 9:4).¹² R. Ze'era answered: "What was done to those who merely sighed and cried? Did not the measure of punishment begin with them, as in the next verse it is said *Go ye through the city . . . and smite . . . and begin with My consecrated ones?* (*ibid.* 9:5-6)"¹³

3. "*On account of the oppression of the poor, on account of the sighing of the needy, now will I arise,*" saith the Lord (Ps. 12:6). When judges seek to corrupt justice, the Holy One, blessed be He, makes His presence rise and depart from among them, for by "*Now will I arise,*" saith the Lord the Holy One, blessed be He, means "I rise forthwith, *on account of the oppression of the poor, on account of the sighing of the needy.*"

R. Yudan said: The punishment for oppressing the poor is greater than the punishment of the generation that perished in the flood. For of the generation of the flood it is written *The Lord sitteth upon the flood* (Ps. 29:10), as if to say—if one dare speak thus—that God punished them while He was seated at His ease; but in this verse it is written "*Now will I arise,*" as if to say that God does not punish the oppressors of the poor without first rising to His full height.

"*I will set him in safety while puffing upon him*" (Ps. 12:6). According to R. Hoshaia, God said: Even as I set the one in safety, I make the measure of punishment grow hot upon the other.

4. *The words of the Lord are pure words* (Ps. 12:7). R. Joshua ben Levi said: In Scripture, the Holy One, blessed be He, speaks in a roundabout way so as not to utter an unseemly word, as is shown by the previous discussion of the Psalm *Blessed is the man*.¹⁴

In another comment, the verse is read *The words of the Lord, words concerning purity, were committed to the care of those who are as pure as silver* (Ps. 12:7). According to R. Tanhum, the Holy One, blessed be He, declared to Moses: "I gave thee two

precepts which concern the maintenance of ritual purity. To whose care were they committed? To the care of the sons of Levi, of whom it is written *My messenger . . . shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver* (Mal. 3:3). And where in Scripture are the two precepts to be found? One in the chapter on the red heifer whose ashes were used for lustration (Num. 19:1-22); and the other in the chapter stating under what circumstances a priest may defile himself for the dead, the section beginning *Say unto the priests, the sons of Aaron, say unto them: There shall none defile himself for the dead among his people; except for his kin that is near unto him*, etc. (Lev. 21:1-2).

[In another comment, the verse of the Psalm is read] *The words of the Lord are . . . silver tried in the open before all men*¹⁵ *refined seven times seven*¹⁶ (Ps. 12:7). R. Yannai said: The words of Torah were not given as clear-cut decisions. For with every word which the Holy One, blessed be He, spoke to Moses, He offered him forty-nine arguments by which a thing may be proved clean, and forty-nine other arguments by which it may be proved unclean. When Moses asked: Master of the universe, in what way shall we know the true sense of a law? God replied: The majority is to be followed:¹⁷ when a majority says it is unclean, it is unclean; when a majority says it is clean, it is clean.

R. Abbahu said in the name of R. Jonathan: R. Akiba had a faithful disciple named R. Meir, who with forty-nine arguments from Scripture could prove even a reptile clean, and with forty-nine other arguments could prove it unclean.

R. Joshua ben Levi said: Even children living in the days of Saul and David and in the days of Samuel knew those subtle distinctions of the law which elaborate forty-nine arguments by which a thing may be proved clean, and forty-nine other arguments by which it may be proved unclean, as was stated above in the Seventh Psalm.¹⁸

5. *They will walk on every side of the wicked* (Ps. 12:8)—that is, according to R. Judah, the righteous will walk around and around the wicked. The righteous in the Garden of Eden will see

the wicked punished in Gehenna, and their souls will rejoice within them. Of this it is written *And they shall go forth, and see their desire upon the carcasses of the men that have rebelled against Me* (Isa. 66:24). On that day, the righteous will give praise and thanks to the Holy One, blessed be He, for the afflictions He brought upon them in this world, as it is said *In that day thou shalt say: "I will give thanks unto Thee, O Lord; for though Thou wast angry with me—that is, in this world—Thine anger is turned away and Thou comfortest me"* (Isa. 12:1)—that is, in the hereafter, when Thou lettest me see Thy vengeance upon mine enemies. When will this be? *When He will exalt (kěrum) the most despised among the sons of men* (Ps. 12:9). The word *kěrum*,¹⁹ written defectively, must be read "When he will exalt,"—that is, when the Holy One, blessed be He, will exalt the righteous who are most despised in the eyes of men in this world.

Another comment, [also by R. Judah]: The words *When He will exalt (kěrum) the most despised* refer to the time in the world-to-come when the Holy One, blessed be He, will exalt the vineyard (*kerem*) which is despised. The vineyard of the Holy One, blessed be He, is none other than the house of Israel, as is said *The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah the plant of His delight* (Isa. 5:7).

R. Nehemiah said to R. Judah: How long will you twist the meaning of Scripture for us? The verse should be read *The wicked will walk on every side*—that is, the wicked will walk around and around the righteous. The wicked will come out of Gehenna and see the righteous dwelling at ease in the Garden of Eden, and their souls will wither within them, as is said *His righteousness . . . shall be exalted in honor. The wicked shall see it, and be vexed* (Ps. 112:9-10). When will this be? *When He will exalt the despised among the sons of men* (Ps. 12:9). That is to say, when the Holy One, blessed be He, exalts and makes known the commandments of Torah which are despised in this world. "Wherefore dost thou go forth to be killed?" "Because I circumcised my son!" "Wherefore dost thou go forth to be stoned?"

"Because I kept the Sabbath!" "Wherefore dost thou go forth to be burned?" "Because I ate unleavened bread!" "Wherefore art thou lashed with whips?" "Because I performed the will of my Father in heaven." As Scripture says, "*Wherefore are these wounds between thy hands?*" . . . "*Because I was wounded in the house of those that cause me to be loved*" (Zech. 13:6). That is to say, these wounds cause me to be loved²⁰ by my Father in heaven.

Hence it is said *When He will exalt the despised among the sons of men*—that is, when the Holy One, blessed be He, exalts commandments which are despised in this world.

PSALM THIRTEEN

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David. How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? For ever? How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?* (Ps. 13:1-2). This verse is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *And it came to pass that, as He called, and they would not hear, so they shall call, and I will not hear, said the Lord of hosts* (Zech. 7:13). R. Isaac said: Measure for measure! The Holy One, blessed be He, declared: Four times did I ask "How long?": *How long will this people despise Me?* (Num. 14:11), *How long will they not believe in Me?* (*ibid.*), *How long refuse ye to keep My commandments?* (Ex. 16:28), and *How long shall I bear with this evil congregation?* (Num. 14:27). Four times will you also ask "How long?" After I shall have delivered you over to the four kingdoms, you will cry out four times in your distress, "How long?"—*How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? For ever? How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul. . . . How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?* (Ps. 13:2-3). In the kingdom of Babylon you will cry out *How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? For ever?* In Media and Persia you will cry out *How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?* In Greece, *How long shall I take counsel in my soul?* And in wicked Edom, *How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?*

In another comment, the verse is read *How long, O Lord? Wilt Thou forget, O Strength?* (Ps. 13:2), and means that the congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, is one a king without a throne? Is one a king without a crown? Is one a king without a palace? *How long, O Lord? Wilt Thou forget, O Strength?*—forget that Thou saidst to the prophet Samuel: *The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent* (1 Sam. 15:29)? Surely in the covenant made between Thee and the Patriarchs, Thou that art the strength of Israel, didst not act the liar. Surely Thou dost not repent of Thy boons, that Thou wilt not bring them to us. For Scripture says, *God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent* (Num. 23:19).

R. Samuel bar Nahmani commented: The beginning of this verse denies its conclusion; and its conclusion denies its beginning.¹ How is the discrepancy to be explained? When the Holy One, blessed be He, decides to bring a boon to the world, *He is not a man, that He should lie* (Num. 23:19); but when He decides to bring chastisement to the world, then *As to that which He hath said, He will not do it (ibid.)*. Thus when God said of Egypt: "That nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge" (Gen. 15:14), *God is not a man, that He should lie*. But when God said to Abram: "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years"² (Gen. 15:13), then, *As to that which He hath said, He will not do it*. Thus also when the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham, "In Isaac shall seed be called to thee" (Gen. 21:12), *God is not a man, that He should lie*. But when He said: "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac . . . and offer him . . . for a burnt-offering" (Gen. 22:2), then *As to that which He hath said, He will not do it*. Thus³ also when God said: "I have surely remembered you" (Ex. 3:16), *God is not a man, that He should lie*. But when God said: "Let Me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven" (Deut. 9:14), then, *As to that which He hath said, He will not do it*.⁴

R. Berechiah related: It happened that from a teacher's chair a certain man was expounding the words *Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child* (Ex. 22:21). A widow who heard him came to him. When the man said to her, "Go away now," she replied: "Had I not heard thee say *Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child*, I would not have come to thee. And yet thou sayest to me, 'Go away, come tomorrow!'" Even so Israel say to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, we would not have come unto Thee, had we not depended on Thy mercy, for Thou didst declare, *The needy shall not always be forgotten* (Ps. 9:19). And yet Thou forgettest us.

2. *How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? For ever? How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?* (Ps. 13:2). According

to R. Hanina, the congregation of Israel says to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, in generations past Thou didst fight our battles for us, as is said *For then is the Lord gone out before thee to smite the host of the Philistines* (2 Sam. 5:24). For future generations Thou wilt also fight, as it is said *Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle* (Zech. 14:3). But for us, the generations in between, Thou goest not forth, as it is written *Hast not Thou, O God, cast us off? And Thou goest not forth, O God, with our hosts* (Ps. 60:12). *How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord?*" The Holy One, blessed be He, replies: Is it I who have forgotten you? Is it not you who have forgotten Me, as it is written *They forgot God their savior* (Ps. 106:21)? Have I hid My face from you? Is it not you who have hid your faces from Me, as it is written *Our fathers . . . have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs* (2 Chron. 29:6)? And is it not also written *For they have turned their back unto Me, and not their face* (Jer. 2:27)? But the Holy One, blessed be He, also says to the congregation of Israel: In this world I have hid My face from you, but *They shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion* (Isa. 52:8) in the time-to-come.

3. *How long shall mine enemy be raised high above me?* (Ps. 13:3). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *After these things did Ahasuerus raise Haman . . . high and exalt him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him* (Esther 3:1). R. Akiba observed: To what height did Ahasuerus raise up Haman? To the height of a gallows fifty cubits high, as is said *Let a gallows be made fifty cubits high* (*ibid.* 5:14). "Ahasuerus . . . set his seat above all that did look at him"⁵ (*ibid.* 3:1)—that is, until in the end all looked up at Haman hanging fifty cubits high. Indeed, the letters *k* and *l* in the word *kl* ("all") add up to fifty.⁶

How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? (Ps. 13:3): Although I am sorrowfully oppressed by the kingdoms, yet I continue with my whole heart to observe the

Torah and the commandments which Thou gavest me on Sinai. I practice circumcision, I keep the Sabbath, and I set aside the priest's portion of the bread.⁷

In a different interpretation, the verse is read *How long shall I take counsel against my life, having sorrow in my heart daily?* (Ps. 13:3). I risk my life on account of the decrees issued against me by the nations of the earth for the purpose of destroying Thy Torah and Thy commandments: For their sake, I expose myself to death.

4. *Behold Thou, and answer me, O Lord my God; lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death* (Ps. 13:4)—that is, lest I be worn out in the stupor of banishment among the kingdoms.⁸

Behold Thou, and answer me . . . lest mine enemy say: "I have prevailed against him"; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved (Ps. 13:5). When the Holy One, blessed be He, asked David: The insolence⁹ of thee to speak such peremptory words to Me! David answered: Because I trust in Thy mercy: *In Thy mercy do I trust* (Ps. 13:6), in the mercy ascribed to Thee in the verse *The earth, O Lord, is full of Thy mercy* (Ps. 119:64),¹⁰ and again in the verse *When I said "My foot slippeth," Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up* (Ps. 94:18), *Thy mercy* being Thy Torah, which is called "The Torah of mercy" (Prov. 31:26).

My heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation (Ps. 13:6). R. Abbahu taught: This is one of those difficult verses which declare that the salvation of the Holy One, blessed be He, depends upon the salvation of the people of Israel.¹¹ Note that it is not written "My heart shall rejoice in my salvation," but *in Thy salvation*, by which David meant: Thy salvation depends upon our salvation.

Another comment: In the kingdom of Babylon we said *In Thy mercy do I trust*; in the kingdom of Persia and Media we said *My heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation* (*ibid.*); in Greece we said *I will sing unto the Lord* (*ibid.*); and in Rome¹² we say *Because He will deal bountifully with me* (*ibid.*).

Another comment on *Because he will deal bountifully with me*. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Give Me of My things wherewith I met you in this world, and I shall deal bountifully

with you in the time-to-come: during the Feast of Booths pour water on the altar before Me, for long ago I met you with water, as is written *Spring up, O well—sing ye unto it* (Num. 21:17), and I shall deal bountifully with you in the time-to-come when *The mountains shall drop down sweet wine* (Joel 3:18). Take ye a *lulab*,¹³ and with it dance in praise before Me, for long ago I met you with dancing, as is written *The mountains skipped like rams* (Ps. 114:4), and I shall deal bountifully with you in the time-to-come when *All the trees of the field shall clap their hands* (Isa. 55:12). Make a booth before Me, for long ago I met you with booths, when *I had the children of Israel dwell in booths* (Lev. 23:43), and I shall deal bountifully with you in the time-to-come when *There shall be a booth for a shadow in the day-time from the heat* (Isa. 4:6). Hence it is said *I will sing unto the Lord, because He will deal bountifully with me.*

PSALM FOURTEEN

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David. The fool hath said in his heart: "There is no God"* (Ps. 14:1). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways* (Jer. 17:10). Of all parts of the body why does Scripture single out only the heart and the reins? Because the eyes go astray after the heart, as implied in the verse *After your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go astray* (Num. 15:39); because the ears, and for that matter all two hundred and forty-eight parts of the body, go astray after the heart; and the heart moves to satisfy itself only upon the impulse of the reins. Therefore in this verse Scripture mentions only the heart and the reins, because the Holy One, blessed be He, searches the heart and tries the reins.

Thus when David said: *And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts* (1 Chron. 28:9), what did he mean by *all hearts*? He meant the two hearts and the two inclinations, the heart which is evil by reason of the evil Inclination, and the heart which is good by reason of the good Inclination.

Another comment on *I the Lord search the heart*: When the wicked say in their hearts, "We shall devise evil in our hearts, since the Holy One, blessed be He, cannot know—as though such a thing were conceivable—what is in our hearts," the Holy One, blessed be He, says to them: "Seek you to hide from Me? Is it not written of the likes of you *Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say: 'Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?'*" (Isa. 29:15). Because you liken the Potter's clay to the Potter, the plant to the Planter, you think that I am like you! *Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay*" (*ibid.* 29:16).

R. Levi taught: What parable fits here? That of an architect who built a city, making secret chambers and hiding-places in it,

and then was made governor of the city. When he set out to catch the thieves in the city, they ran off and sought to hide themselves within the hiding places. Thereupon he said: "Fools, would you hide yourselves from me? I am he who built the city! I am also he who knows all the secret chambers and the way in and the way out of the hiding places, better than any one of you." Likewise, the Holy One, blessed be He, says to the wicked: "Fools, would you hide wicked counsel in your heart from Me? I am He who made man, and so I know all the inner recesses and secret chambers within him." Hence it is said *Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord* (Isa. 29:15).

R. Jeremiah taught: Indeed, Scripture says, *Labyrinthine above all things is the heart*,¹ and man being desperately wicked, says "Who would suspect?" (Jer. 17:9), and goes on to say: *I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins (ibid.)*—that is, "I am He who searches the heart, who tries the reins, and who reveals the secret places." As Daniel says: *God . . . revealeth the deep and secret things* (Dan. 2:22).

2. Another comment: *The fool hath said in his heart* (Ps. 14:1)—that is, the wicked are ruled by what is in their heart. Thus it is written *The fool hath said in his heart* (Ps. 14:1), *Esau said in his heart* (Gen. 27:41), *Jeroboam said in his heart* (1 Kings 12:26), *Haman said in his heart* (Esther 6:6). So, too, Nebuchadnezzar was told *Thou saidst in thy heart: "I will ascend into heaven"* (Isa. 14:13). And what happened to him? *While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven: "O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken: the kingdom is departed from thee"* (Dan. 4:28). Hence it is said *The fool hath said in his heart*.

And Esau said in his heart: "Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41). What was he scheming? He said: "For me to slay my father is not the way to gain my end. Instead I shall tell my father's brother, Ishmael, that he slay my father, while I will slay my brother Jacob, so that Ishmael and I together will possess the world." And thus he spoke to Ishmael. But in his heart Esau

said: "After Ishmael has slain my father, and I have slain my brother, I will fall upon Ishmael and will slay him also, and then I alone shall possess the world." Accordingly, the verse in Psalms reads *The fool hath said in his heart: "There is no God"* (Ps. 14:1). But the Holy One, blessed be He, exposed him. *How are the things of Esau searched out! How are his hidden things sought up!* (Ob. 1:6). Thus Scripture says: *But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places* (Jer. 49:10), by which is meant that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Esau: "I know what thou saidst in thy heart." So, too, when Ezekiel declared to Esau's descendants: *Thou hast said: These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it* (Ezek. 35:10), it may be asked "Who made known to Ezekiel what Esau had said in his heart?" *The Lord who was there (ibid.)*.

3. A further comment on *The fool hath said in his heart*: It was the wicked Esau who said one thing with his mouth, but said another thing in his heart. He said in his heart: "*Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand*" (Gen. 27:41), but with his mouth he said to his father: "*Here am I*" (Gen. 27:1). Accordingly, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "O wicked one! In thy words to thy father, thou speakest in a tone of entreaty, saying to him: *Hast thou but one blessing, my father?*" (Gen. 27:38), yet of such as Esau it is said, *When he speaketh fair, believe him not; for there are seven abominations in his heart* (Prov. 26:25).² God said of him: All things that I hate, he loves, as is said *These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto Him* (Prov. 6:16).

Another comment on *The fool hath said in his heart*. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the wicked: Because you contrive wicked schemes in your heart, I shall call your heart, and only your heart, to account, as is said *Their sword shall enter into their own heart* (Ps. 37:15).

Another comment on *The fool (naḥal) hath said in his heart*. *Naḥal* refers to the wicked Esau. Why was he called *naḥal*? R. Judah explained in the name of R. Samuel: Because he filled the whole earth with obscenity (*naḥēlut*): Everywhere he set up

thrones for gods who are no more than thorns, refuges for deities who are mere refuse, ribald theatres, and bloody circuses.³

But R. Huna said: Esau was called *naḥal* because he filled the earth with Israel's corpses (*niḥēlat*), as it is said *O God . . . the dead bodies (niḥēlat) of Thy servants have [the heathen] given to be food unto the birds of the heavens* (Ps. 79:1-2).

R. Abba said: Esau was called *naḥal* because he was an ugly man (*mēnuwwal*). Nevertheless, he set up images of himself even at the doorway of the harlot and at the doorways of privies and bath houses. Accordingly it was said to him: *Thine image⁴ has deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart* (Jer. 49:16).

R. Jacob said: *Naḥal*, because there will come a time when the Holy One, blessed be He, will make Esau's sons fall like unripe fruit (*noḥelet*) which drops from the tree, as it is said *The sons of the stranger shall drop like unripe fruit* (Ps. 18:46).⁵

R. Yudan said in the name of R. Simon: *Naḥal* is the same as Laban: One is an anagram of the other.⁶ Even as Laban was a deceiver, so a *naḥal* is a deceiver. Of such men Solomon said: *Deceit is in the heart of them that devise evil* (Prov. 12:20). But the conclusion of the verse speaks of the righteous, saying, *To the counsellors of peace is joy* (*ibid.*). To whom shall peace be given? To the people of Israel, of whom it is said *The Lord will bless His people with peace* (Ps. 29:11).

4. "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? Who eat up My people as they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord?" (Ps. 14:4). R. Judah took this verse to refer to conduct at the table. That is, there are those among My people who after eating a meal, whether of kneaded bread, or of braided bread, or even of bread baked of the finest flour,⁷ do not say grace to the Lord.

R. Samuel took the verse to refer to the nations of the earth who destroyed the Holy Temple. You will find that when the heathen entered the Temple they found in the chamber of daily offerings lambs, which they killed and devoured; and upon the table of show-bread they found arranged in good order the show-bread, which they also devoured. What is meant by the words *And call not upon the Lord*? The meaning is that those who

devoured My people would not acknowledge the words of the Lord, namely, *Israel is the Lord's hallowed portion, His first-fruits of the increase; all that devour him shall be held guilty, evil shall come upon them* (Jer. 2:3).

Any [heathen] who has not fed himself fat on Israel's wealth feels that he has never known the taste of bread; only after he savors Israel's possessions does he feel that he knows the taste of bread.

5. One verse reads *They were in great fear there* (Ps. 14:5); the corresponding verse in the parallel Psalm reads *They were in great fear there; no fear was here* (Ps. 53:6). The words *They were in great fear there* refer to the ten tribes of Israel who were exiled; the words *no fear was here* refer to the tribes of Judah and of Benjamin.

Another comment: The words *They were in great fear there, for the fear of God was in the righteous generation* refer to righteous men in this world who in great fear of the Holy One, blessed be He, followed His precepts and thus repented; the words *no fear was here* mean that in the hereafter, these righteous men will not fear punishment in Gehenna.

Another comment: The verse *They were in great fear there* refers to wicked sinners there in the time-to-come who are afraid, as is said *The sinners in Zion are afraid . . . "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"* (Isa. 33:14). Since they did not fear the Holy One, blessed be He, in this world, and the fear of Him was not in them, what causes them to be afraid? Scripture's answer is *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God* (Jer. 2:19). And what caused their wickedness? *That My fear was not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts* (*ibid.*).

6. *Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!* (Ps. 14:7). R. Levi said: All the blessings, boons, and comforts which the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring to the people of Israel, He will bring them out of Zion: Thus, the Law of the Lord shall

go forth out of Zion, as is said *For out of Zion shall go forth the law* (Isa. 2:3); divine blessing shall be bestowed out of Zion, as is said *The Lord bless thee out of Zion* (Ps. 128:5 and 134:3); a shining shall come forth out of Zion, as is said *Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined forth* (Ps. 50:2); a strengthening shall come out of Zion, as is said *The Lord . . . strengthen thee out of Zion* (Ps. 20:2); life shall come out of Zion, as is said *As the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion . . . there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for ever more* (Ps. 133:3); greatness shall come out of Zion, as is said *The Lord is great in Zion* (Ps. 99:2); salvation shall come out of Zion, as is said *Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion*.

You find that twice in the Book of Psalms⁸—once in the first book and again in the second book—David said: *The fool hath said in his heart "There is no God" . . . Oh that Israel's salvation were come out of Zion*. Why did David repeat this verse? R. Levi explained: David spoke once in behalf of the master, and once again in behalf of the disciple. He spoke the first time in behalf of the master Moses who said: *Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear [God]* (Deut. 5:26); and, as a disciple, he spoke the second time in his own behalf: *Oh that Israel's salvation were come out of Zion* (Ps. 53:7). Another comment: David spoke the first time in behalf of the Master, the Holy One, blessed be He, who said: *Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear Me, and keep My commandments* (Deut. 5:26); and he spoke the second time in behalf of the disciple Moses who said: *Would that all the Lord's people were prophets* (Num. 11:29). Neither the words of the Master nor the words of the disciple are to be fulfilled in this world, but the words of both will be fulfilled in the world-to-come: The words of the Master, *A new heart also will I give you and ye shall keep Mine ordinances* (Ezek. 36:26), will be fulfilled; and the words of the disciple, *I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy* (Joel 3:1), will also be fulfilled.

Another comment: Why did David say twice in the Book of Psalms that *The workers of iniquity . . . eat up My people as they eat bread . . . Oh that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion?* R. Yudan answered in the name of R. Joshua ben Levi: For the same reason that school children say twice every day, morning and evening, *Restore us, O God of our salvation, and cause Thine anger toward us to cease* (Ps. 85:5),⁹ so David said twice in the Book of Psalms *Oh that salvation for Israel were come out of Zion* (Ps. 14:7, 53:7).

R. Tanhuma said: When I reported this teaching to R. Hanina, he told me that it was inaccurate. Rather it is because *Save us, O Lord our God* occurs twice in Scripture—once in the Book of Psalms, and again in the Book of Chronicles¹⁰—that David said twice *Oh that salvation for Israel were come out of Zion* (Ps. 14:7, 53:7). A parable of a prince betrothed to a princess: a certain day was appointed for festivities before the wedding. The prince was looking forward to his wedding joy, and the princess also was looking forward to her wedding joy. But what delayed their union? The festivities that were going on before the wedding. So, too, the Holy One, blessed be He, looks forward to redemption for Israel, and Israel awaits redemption for the Holy One, blessed be He. Yet what causes the delay? The festivities before their union. First comes *The day of vengeance that is in My heart, then comes My year of redemption* (Isa. 63:4).

7. *When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of His people, then shall Jacob rejoice, and Israel shall be glad* (Ps. 14:7). It is not written here “Then shall Abraham rejoice, and Isaac shall be glad,” but *Then shall Jacob rejoice, and Israel shall be glad*. Of all the Patriarchs, why is it that Jacob is named as rejoicing? R. Simeon ben Lakish answered: Just as when the children of Israel sin, only Jacob in the Cave of Machpelah feels himself defiled, as is said *For now, O Ephraim, that thou hast committed harlotry, Israel is defiled* (Hos. 5:3),¹¹ so when the gladness of redemption comes, Jacob will rejoice in it more than any of the other Patriarchs. For he alone of the Patriarchs will be called to the feast, as it is said *Hearken unto Me, O Jacob, and Israel My called* (Isa.

48:12). What is meant by the words *Israel My called*? They mean "Israel whom I will call to the feast" as in the verse "And Samuel . . . made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were called" (1 Sam. 9:22).

Rab taught that here Jacob is like a man who is giving his daughter in marriage. Who rejoices? Is it not the father of the bride? For it is said *Therefore thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob* (Isa. 29:22).¹² Accordingly, when redemption comes to Israel, Jacob will rejoice in it more than any of the other Patriarchs. Hence it is said *When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of His people, then shall Jacob rejoice, and Israel shall be glad* (Ps. 14:7).

PSALM FIFTEEN

1. *A Psalm of David. Lord, who shall abide in Thy Tabernacle?* (Ps. 15:1). Consider these words in the light of the verse *And its provisions (salē'o) shall fail in its abode; and its princes shall be dismayed at the ensign* (Isa. 31:9). This verse speaks of Rome, the wicked kingdom: *salē'o* refers to its tax revenues, and the words *shall fail in its abode* mean that its revenues shall dwindle in its treasuries.

Or *salē'o* may mean "its limbs"¹ that *shall fail in its abode*—that is, the outlying provinces of the wicked kingdom shall fall away from it.²

Or again *salē'o* may mean "statues" that *shall fail in its abode*—that is, the statues of the wicked kingdom's emperors shall be toppled in the basilicas.

Of the words *its princes shall be dismayed at the ensign* (*ibid.*), R. Simon said: Twice shall the wicked kingdom's princes be dismayed.

When Isaiah was asked "Who says these things?" he replied: "Do I have the knowledge to say such things? *Thus saith the Lord, whose fire is in Zion and His furnace in Jerusalem* (Isa. 31:9)."

Hence David said: Since The Lord's fire is in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem,³ *who shall abide in Thy Tabernacle?*

2. The question *Who shall abide in Thy Tabernacle?* (Ps. 15:1) is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Jerusalem shall be inhabited without walls . . . For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about*—that is, in the area outside the walls—and *I will be the glory in the midst of her* (Zech. 2:8-9)—that is, in the area inside the walls. Therefore David said: Since there is a wall of fire in the area outside, and the glory is in the area inside, how can any one bear to abide at Jerusalem? Hence he asked: *Who shall abide in Thy Tabernacle?*

3. Another comment on *Who shall abide (yağur) in Thy Tabernacle*: Taking the syllable *gur* to mean "sojourn," the verse is not to be read *Who shall abide*, but "Who shall sojourn in Thy

tabernacle?" That is to say, is it possible for anyone even to sojourn with Thee?

R. Joshua ben Levi said: If Nadab and Abihu were burnt because they merely set foot in the sacred Tabernacle,⁴ is it possible for anyone to sojourn in Thy Tabernacle?

R. Samuel said: It is written of Uzza, *Uzza put forth his hand to hold the Ark* (1 Chron. 13:9). And what happened to him? *The anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza . . . and there he died* (1 Chron. 13:10). Can anyone, then, sojourn in Thy Tabernacle?

A parable of a rustic who came to the city. He saw many kinds of pastries and all sorts of delicacies being sold there and asked: "Can a man get his fill of these things?" His companions replied: "Yes, if he has coins—many coins." So, too, David asked: *Lord, who shall abide in Thy Tabernacle?* and the Holy One, blessed be He, replied: He that obeys many commandments—obeys the commandments and practices self-denial.

4. *He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness*, etc. (Ps. 15:2). *He that walketh uprightly* is the Holy One, blessed be He, "The Rock whose work is upright" (Deut. 32:2); *He that . . . worketh righteousness* is also the Holy One, blessed be He, of whom it is said "For the Lord is righteous, He loveth righteousness" (Ps. 11:7); *He that . . . speaketh truth* is also the Holy One, blessed be He, of whom it is written "But the Lord God is the God of truth" (Jer. 10:10).

He that backbiteth not with His tongue (Ps. 15:3) is the Holy One, blessed be He, as R. Joshua taught: The Holy One, blessed be He, speaks in a roundabout way so as to avoid unseemly words, as indicated in a preceding Psalm.⁵ *He who doeth no evil to His neighbor* is again the Holy One, blessed be He: When the children of Israel made the golden calf, what does Scripture say? "And the Lord repented of the evil which He said He would do unto His people" (Ex. 32:14). The word "neighbor" in the verse must mean the people of Israel, as in the words "For My brethren and neighbors' sakes, I will now say: 'Peace be within thee'" (Ps. 122:8).

He taketh up no reproach against those near unto Him (Ps. 15:3)—that is, against the children of Israel who were led astray⁶ at Shittim so that “those that died by the plague were twenty and four thousand” (Num. 25:9), but of whom God continued to speak as “children of Israel, a people near unto Him” (Ps. 148:14). *In His eyes, he who rejects His word, is despised*⁷ (Ps. 15:4): these words refer to the Holy One, blessed be He, who rejected Saul’s kingship,⁸ saying through Samuel to Saul: “Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king” (1 Sam. 15:23), and again “I have rejected him from being king over Israel” (1 Sam. 16:1). *But He honoreth them that fear the Lord* (Ps. 15:4) refers to the Holy One, blessed be He, for, according to R. Simon, the verse “And the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again” (Num. 12:15) proves that the pillar of cloud stood still for Miriam’s sake. And *He that sweareth to hurt*⁹ and *changeth not* (Ps. 15:4) is again the Holy One, blessed be He, who said: “As I live . . . surely ye shall not come into the land” (Num. 14:28, 30), and who also said: “Therefore I have sworn that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be expiated with sacrifice nor offering for ever” (1 Sam. 3:13). Now, if God “having sworn to hurt” does not change His vow, surely, after swearing to benefit, He will not change His vow.

R. Abin said that the words *He that sweareth to his hurt and changeth not* refer to a man who so depletes his purse in giving alms that he actually hurts himself. According to the Rabbis, the words refer to a man who swears to curb his impulse to evil¹⁰ so as not to commit a sin.

He that putteth not out His money to usury (Ps. 15:5) is the Holy One, blessed be He, who did not give the Torah for money, but gave it without price, as is said “Come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1). By *His money* is clearly meant the Torah, of which it is said “The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver money tried in the open before all men.”¹¹

He taketh no bribe against the innocent (Ps. 15:5) refers to the

Holy One, blessed be He. For when all the nations of the earth gather, ready to give up all their money for one precept of Torah, they will be unable to quench God's love for Israel, as is said *Many waters cannot quench love* (Song 8:7): By *many waters* is clearly meant the nations of the earth, of whom it is said "Woe . . . to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of many waters" (Isa. 17:12, 13), and by *love* is meant the love between the Holy One, blessed be He, and Israel. *Neither can the floods drown it* (Song 8:7): By *floods* is meant the kings of the nations of the world, of whom it is said "Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up . . . the waters of the flood . . . even the king of Assyria" (Isa. 8:7).

5. R. Azariah taught in the name of R. Judah: In the time-to-come, the [guardian angels of the] nations of the earth will come to accuse the children of Israel and will say in the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, these worshipped idols, and those worshipped idols. These committed incest, and those committed incest. These shed blood, and those shed blood. And yet these are being sent down to Gehenna, but those are not being sent down!"¹² Does this mean that there is partiality in Thee?" The Holy One, blessed be He, will reply: "If a man gave all the substance of his house for love, how could he ever be utterly condemned? (Song 8:7). How can I condemn the children of Israel?" Then the nations of the world will say, "We also are ready to give up our treasures that we may be forgiven," but God will reply: "Even if you now give up all your money for one precept of the Torah which you once rejected, you shall not be forgiven."

What more did God say to the nations? He said: "We have a little sister" (Song 8:8), by which He meant: As a child before it reaches maturity is not held responsible for its misdeeds, so the children of Israel are not held responsible for any of the sins wherewith they have soiled themselves throughout the days of the year: The Day of Atonement cleanses them, as is said "On this day shall a cleansing be appointed for you" (Lev. 16:30).

6. Another comment: *He that walketh uprightly* (Ps. 15:2) is

Abraham, to whom God said: "Walk before Me, and be thou upright" (Gen. 17:1). *He that worketh righteousness* (Ps. 15:2) is Isaac, whose work was in righteousness, for he surrendered himself as an offering. *He that speaketh the truth* (*ibid.*) is Jacob, of whom it is written "Thou givest the truth to Jacob" (Micah 7:20). *He that backbiteth not with his tongue* (Ps. 15:3) is Jacob's son, Benjamin, who knew of Joseph's being sold into slavery, but did not reveal it to his father. *He that doeth no evil to his fellow* (*ibid.*) is Joseph, who could have done evil to his brothers but did not. The words *Yet shameless doing even in a kinsman he doth not condone* (Ps. 15:3) refer to Phinehas of the tribe of Levi: When Zimri, Phinehas's kinsman in the tribe of Simeon, committed that deed of his, Phinehas slew him forthwith, that there be no shamelessness in Israel.¹³ *In his eyes plunder*¹⁴ *is despised* (Ps. 15:4): It was Moses, our master, who despised Egypt's plunder, as is said "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him" (Ex. 13:19), for while all Israel were busy taking booty, Moses was busy taking up the bones of Joseph. *He honoreth them that fear the Lord* (Ps. 15:4) refers to David, for it is said "When David came to Ziklag, he sent of the spoil unto the elders of Judah" (1 Sam. 30:26).

Another comment. *In his eyes a vile person is despised*: It was Hezekiah, king of Judah, who ordered that the bones of his vile father be dragged on a pallet of ropes.¹⁵ And the words *He honoreth them that fear the Lord* refer to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah: Though his spearmen and palace guard numbered sixteen myriads, yet whenever he saw a disciple of the wise he would stand up from his seat, embrace him, kiss him, and call him, "My teacher, my teacher! my master, my master!"

*He that abjureth his evil Inclination*¹⁶ *and changeth not* (Ps. 15:4) is Boaz who abjured his evil Inclination, saying to Ruth, "As the Lord liveth; lie down until the morning" (Ruth 3:13).

A different comment: *He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not* is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who swore "As the Lord liveth before whom I stand, I will receive none" (2 Kings 5:16).¹⁷

Another comment: *He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not* is Elijah, who swore "As the Lord, the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years"¹⁸ (1 Kings 17:1).

He that putteth not out his money to usury (Ps. 15:5) is a man such as Obadiah, who hid the Lord's prophets in a cave, borrowed money for their sake, and gave them food to eat.¹⁹

Another comment: *He that putteth not out his money on usury* is such as were Shammai and Hillel, who did not teach Torah²⁰ for money.

Nor taketh a reward against the innocent (Ps. 15:5) is a man such as Samuel, who said: "Here I am; witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? or whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I taken a ransom to blind mine eyes therewith?" (1 Sam. 12:3).

He that doeth these things shall never be moved (Ps. 15:5). R. Samuel said: I knew not the import of the word *moved* in this context, until King Solomon threw light on it for me in the verse "Those that are removed Thou wilt not forbear to rescue" (Prov. 24:11). I concluded therefore that the words *He . . . shall never be moved* mean that he who does these things will be rescued from death to live in the world-to-come.

7. *He that doeth these things shall never be moved* (Ps. 15:5). Whenever Rabban Gamaliel read this verse he would grieve, saying, "What man can do all of these things?" But R. Akiba, reading this verse, or the verses in Ezekiel beginning *But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right* (Ezek. 18:5-6), did not grieve but rejoiced. Rabban Gamaliel asked him, "Why do I grieve while thou rejoicest?" R. Akiba replied: "Note that it is written *These are they which are unclean to you among all that creep; whosoever doth touch them . . . shall be unclean* (Lev. 11:31), and so it might be argued that for a man to be unclean, he would have to touch all these creeping things, whereas if he touched only one of them he would not be unclean. Yet in truth, like the 'bright spot' of leprosy which makes all the leper's gar-

ments unclean, the touch of one creeping thing—even a portion of it no larger than a lentil—can make him unclean. Note also that at the end of the chapter which contains regulations concerning defilement it is written *Defile not yourselves in all of these things* (Lev. 18:24), and again it might be argued that only a man guilty of all such defilements²¹ becomes unclean. Yet the truth is that a man becomes unclean if he touches any of these sins even by a touch as light as the weight of a lentil. Now consider: what measure is greater? The measure of goodness or the measure of punishment? Clearly, the measure of goodness is five hundred times greater than the measure of punishment. And so if a man who touches a single creeping thing, even a portion of it no larger than a lentil, thereby becomes as unclean as though he had touched all creeping things, does it not follow that if a man does a single one of these good deeds, it is as though he had done all of them? And does it not also follow that just as the word *These* specifies the creeping things and defilements to indicate that a man touching any one of them touches them all, so a man who does any one of the good things of which it is written *He that doeth these things shall never be moved*, yea, does any one at all of them—it is as though he had done all of them." Thereupon Rabban Gamaliel said to R. Akiba: "Thou hast comforted me, Akiba, thou hast comforted me."

PSALM SIXTEEN

1. *Miḳtam of David* (Ps. 16:1). There are some of the Rabbis who say that *Miḳtam* is compounded of two words which describe David: *maḳ*, "meek," and *tam*, "undefiled." And there are others who derive *miḳtam* from *ḳeṭem*, "fine gold," and say that *Miḳtam of David* means the "golden Psalm" of David.

Keep me, O God (Ps. 16:1)—that is, "Protect me from evil."

For I have taken refuge in Thee. I have said unto the Lord: "Thou art my Lord: I have no good but in Thee (ṭobaṭi bal 'aleḳa)" (Ps. 16:1-2). The phrase *Thou art my Lord* is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein* (Ps. 24:1). Hence, say the Sages, a man embezzles from God whenever he makes use of the world without a blessing, for only affirmations of God's sovereignty can release the earth's fullness to man's use.

R. Abbahu said: The verse *Lest the fulness of the seed which thou hast sown be forfeited together with the increase of the vineyard* (Deut. 22:9) implies that this world is to be cared for like a vineyard. And by what means may it be redeemed for man's use? By blessing the Lord! And the proof? R. Simeon ben Laḳish cited *I have said unto the Lord: "Thou art my Lord"* (Ps. 16:2)—that is, when you are eating and you bless the Lord, only then do you make what you eat your own. Hence God says *My good shall not be held against thee (ṭobaṭi bal 'aleḳa) (ibid.)*—that is, you shall not be held guilty of embezzling from the Lord the good things you ate.

Or, *ṭobaṭi bal 'aleḳa* can be interpreted as "My good shall be brought to thee" (Ps. 16:2)—that is, none but good things shall be brought to you, and they shall abide with you.¹

Or, *ṭobaṭi bal 'aleḳa* can be interpreted as "I shall wear out all good things upon thee"—that is, "I shall see to it that all good things are worn out by your body, but your body will not wear out."²

R. Aḥa taught: What did God mean by saying *ṭobaṭi bal 'aleḳa (I have no good but for thee)*? He meant, "Whenever I bring a

a good thing into the world, I bring it for none but you." The words *bal 'aleka* are read here as *bil'adeka*, as in the verse *And but for thee (bila'deka) shall no man lift up his hand* (Gen. 41:44).

2. Another comment on *I have said unto the Lord: "Thou art my Lord"* (Ps. 16:2). David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, though I am a king, I set Thee as king over me!" The Holy One, blessed be He, answered: "I do not yet regard goodness as firmly fixed in thee. *My good is not in thee (toḇaṭi bal 'aleka)* (Ps. 16:2). In whom, then, is My goodness firmly fixed? *Only in the holy that are in the earth* (Ps. 16:3)." The Holy One, blessed be He, does not call the righteous man holy until he is laid away in the earth. Why not? Because the Inclination-to-evil keeps pressing him. And so God does not put His trust in him in this world till the day of his death.³ So, too, Solomon said: *There is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not* (Eccles. 7:20). That the Lord will not call a righteous man holy until he is laid away in the earth is what is meant by *The holy that are in the earth*.

Even the Patriarchs were not called holy ones until they were laid away in the earth, for it is said *Behold, He putteth no trust in His holy ones* (Job 15:15). When did God show that He had put His trust in them? When He said to Moses: *Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them: The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob* (Ex. 3:16). It was upon these that Moses leaned when he prayed: *Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Thy servants* (Ex. 32:13).

R. Phinehas said: Had the Patriarchs [in their lifetime] desired their abode to be in heaven, they could have had their wish. Nonetheless, until they died, yea, until their tombs above them were sealed with the topstone, even they were not called "holy."

R. Aḥa bar Papa taught: What is meant by the verse *He draweth away the mighty also by his power* (Job 24:22)? It means that the Inclination-to-evil, by its power, draws even the mighty away. Who are they? The generation of Enosh, the generation of the flood, the generation that saw the dispersion

of the races of mankind, and the people of Sodom. And so it is said that even if a righteous man *riseth up, He trusteth not in the living* (*ibid.*)—that is, “As long as the righteous is among the living, God trusts him not.”

3. *Their sorrows shall be multiplied* (Ps. 16:4). Thou didst multiply sorrows for all the children of men, saying to them, *In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life* (Gen. 3:17), and also *I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy travail* (Gen. 3:16). David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: “Master of the universe, Thou didst multiply sorrows even for the Patriarchs.” The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: “Have they suffered any loss therefor? *Do I not look upon their oblations as more valuable than [ritual offerings of] blood?*” (Ps. 16:4).⁴ Here God refers to the traditional practice described in a Mishnah: “Upon the lower half of the ramp of the altar, on the west side thereof, priests placed portions of the lamb that was offered up and salted them; then leaving the ramp, the priests went back to the chamber of hewn stone there to recite⁵ the Shema.”⁶

4. Another comment on *Their sorrows shall be multiplied*. David said: “Thou didst multiply sorrows for the generation who in a time of persecution died to hallow Thy name.” The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: “Have they suffered any loss therefor? *Do I not look upon their oblations as more valuable than [ritual offerings of] blood?*” (Ps. 16:4). The blood of those who died to hallow My name is of more worth to Me than all ritual offerings.”

R. Levi taught in the name of R. Idi: Suffering is divided into three portions: One, the Patriarchs and all the generations of men took; one, the generation that lived in the time of [Hadrian's] persecution took; and one, the lord Messiah will take.⁷

What did they use to do to the generation that lived under [Hadrian's] persecution? They fetched iron balls, brought them to a white heat, and put them into the armpits of the children of Israel who were thus slowly done to death. Or they fetched sharpened reeds and drove them under the nails of the children

of Israel. And in these ways they died for the hallowing of the Name.

5. Another comment on *Their sorrows shall be multiplied* (Ps. 16:4). David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: The men who hasten to come into Thy door and delay their departure thence,⁸ for them Thou hast multiplied sorrows! Any one of these men when commanded: "Pour a libation to another god!" would answer, "I will not pour it!" When commanded: "Bring offerings to another god!" he would answer, "I will bring no such offerings." "Drink a libation, out of a wine-red glass, water—mere water!" he would answer, "I will not drink it!" "Make a vow in the name of another god!" he would answer, "I will make no such vow, for Moses our master has charged us in his Torah: *Make no mention of the name of other gods* (Ex. 23:13). *Their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips. The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup!* (Ps. 16:4-5)."

Thou layest upon me my lot (*ibid.*). R. Judah taught in the name of R. Simeon ben Lakish that the people of Israel said: This was the portion laid upon me at Sinai.

6. *Lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places* (Ps. 16:6): the lines are two—the Written Law and the Oral Law.

R. Phinehas taught: *The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places* means that the people of Israel said: When Thou didst divide by lot the portions for the nations of the world, my lot fell in pleasant places, for Scripture says *When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance* (Deut. 32:8), and then goes on to say *The Lord's portion is His people, Jacob is the cord of His inheritance* (Deut. 32:9), as a man might say, "Such-and-such a woman fell to the lot of such-and-such a man."

Yea, I have a goodly heritage (Ps. 16:6) means that the people of Israel said: "Because I take delight in my heritage, it is made goodly for me." Reading these words, *The heritage of His goodness*⁹ is upon me, R. Johanan took them to mean "As a reward for keeping the commandments, God's glory is upon me."

7. *I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel; yea, in*

the night seasons my reins instruct me (Ps. 16:7). According to R. Samuel bar Naḥman, this verse refers to Abraham. For R. Samuel bar Naḥman used to say: No father taught Abraham; no master taught him. Then who taught him? The Holy One, blessed be He. R. Simeon ben Yoḥai declared: This verse proves that the Holy One, blessed be He, had provided Abraham with two reins that welled forth wisdom and understanding.¹⁰ You can see for yourself that this is so. For when the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself between the halves of a heifer¹¹ to Abraham, the Holy One, blessed be He, let Abraham see four things: the Torah, the Temple offerings, Gehenna, and the darkness of the exile in the four kingdoms. And the proof that God let Abraham see the Torah? The words *A lamp of fire . . . passed between these pieces* (Gen. 15:17), *fire* clearly referring to Torah, as in the verse "Is not My word like as fire?" (Jer. 23:29). And the proof that God let Abraham see the Temple offerings? The words *Take Me a heifer of three years old* (Gen. 15:9). And the proof that God let Abraham see Gehenna? The words *And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down . . . behold a smoking furnace* (Gen. 15:17). And the proof that God let Abraham see the darkness of the exile in the four kingdoms? The words *And, lo, an horror of a great darkness fell upon him* (Gen. 15:12).

For further commentary upon this matter, see our exposition of the First Psalm.¹²

8. *I have set the Lord always before me* (Ps. 16:8). Rab taught: In making a blessing a man is required to say, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord," for a blessing wherein the Lord's name is not mentioned is no blessing; as Scripture says, *I have set the Lord always before me* (Ps. 16:8).

Both R. Ze'era and R. Judah taught: A blessing wherein God's kingship is not mentioned is no blessing, for it is said *I will extol Thee, my God, O King* (Ps. 145:1). R. Berechiah commented: What you say applies only to blessings such as the blessing over fruit, or the blessing at the performance of commandments. In general worship, however, as long as a man mentions the name of God he has done his duty.

9. *Surely He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved* (Ps. 16:8). This verse proves that setting matters right according to the precepts of Torah was always David's concern. Thus, though all the kings of the east and of the west were seated in their glory before David, he was not ashamed even when abortions were brought before him, but would examine them and say: "This one was a male," or "That one was a female," "The mother of this one should regard herself as unclean for forty days," or "The mother of that one should regard herself as unclean for eighty days." It was of such matters that he said: *Even of Thy tokens [for ritual purification] I speak before kings and am not ashamed* (Ps. 119:46).

10. *Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth* (Ps. 16:9). R. Abbahu commented: At the very moment that small-minded men propose to make use of glory, it is removed from them.¹³

Another comment: *Therefore my heart is glad*, glad in words of the Torah; *and my glory rejoiceth*, rejoices in the lord Messiah who will rise up out of me. Of this it is written *And over all the glory shall be a canopy* (Isa. 4:5).

My flesh also dwelleth in safety (Ps. 16:9)—dwells in safety even after death. R. Isaac said: This verse proves that neither corruption nor worms had power over David's flesh.

11. *For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to the nether-world* (Ps. 16:10): In the grave his flesh will not dissolve like dust. *Neither wilt Thou suffer Thy merciful one to see the pit (ibid.)*: A merciful man will not even get the smell of Gehenna.

Another comment on *Neither wilt thou suffer Thy merciful one to see the pit* (Ps. 16:10). Since the Holy One, blessed be He, calls Himself "merciful," as is said *For I am merciful, saith the Lord* (Jer. 3:12), how could David presume to call himself *merciful*, as when he said: *Keep my soul, for I am merciful* (Ps. 86:2)? R. Huna explained in the name of R. Alexandri: A man who remains silent even when hearing himself reviled is called "merciful," and because David heard himself reviled and remained silent, he was right in calling himself "merciful."

12. *Thou wilt show me the path of life* (Ps. 16:11). According

to R. Yudan, David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, *show me the path of life!*" and the Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "Desirest thou life? Look as from a watch-tower to fear of the Lord, since *The fear of the Lord prolongeth days* (Prov. 10:26)."

According to R. Azariah, David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "*Show me the path of life,*" and the Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "Desirest thou life? Look as from a watch-tower for [the meaning of] affliction, since *Reproofs of affliction are the way of life* (Prov. 6:23)."

According to Rab, however, the Holy One, blessed be He, replied thus: "Desirest thou life? Look as from a watch-tower to Torah, since *She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that holdeth her fast* (Prov. 3:18)."

According to R. Abba, the Holy One, blessed be He, asked David: "Wouldst thou eat without working? Keep the commandments, and thou wilt feast, for it is said *Keep my commandments, and live* (Prov. 4:4)."

In Thy presence is fullness (śōḇā') of joy (Ps. 16:11): Do not read śōḇā', "fullness," but šēḇā', "seven." The verse thus refers to the seven companies of righteous men whose faces shall shine like the sun, like the moon, and so on, as explained in the commentary on the Psalm *In the Lord have I taken refuge*.¹⁴

Another comment: *In Thy presence is fullness of joy, at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore* (Ps. 16:11). The companies of the righteous will be arrayed in the form of¹⁵ the candlestick of the Temple, which is described in Scripture as having *two olive-trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof* (Zech. 4:3). Which of these companies is the most excellent and best-loved? The one standing upon the right side of the Holy One, blessed be He—the one alluded to as arrayed *upon the right side of the bowl*.

At Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore (Ps. 16:11). Two Amoraim differed as to the kind of men standing at the right hand of God. One maintained: They are men in whom is the strength of Torah, of which it is said *At His right hand was*

a fiery law (Deut. 33:2). The other maintained: They are scrupulous copyists and teachers of children who dwell in the shadow of the Holy One, blessed be He, for they are spoken of as *They that dwell under His shadow* (Hos. 14:8); each of them says, *I have set the Lord always before me; surely He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved* (Ps. 16:8).¹⁶

Another comment: *Thou wilt show me the path of life*. R. Abin took this verse to refer to the children of Israel for whom, on New Year's Day, God records His decree of life, a decree He seals on the Day of Atonement.

In Thy presence is fullness (šōḇa') of joy. Do not read *šōḇa'*, "fullness," but *šēḇa'*, "seven"—that is, the seven requirements for the Feast of Tabernacles, namely, the citron, the palm, the myrtle, the willow, the booth, the sacrifice, and the rejoicing.

13. Another comment on *Miktam of David* (Ps. 16:1). David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Stained with sin (*mēḵuṭam*) am I." A parable of a man who set out on a journey with but two *issars*.¹⁷ Seeing an inn, he entered it and saw some people eating meat, and others eating fish. He said: "What shall I do? If I say, 'Give me something to eat,' the innkeeper may bring me a pair of pheasants, and I have only two issars." And so he said to the innkeeper: "Give me two issars' worth of food." The innkeeper asked: "What shall I give thee?" and the man answered: "Hast thou not heard the common saying 'Dance my shilling's worth for me?'" Just so David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "I have not enough merit to sit with the great, so let me be with the lesser. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are in the bed-chamber, and Moses and Aaron are in the banqueting hall, so let me be but at the threshold, as it is said *I had rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God* (Ps. 84:11). If I have not even enough merit to be allowed at the threshold, let me remain in the courtyard, as it is said *Let me pay my vows . . . in the courts of the Lord's house* (Ps. 116:18-19). If I have not enough merit even to be allowed in the courtyard, make me not depart from the inn, as it is said *Let me pay my vows . . . in the midst of Thee, O Jerusalem (ibid.)*."

PSALM SEVENTEEN

1. *A prayer of David. Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto my cry* (Ps. 17:1). These words are to be read in the light of the verse *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord* (Prov. 15:8). R. Joshua taught in the name of R. Hananiah that Balaam told Balak: *Build me here seven altars* (Num. 23:1), arguing that the Holy One, blessed be He, delights in offerings, and quoting what God said to Job's friends, *Now therefore, take unto you seven bullocks and seven rams* (Job 42:8); but R. Joshua went on to say that the Holy One, blessed be He, replied to Balaam: "O thou wicked one, I take no delight in thine offerings: *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord!* Wherein do I take delight? In prayer, as the verse goes on to say, *The prayer of the upright is His delight* (Prov. 15:8)."

2. Another comment: [1] *A prayer of David.* [2] *Hear the right, O Lord,* [3] *attend unto my cry,* [4] *give ear unto my prayer,* [5] *that goeth not out of feigned lips* (Ps. 17:1). Why did David utter these five petitions and then conclude *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence* (Ps. 17:2)? Because it was as if David were saying to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, if Thou causest Thy judgment of me to come forth before I say my prayers on the morning of the Day of Atonement, I shall be unable to stand up. Let me first read the Shema (*Hear the right*) and say the other four prayers [two preceding and two following the Shema], and only then, *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence.*"

Our Masters taught: "A king cannot sit in judgment, nor can he be brought to judgment."¹ However, asserted R. Johanan, David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, Thou art a king, and I am a king, and it is proper that a king sit in judgment of another king." Hence it is written *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence.*

3. Another comment: The words *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence* (Ps. 17:2) mean that David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "There is no one but Thee who can pardon

sin." Therefore it is written *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence.*

R. Levi taught: When the Holy One, blessed be He, sent an angel to the children of Israel to go before them, what did He say? *Behold, I send an angel before thee* (Ex. 23:20), and then added: *Take heed of him, and hearken unto his voice; be not rebellious against him; for he will not pardon your transgression; for My name is in him* (Ex. 23:21). According to R. Levi, what can *My name is in him* mean but that every courier²-angel of the Holy One, blessed be He, bears a kind of seal³ graven in his heart. Thus Scripture, in saying *The chariots of God . . . thousands of angels; the Lord is among them* (Ps. 68:18), implies that the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, is a part of the name of each angel, as in the names Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, Raphael. And why did God instruct Israel concerning the angel who was to go before them: *Take heed of him, and hearken unto his voice; be not rebellious against him*? Because, according to the world's custom, only a king can do whatever pleases him. When he imposes a penalty upon a province and its inhabitants come and plead with him, the king can heed their plea. But when he sends a magistrate to collect one hundred pounds [of gold], and the inhabitants of the province beseech the magistrate that he lessen the sum, can they possibly be permitted to pay even one copper less than what the king commanded? *For he will not pardon your transgression* (*ibid.*). That is to say, the magistrate cannot remit a single farthing to the inhabitants of the province. Why not? Because he is merely the king's messenger.

Just so David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, since there is no one other than Thee who can pardon, *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence.*

4. Another comment on *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence* (Ps. 17:2). R. Judah taught: When did David say *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence*? When David numbered the children of Israel, wrath came to the Holy One, blessed be He, and God said to David: "I commanded that *the children of Israel shall . . . not be measured nor numbered*

(Hos. 2:1), and thou didst subject them to a numbering!" Then God sent Gad the Seer who said to David: *Thus saith the Lord: I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee* (2 Sam. 24:12). Why did God offer David a choice of three things? As if to say to him: Even as thou spakest three imprecations against Saul thy master, so I weight thee with three things, in keeping with the words *In full measure . . . Thou dost contend* (Isa. 27:8): measure for measure.⁴ And what were the three imprecations? *The Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall go down into battle, and be swept away* (1 Sam. 26:10).

After speaking thus to David, Gad the Seer asked: *What answer shall I return to Him that sent me?* (2 Sam. 24:13). David stood still, greatly troubled, not knowing what to answer. But then he said: "If I answer, 'Famine,' all Israel will say: 'David is rich. His granaries are filled with corn. Why should he be concerned?' If I answer, 'War,' all Israel will say: 'David is strong, and his men are strong. Why should he be concerned?' Behold, therefore I must choose a thing which comes alike to the poor and to the rich, to the strong and to the weak, to those who are grown and to the little ones!" Indeed, Gad the Seer gave David a hint that he should choose pestilence by saying to David, *Now advise thee, and consider what answer I shall return to Him that sent me* (2 Sam. 24:13), as much as to advise David: "Say, 'Pestilence.'"⁵ And then what does Scripture tell us? *David said unto Gad: "I am in a great strait; let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man"* (2 Sam. 24:14). A parable of a man who was close to death. They asked him: "Where dost thou wish that we bury thee—near thy father or near thy mother?" He replied: "Woe unto the ears that hear such a thing."⁶ Nonetheless, bury me near my father." So, too, David said: "Woe unto the ears that hear such a thing. Nonetheless, *Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man.*"

Come and see the mercies of the Holy One, blessed be He! For

although David decided to choose pestilence for three days—that is, for thirty-six hours⁷—yet what does Scripture say? *The Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed* (2 Sam. 24:15). What is meant by *From the morning even to the time appointed*? R. Hiyya the Elder said: It means from the time the daily whole-offering is slain until the time its blood is sprinkled.⁸ But the Rabbis said that it means from the time the east begins to glow to the time the sun rises.

R. Tanhuma related: The Ten Commandments, the two Tables of the Law, the five Scrolls of Torah, the three Patriarchs, the seven days of the week, and the eight days of circumcision—thirty-five in all, a number matching thirty-five hours—came and asked mercy of the Holy One, blessed be He, beseeching Him to cancel out one hour of pestilence for them, an hour for the sake of each one of them, saying that if Israel vanished from the earth, no one would be left to honor them, and they would cease to exist. Whereupon, for the sake of each of them, the Holy One, blessed be He, cancelled thirty-five hours.⁹ But in the hour of pestilence which remained, in that one hour there perished seventy thousand of the children of Israel. The Rabbis maintained that in that one hour there perished Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, who was the equal¹⁰ of seventy thousand men among the children of Israel. Of him it is written *The Lord . . . said to the angel that destroyed the people: "It is the teacher"*¹¹ (2 Sam. 24:16). This is to say, "The people's teacher, he is taken as a forfeit for thee."

Thereupon *That day Gad came to David and said unto him: 'Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord'* (2 Sam. 24:18). R. Simeon ben Yoḥai told a parable of a man who was punishing his son. The son did not know why he was being punished. After the man had finished punishing him, he said: "Now go and do such-and-such a thing which I commanded thee many days ago, but which thou hast not done." Even so, all the thousands who perished in the fighting in David's days, perished only because they did not demand that the Temple be built.¹²

Now may it not be argued *a fortiori*¹³ that if death befell men

in whose midst the Temple did not exist and so was not destroyed in their days—if death befell them and they were punished merely because they did not demand that the Temple be built, how much more severely shall we be punished, we who neither mourn for the Temple, nor seek mercy for it, even though it was destroyed in our days!

Hence pious men of olden days ordained three prayers to be recited every day. They introduced into one of the prayers in the Eighteen Benedictions the words "O, Compassionate One, in Thy great mercy, return Thy presence to Zion and the order of service to Jerusalem";¹⁴ furthermore they designated as a distinct blessing in the Eighteen Beneditions and also in the Grace after Meals,¹⁵ the words "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who rebuildest Jerusalem."

When David perceived that the time of the pestilence was shortened, he said: Had I fallen into the hands of them that hate me, they would have felled me with the sword. But the Holy One, blessed be He—His mercies are many. Accordingly, he said: *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence.*

5. Another comment on *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence*. R. Levi taught: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to David: "Have I made thee a Sanhedrin to no purpose? Go forth, and argue before it!" And David answered: "Master of the universe, Thou didst write in Thy Torah, *Thou shalt take no gift* (Ex. 23:8), and the members of the Sanhedrin are afraid to take a gift from me and then pass judgment on me. But as for Thee, it is Thy will to take a gift, and then to *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence*." And the proof that the Holy One, blessed be He, takes a gift? The verse *He taketh a gift out of the bosom of a wicked man to pervert the ways of judgment* (Prov. 17:23).¹⁶ And what are the gifts that God takes from the wicked in this world? Repentance, prayer, and charity! Hence, David said: *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence.*

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: My children, repent as long as the gates of prayer are open, for I take gifts in this world,

but when I sit down for judgment in the world-to-come I will take no gifts, as is said *He will not regard any ransom; neither will He rest content, though thou givest many gifts* (Prov. 6:35).

Hence David said: *Thou showest me the paths of life* (Ps. 16:11), *paths of life* referring to the ten days of repentance between New Year's Day and the Day of Atonement.

In the following clause, *In thy right hand there are pleasures* (Ps. 16:11), what is meant by the word *pleasures*? R. Abin taught: It refers to the myrtle, the palm-branch, and the willow¹⁷ which give pleasure. These are held in the right hand, for, according to the Rabbis, the festive wreath (*lulab*) should be held in the right hand, and the citron in the left.

What kind of victory is meant in the clause *In thy right hand there are pleasures of victory*¹⁸ (*ibid.*)? That kind in which the victor receives a wreath.¹⁹ For according to the custom of the world, when two charioteers race in the hippodrome, which of them receives a wreath? The victor.²⁰ Thus on New Year's Day all the people of the world come forth like contestants on parade²¹ and pass before God, and the children of Israel among all the people of the world also pass before Him. Then the guardian angels of the nations of the world declare: We were victorious, and in the judgment shall be found righteous. But actually no one knows who was victorious, whether the children of Israel or the nations of the world were victorious. After New Year's Day is gone, all the children of Israel come forth on the Day of Atonement and fast thereon, clothed in white and comely garments. But even after the Day of Atonement is gone, still no one knows who was victorious, the children of Israel, or the nations of the world. When the first day of Tabernacles comes, however, all the children of Israel, they that are grown as well as the little ones, take up their festive wreaths in their right hands and their citrons in their left, and then all people of the world know that in the judgment the children of Israel were proclaimed victorious. Moreover, when Hoshana Rabba²² comes, the children of Israel, taking willows of the brook, circle seven times therewith, while the reader of the synagogue, like an angel of God, stands up

with the Scroll of Torah in his arm, the people circling about him, as though he were the altar. (Of this circling our Masters taught: Every day of the first six days of Tabernacles they circled about the altar once, saying *We beseech Thee, O Lord, save now! We beseech Thee, O Lord, make us now to prosper* [Ps. 118:25]. But on the seventh day, they circled about the altar seven times.²³ This circling of the altar is clearly referred to by David, king of Israel, in the verse *I will wash my hands in innocency; so will I compass Thine altar, O Lord* [Ps. 26:6]). Thereupon, the ministering angels rejoice, and say: "The children of Israel are victorious; the children of Israel are victorious," and they also say, *The Victory of Israel will not lie nor repent* (1 Sam. 15:29). Therefore, David meant to say this: If you perform the rite of the festive wreath known as "a pleasure" and take up the wreath "in the right hand" to praise therewith the Holy One, blessed be He, behold! He has made known to you the paths of life. Hence David said: *Thou showest me the path of life, in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures of victory* (Ps. 16:11). By *the path of life* David meant New Year's Day and the Day of Atonement; by *fullness of joy* he meant the Feast of Tabernacles; by *in Thy presence* he meant Israel's appearance in Jerusalem as ordained in the verse "Three times a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God" (Deut. 16:16); by *in thy right hand there are pleasures* he meant the festive wreath of *lulab*²⁴ called "a pleasure," which is held in the right hand; and by *of victory* he meant: I bring thee the glad tidings, that at the judgment thou art proclaimed victorious over the nations of the world, as is said "The Victory of Israel will not lie nor repent."

Another comment on *In Thy presence is fullness (šōḇa') of joy*: Do not read *šōḇa'*, "fullness," but *šēḇa'*, "seven," for the seven things mentioned in the verse *And ye shall take you . . . the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willow of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days* (Lev. 23:40). The seven are: the booth, the branch of the palm-tree, the willow, the myrtle, the citron, the

libation of water,²⁵ and the joyous procession to and from the well.²⁶ If the children of Israel thus observe the Feast of Tabernacles, the Lord will give them pleasure, and with His right hand will declare them victorious at the judgment.

Another comment: By *path of life* in *Thou showest me the path of life* David meant the Torah, "A tree of life to them that lay hold upon her" (Prov. 3:18); by *fullness of joy* David meant the text of Scripture, the Mishnah, the Talmud, the traditional laws, moral lessons, subtle interpretation of Biblical laws, and the subtleties of rabbinic enactments. Nay more! Thou also makest Thy presence to shine upon me, as is said *In Thy presence*. Finally, by *pleasures* in *In Thy right hand there are pleasures*, David was referring to this world; and by *for evermore* he was referring to the world-to-come.

6. Another comment: David spoke *A prayer of David. Hear the right, O Lord* (Ps. 17:1) the first time he ran away from Saul.²⁷ When he ran away from Saul into the cave of Adullam,²⁸ David said: *Attend unto my cry*. Within the barricade, when he was afraid of Abner,²⁹ David said: *Give ear unto my prayer*. Finally, referring to the Ziphites,³⁰ who "came and said to Saul: 'Doth not David hide himself with us?'" (Ps. 54:2), David declared: *Not out of feigned lips*.

Another comment: *A prayer of David* refers to the man who rises from his sleep and prays, saying "Blessed is He who quickens the dead";³¹ *Hear the right, O Lord* refers to the reading of Shema, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one"; *give ear unto my cry* refers to the first prayer before Shema, namely, "Blessed art Thou . . . who formest light";³² *Give ear unto my prayer* refers to the afternoon prayer; *that goeth not out of feigned lips* refers to the evening prayer, which we stand up to say not out of laughter, nor out of coarse talk, nor out of idle chatter, nor out of feigning lips, but out of converse in Torah and the doing of good works.

Another comment: *Attend unto my cry* refers to the intonation of the words in the study of Torah, the manner in which disciples of the wise chant,³³ as commanded by the verse "Arise,

cry out in the night" (Lam. 2:19). *Hear my prayer* refers to the morning prayer; *not out of feigned lips* refers to the additional prayer.³⁴ And because I pray to Thee not out of feigning lips, but with a whole heart, therefore, *Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence*—"At the judgment do Thou declare us innocent."

7. *Thou hast proved my heart. Thou hast visited it in the night* (Ps. 17:3). Because David said, *Examine me, O Lord, and prove me* (Ps. 26:2), the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "Thou wilt be unable to stand up to the proof." David replied: "I shall be able to stand up to it." In no time at all the Holy One, blessed be He, put David to the proof,³⁵ and he was unable to stand up to it. About to slip into transgression, David cried out, saying: *Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not* (Ps. 17:5). Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Did I not tell thee that thou wouldst be unable to stand up to the proof?" And David said: *I have called upon Thee, for Thou didst caution me, O God* (Ps. 17:6).

8. *Show Thy marvellous loving-kindness, O Thou that savest by Thy right hand them which put their trust in Thee* (Ps. 17:7). David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, give me of that marvellous balm which is Thine. And what is that? It is pardon and forgiveness, as is said *The Lord . . . who forgiveth all thine iniquity; who healeth all thy diseases* (Ps. 103:2-3).

Keep me as the apple of the eye (Ps. 17:8). R. Yudan said in the name of R. Levi: In the wide space of the universe, there is no place—even one so small that it holds no more than a fourth of a *kab*³⁶ of seed—that is without nine *kab* of demons, so that wherever a man reaches, his hand is in the midst of demons,—and yet the Holy One, blessed be He, protects him.

R. Joshua ben Levi said: When a man walks on the highway, a company³⁷ of angels goes before him, crying out and saying: "Make way for the image of the Holy One, blessed be He." So a verse in another Psalm says, *He will give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways* (Ps. 91:11).

The Rabbis taught: Blindfolds are placed over the eyes of

demons as over the eyes of millers' asses. And when a man's sins demand it, the blindfold is removed, and the demon looks upon the man, and the man's countenance is changed, for the verse *Thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away* (Job 14:20) implies that once a demon has looked upon a man, the man sickens and dies. Accordingly, the Holy One, blessed be He, charges all those angels to protect him—a thousand at his left side, and ten thousand at his right—as it is said *A thousand shall encamp at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee* (Ps. 91:7). And why more angels at the right than at the left? Because the right is empowered to perform all the commandments, and therefore Scripture says, *Ten thousand at thy right hand*. But the left, which is empowered to perform no commandment other than that of the Tefillin, of which it is said "Thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand" (Deut. 6:8)³⁸—the left has assigned to it only a thousand angels.

What is meant by the words *Shall not come nigh thee*? They mean that the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "It is the way of the world that when a king goes forth on a journey, and all his legions go forth with him to protect him, he is obliged to give them provision and food. But I, I assigned a thousand angels at thy left hand, and ten thousand at thy right to protect thee, and not one *shall come nigh thee*, and say, 'Feed me and provide for me.'"

R. Hanina taught: The verse, read literally, does not say, "A thousand shall be assigned to thy side" but *A thousand shall fall at thy side*. What can *shall fall* imply but that if demons should fall upon thee, the angels will fell them before thee?

Another comment: What does *shall fall* imply? It implies that the Holy One, blessed be He, will make [the demons] be at peace with thee, as in the verse *And there fell some of Manasseh to David*³⁹ (1 Chron. 12:20). As for all those angels which are assigned to a man in order to guard him, when is he guarded by them? When he guards the Torah.

R. Eleazar haq-Ḳappar taught: The Holy One, blessed be He,

said to man: Let My lamp be in thy hand, and thy lamp in My hand. Of My lamp in thy hand, it is written *For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light* (Prov. 6:23); and of thy lamp in My hand, it is written *The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord* (Prov. 20:27): When thou keepest My lamp, I shall keep thine.

R. Hiyya told a parable of two men who owned two vineyards: one had his in Galilee, and the other had his in Judea. The one of Galilee had his vineyard in Judea; and the one of Judea had his vineyard in Galilee. After a time, they encountered each other. And one said to the other: Keep my vineyard in Galilee for me, and I shall keep thy vineyard in Judea; and if thou wilt hoe my vineyard in Judea, I shall hoe thy vineyard in Galilee.⁴⁰ Just so the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the children of Israel: *Keep My commandments, and live* (Prov. 4:4): If you keep My commandments, I shall keep you, as is said *If ye shall keep all this commandment ye shall be kept*⁴¹ (Deut. 11:22): "If ye keep, ye shall be kept."

R. Johanan said: The Torah is greater than the commandments, for a commandment in the presence of the Torah is like a lamp in the face of the sun, as is said *The commandment is a lamp, but the Torah is light* (Prov. 6:23), and also *The sun shall be no more thy light . . . But the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light* (Isa. 60:19).

9. *Arise, O Lord, confront him, cast him down* (Ps. 17:13). R. Phinehas stated in the name of R. Hoshai: Five times⁴² in the Book of Psalms⁴³ David asked the Holy One, blessed be He, to arise: four times against the four kingdoms,⁴⁴ for by the help of the Holy Spirit David saw how the four kingdoms would oppress Israel, and so he asked the Holy One, blessed be He, to arise against each of them; and the fifth time was when he saw that Gog and Magog would fall with might upon Israel, and he said to the Holy One, blessed be He: *Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Thy hand* (Ps. 10:12); we have no captain but Thee to make war against Gog and Magog.

A parable of a strong man crossing a stream; with him was

his son whose hand he held to help him cross over. When the man came to the middle of the stream, a wave rose up above his son's head. Forthwith the son cried out: "Father, father, lift up thy hand, I am sinking, and will die." The four kingdoms of the nations are like the mighty waves, as is said *Woe . . . to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters* (Isa. 17:12), in whose depths the children of Israel are sinking, as is said *I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into depth of waters, so that the floods run over me* (Ps. 69:3). And but for the Holy One, blessed be He, who is with them, the children of Israel would cease to be and would perish, but that God said: *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee* (Isa. 43:2). When David⁴⁵ saw that the nations would wax strong, and that [Israel's] sin would result in the kingdoms' rising up like a flood to overwhelm the children of Israel, he began to cry out and say *Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Thy hand*, for we are sinking. And again: *Let not the waterflood overwhelm me* (Ps. 69:16). And so when David said: "*Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Thy hand*, for we are sinking," the Holy One, blessed be He, replied: As thou livest, I shall lift up My hand, for it is said *I lift up My hand to heaven* (Deut. 32:40).

10. Another interpretation of *Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Thy hand* (Ps. 10:12): Remember Thine oath which the angel swore in Thy name, as is said *The man clothed in linen . . . lifted up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by Him that liveth for ever* (Dan. 12:7). Again it is said *Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you* (Isa. 30:18): *Therefore* clearly introduces an oath, as in the verse *Therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli* (1 Sam. 3:14).

R. Joshua of Siknin taught in the name of R. Levi: The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Twice have I bound⁴⁶ Myself by oaths: I shall bring the redemption and redeem you from the oppression of the kingdoms; and when Gog and Magog come in the time-to-come, I shall fight against them, as is said *Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations* (Zech. 14:3). Therefore

David said: *Arise, O Lord, confront him* (Ps. 17:13), as much as to say, "Confront the wicked⁴⁷ before he confronts Thee."

What does *hakri'ehu*⁴⁸ mean? It means: In Thy balance, cast him from the pan of favor down into the pan of disfavor. Or, *hakri'ehu* may be taken to mean "bend him down," as in the verse *They are bent down (karē'u) and fallen* (Ps. 20:9).

Deliver my soul from the wicked [who comes armed with] Thy sword, that is, from the wicked who comes at one with the strength of the Torah, which is called a sword, as in the verse *The high praises of God . . . in their mouth; and a two-edged sword in their hand* (Ps. 149:6).

By another reading, *Deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword*, the verse means, "Deliver my soul from that sword which comes against me by the power of Isaac, father of Esau, to whom Isaac said: *By thy sword shalt thou live* (Gen. 27:40)."

Another interpretation: *Deliver my soul from the wicked, which is Thy sword* means "Deliver my soul from that wicked one who is Thy sword, the one whom Thou didst appoint to chastise Thy world, as is said *O Assyrian, the rod of Mine anger, and the staff in their hand is Mine indignation* (Isa. 10:5)."

R. Joshua of Siknin said in the name of R. Levi: Reading the verse *Deliver my soul from the wicked, by Thy sword*, it means "Deliver my soul from the wicked one who rises up, only to perish by Thy sword, as is said *My sword hath drunk its fill in heaven; behold, it shall come down upon Edom* (Isa. 34:5)."

11. The passage beginning *Deliver my soul . . . from men (mēṭim) which are Thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world* (Ps. 17:14) alludes to Nebuchadnezzar. David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, what manner of mighty men are they who take over power from Thy hands, and to whom Thou givest power to oppress the children of Israel in Thy world? This Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar too—who are they? They are the *mēṭim*—not merely men, but "mighty men," the meaning indicated in the verse "utterly destroying every city, even the men⁴⁹ (*mēṭim*)" (Deut. 3:6). The phrase *from men of the world (heleḏ)* means that Thou hast given such men power

over the whole world, for *heled* clearly means "world," as in "Give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world (*heled*)" (Ps. 49:2). The next clause, *which have their portion in this life*, means that in this world, Thou hast given such men power and hast given them prosperity. The clause *And whose belly Thou fillest with Thy hid treasure* means that the Babylonians have enriched themselves out of the sacred treasures hid in the Temple, for it is said "The king of Babylon . . . carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord" (2 Kings 24:13). The clause *Their children are full* refers to Evil-Merodach,⁵⁰ of whom it is said "All the nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son" (Jer. 27:7). The word *babes* in *And leave the rest of their substance to their babes* refers to the fatherless babe, the only one remaining of his royal house. This was Vashti,⁵¹ who was made queen in a kingdom which did not belong to her, as is said "Vashti the queen also made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to King Ahasuerus" (Esther 1:9).

12. Another interpretation: In the verse *Deliver my soul . . . from men which are Thy hand, O Lord*, by *men* is meant Esau's⁵² mighty men who have taken sovereignty from Thy hand. The phrase *From men of the world* means "Deliver me from men to whom Thou givest power in this world." The clause *which have their portion in this life* implies that such men are meant for lives of serenity and prosperity, of peace and wealth in this world. The clause *And whose belly Thou fillest with Thy hid treasure* means that such men have grown rich out of the sacred treasures hid in the chambers of the Temple and also out of the treasures of Israel. The clause *Their children are full* refers to Vespasian and to his comrades.⁵³ In the clause *And leave the rest of their substance to their babes*, by *babes* is meant the two fatherless babes remaining [of the house of Esau]. These were Remus and Romulus, for whose sake Thou madest ready a she-wolf in milk which gave them suck until they grew up and became great kings.

The clause *And leave the rest of their substance to their babes* means that Remus and Romulus built wicked Rome, and within

it made palaces which they left to the kings of Rome, the exceedingly wicked.

13. Another exposition: Rendered *of men who died*⁵⁴ *on account of Thee, O Lord*, these words refer to the generation persecuted by Hadrian. What was their mighty deed? They were willing to suffer death for the hallowing of the Name and died for Thee, letting themselves be put to death because of Thee. The following words, *Of men willing to suffer death from sores (heled)*,⁵⁵ refer to men who hid themselves from the enemy, until their bodies were covered with sores, as, for example, R. Simeon ben Yoḥai who with his son lived in a cave thirteen years, until their bodies were covered with sores. And what did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He let them see a heavenly prince who, sitting in judgment, was passing sentence upon birds: Some of the birds coming into his presence received their freedom and went forth, but others received sentences of captivity. When R. Simeon ben Yoḥai saw this, he said: "Without the will of heaven, even a bird may not come and go. If even birds cannot be captured without God's knowing, shall we be captured without God's knowing?" Forthwith R. Simeon ben Yoḥai came forth, [openly] performed a ritual cleansing of the Land of Israel,⁵⁶ and departed. The Holy One, blessed be He, asked David: "Have such men really suffered any loss? Is it not true that *their portion is in life*?"

In the following words, *And Thy treasure will fill their belly*, note that not "their treasure," but *Thy treasure* is written here, implying that David received at this moment the good tidings that his portion of the goodnesses in the world-to-come he would enjoy with such men as those of whom it is written *Oh how abundant is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee* (Ps. 31:20).

Their children are full, as is said "Thy glory upon their children" (Ps. 90:16). *And leave the rest of their substance to their babes*, as is said "He . . . showeth mercy to His anointed, to David and to his seed, for evermore" (Ps. 18:51).

David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the

universe, such men came into Thy presence with the strength of Torah and of good works. But as for me, I come⁵⁷ into Thy presence like a pauper seeking charity, as is said *As for me, let me behold Thy presence in charity. Let me be satisfied, at the waking, with Thy likeness* (Ps. 17:15): Let me be one of those who will awake from death, of whom it is said "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust" (Isa. 26:19).

Another exposition: *Let me be satisfied, at the waking, with Thy likeness*. But is it not written *Man shall not see Me and live* (Ex. 33:20)? Indeed, it is impossible for man in this world, but in the time-to-come, in the hour of the awaking of the dead, I shall be satisfied with the seeing of Thy likeness, for it is said *It shall be said in that day: "Lo, this is our God"* (Isa. 25:9), and again *They shall see, eye to eye, the Lord returning to Zion* (Isa. 52:8).

14. In another comment the words are read, *As for me, I shall behold Thy presence in loving-kindness*: Come and see how great is the strength of loving-kindness! Merely because of the one small coin⁵⁸ a man gives to the poor, he gets the right to behold the face of the Shekinah. In the usage of the world, however, a Roman matron wishing to see the king and to wait upon him must make a wreath befitting her means, and only then, because of the wreath with which she enters to crown the king, is she permitted to behold the king's face. You can see, then, how great is the strength of loving-kindness!

Another interpretation of *As for me, I shall behold Thy presence in loving-kindness*: What made David single out the strength of loving-kindness? To prove that even wicked men who bring with them no merit other than their having given alms, are privileged by this deed alone to have the glory of the Shekinah revealed to them, as is said *The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together* (Isa. 40:5): All flesh shall see it? The righteous and the wicked as well? If so, what difference between the righteous and the wicked? This: the wicked shall know what Person they vexed, while the righteous shall know for what Person they labored.

In another comment the words are read, *As for me, I shall behold Thy presence in justice.* Because the wicked live in prosperity in this world, even though they deny the Holy One, blessed be He, and vex Him, and because the righteous suffer in this world, even though they are willing to die for the hallowing of the name of their Creator, therefore David said: I shall not be of those who vex Thee, but of those who labor in the Torah of which it is written *Justice, justice, shalt thou follow* (Deut. 16:20). Hence David said: *As for me, I shall behold Thy presence in justice.*

ADDENDUM TO PSALM SEVENTEEN¹

[17A]

1. Another comment on *A prayer of David. Hear the right, O Lord* (Ps. 17:1). Consider these words in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *And this is the blessing of Judah, and he said: Hear, O Lord, the voice of Judah* (Deut. 33:7). Now there, in a Mishnah, we learned: Hillel said: *A hin*²-full of drawn water makes a ritual bath of purification³ unfit.⁴ (Note well, that it is the duty of a man to quote his master's exact words⁵). Shammai said: Nine *kabs* of drawn water make a ritual bath of purification unfit. But other Sages said: The practice is not in keeping with what the one said, nor with what the other said. Then came two weavers from the Dung-gate in Jerusalem⁶ and testified in the name of Shemaiah and Abtalion that three *logs* of drawn water make a ritual bath of purification unfit, and the Sages⁷ accepted the testimony of the weavers. Since no craft is more lowly than a weaver's, and no place in Jerusalem is more despised than the Dung-gate, why was the place whence the weavers came, and why also was the name of their craft recorded except to show that, like "the fathers of the world" [Hillel and Shammai] who did not persist in their own opinion where there was a tradition to the contrary, so no man should persist in his opinion wherever there is a tradition to the contrary?⁸

2. Since the opinions of Shammai and of Hillel in this instance did not prevail, why were they recorded? To teach coming generations that a man should not always persist in his opinions, for even Shammai and Hillel, "the fathers of the world," did not always persist in their opinions.⁹

3. Since law cannot be decided according to the opinion of a minority of one, for only according to the opinion of the majority can a particular law be decided, why is the opinion of a minority of one recorded? Because it may be that another court at a later time will consider the opinion of the minority of one, and depending on it for support, will reverse a previous judgment.¹⁰ For otherwise, unless one court surpass a former court in both

wisdom¹¹ and number,¹² no court would presume to set aside the decision of a former court.

4. From this you learn that it is necessary for a man to find support for his words in the words of former generations, and that it is also necessary for a man to arrange his prayers according to the prayers in Scripture. And thus we find of David that he sought support in the words of his teacher Moses. When David realized that Moses prayed for him and for his tribe, Moses having said: *This is the blessing of Judah, . . . Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah* (Deut. 33:7), David also, using the same language, began to pray for himself, *Hear, Lord, the right*. For the word *voice* in Moses' blessing can only mean the *voice* of David, of which it is said *Saul knew David's voice* (1 Sam. 26:17).

5. In *Attend unto my cry*, the word *cry* must mean the sort of "cry" referred to in the verse *Yet [do] Thou . . . hearken unto the cry and to the prayer which Thy servant prayeth before Thee* (1 Kings 8:28).

6. Moses speaks boldly *Hear* (*šema'*), *Lord, the voice of Judah* (Deut. 33:7); but David speaks softly *O Lord, Hear* (*šimē'ah*)¹³ *the right* (Ps. 17:1). Why does David speak softly? Because the righteous, when asking something of the Presence for themselves, make themselves less than what they really are.

7. *Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock* (Ps. 137:9). Thus spoke the Holy One, blessed be He: "I shall dash thy little ones against the rock, even as thou didst dash My little ones." But we have not heard that our little ones were dashed against the rock at the destruction of the Temple—actually they were taken away in chains. What the Holy One, blessed be He, meant, however, was this: Thou didst destroy My house which I built so that Israel could fulfill My Torah, My Torah which the little ones of Israel received from Me, as is said *Out of the mouths of little ones and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength* (Ps. 8:3);¹⁴ therefore I shall also destroy what is thine. Thus a verse in another Psalm says, *Give them according to their deeds, and according to the evil of their en-*

deavours (Ps. 28:4); another, *Let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined* (Ps. 10:2); and still another, *The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands* (Ps. 9:17).

8. *Higgayon Selah*, at the end of the verse (Ps. 9:17), means that when the Lord wreaks vengeance upon the wicked we shall make melody¹⁵ before Him.

9. R. Akiba taught: The conclusion of the verse *Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure* (Isa. 5:14) is not to be read "opened her mouth without measure," but *opened her mouth to him who is without a measure*—that is, to a man who is without that one measure of goodness which might incline the scale of good works in his favor.¹⁶ But only in the world-to-come will it be so. In this world, however, though nine hundred and ninety-nine angels plead against a man and only one vouches for him—*If there be . . . an angel . . . one among a thousand, to vouch for a man's uprightness—then He . . . saith: "Deliver him from going down to the pit"* (Job 33:23-24).

10. *Now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites* (2 Sam. 21:2). Why did David expel the Gibeonites from among the children of Israel? Because *There was a famine . . . three years, year after year* (*ibid.* 21:1). Thereupon David said: Rains are withheld in punishment for four kinds of sin: the sin of idolatry, of unchastity, of bloodshed, and the sin of pledging gifts in public and not honoring the pledge. Concerning the sin of idolatry, it is written *Take heed to yourselves, lest . . . ye . . . serve other gods, and worship them*; and Scripture adds *And the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and He shut up the heaven, so that there shall be no rain* (Deut. 11:16-17). Concerning unchastity, it is said *Thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms*; and Scripture adds *Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there hath been no latter rain* (Jer. 3:2-3). Concerning bloodshed, it is said *Blood, it polluteth the land* (Num. 35:33).¹⁷ Concerning the pledging of gifts in public and not honoring the pledge, it is said *Vapors and wind, and rain there is none, because of him that boasteth him-*

self in a gift of falsehood (Prov. 25:14). Upon examining all the men of his generation and finding in them no such sins, David sought the advice of the Urim and Thummim, as is said *David sought the face of the Lord* (2 Sam. 21:1); and the Lord answered: *It is because of Saul, and because of his bloody house* (*ibid.*): *because of Saul*, meaning because you have not dealt kindly with Saul;¹⁸ and *because of his bloody house*, meaning, as the verse goes on to say, *because he slew the Gibeonites*. Whereupon David sent and called the Gibeonites together, and asked them: "What is it between you and the house of Saul?"¹⁹ They answered him: "Saul slew seven of us: two hewers of wood, two drawers of water, a court crier, a scrivener, and a handyman." David asked the Gibeonites: "What do you require?" They replied: "That seven of Saul's kindred be given over to us." David said to them: "And what benefit to you if seven of Saul's kindred be also slain? Take silver or gold for yourselves." But the Gibeonites replied: "*Between us and Saul it is no matter of silver or gold!*" (2 Sam. 21:4). David then said: "It may be that half of the Gibeonites do not yield for fear of the other half." Thereupon drawing each of the Gibeonites aside, he pleaded with one at a time, saying to each: "What benefit will it be to you if seven of Saul's kindred be also slain? Take silver or gold for yourselves." But each of the Gibeonites answered: "Between me and Saul it is no matter of silver or gold!"²⁰

11. Thereupon David said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, bestowed three goodly gifts upon the children of Israel: they have mercy, they have modesty, and they practice loving-kindness. Concerning their having mercy, it is said *The Lord . . . endow thee with mercy* (Deut. 13:18); concerning their having modesty, it is said *That the fear of Him may be in your faces, that ye sin not* (Ex. 20:17)—verily, the mark of the modest man is that he does not sin, for when a man has no shame, it is certain that his forebears did not stand on Mount Sinai—; concerning their practicing loving-kindness, it is said *The Lord thy God shall keep with thee the covenant of loving-kindness* (Deut. 7:12). But as for these Gibeonites, not one of these qualities is

in them!" Thereupon David rose up and expelled the Gibeonites from among the children of Israel, as is said *The Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites* (2 Sam. 21:2).

12. Come and see how much the Holy One, blessed be He, loves converts: not before he was ninety-nine years old did our father Abraham circumcise himself: Had Abraham been circumcised when he was but fifty or thirty, no gentile above thirty²¹ would have thought it possible to become a convert. Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, had Abraham wait until he reached the age of ninety-nine, in order to teach you that you ought not to bolt the door in the face of gentiles who come to be converted; and in order also for Him to give a reward for days and for years,²² and to increase the reward of those who do His will,²³ in keeping with the verse *The Lord . . . exalts those who obey His teachings and strengthens them* (Isa. 42:21).²⁴

13. So, too, you find that four companies testify and proclaim in the presence of Him who no sooner spoke than the world came into being: *One shall say: "I am the Lord's"; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel* (Isa. 44:5). Every man in one company *shall say, "I am the Lord's, and may no sin enmesh me"*; every man in another company *shall call himself by the name of Jacob*, this being the company of complete proselytes;²⁵ every man in yet another company *shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord*, this being the company of repentant sinners;²⁶ and every man in the last company *shall surname himself by the name of Israel*, this being the company of God-fearing gentiles.²⁷

14. As for the Gibeonites, however, David rose up and expelled them from among the children of Israel. For they had refused to call themselves by the name of Jacob, to whose sons it was said *God almighty endow you with mercy* (Gen. 43:14), and had shown no mercy to Saul's kindred. Hence it is said *The Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites* (2 Sam. 21:2). Ezra also expelled the Gibeonites

from among the children of Israel, as is said *The Nethinim*²⁸ *dwelt in Ophel*²⁹ (Neh. 11:21). Moreover, in the time-to-come the Holy One, blessed be He, will expel the Gibeonites out of all the tribes of Israel, as is said *And they that serve the city, out of all the tribes of Israel, shall continue to serve it* (*ya'abduhu*) (Ezek. 48:19). However, the [original] *kētiḥ*³⁰ of *ya'abduhu* ("shall continue to serve it") is *ye'abduhu* ("shall be expelled").

15. R. Eleazar said:³¹ The Holy Spirit showed itself in three courts of justice:³² in the court of Shem,³³ for it is said *Judah acknowledged them*,³⁴ and said: *She speaks the truth. [She is with child] because of me*³⁵ (Gen. 38:26). Is it not possible that Tamar did not speak the truth? For if Judah had gone in to her, another man might have gone in to her! It was a heavenly voice,³⁶ however, that uttered the words, *because of Me*—that is, it was My will that these deeds be kept secret.

16. The Holy Spirit showed itself in the court of Samuel, for it is said: *"Here I am; witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken? . . . Or whom have I defrauded? Or whom have I oppressed?" . . . And they said: "Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand." And he said unto them: "The Lord is witness against you . . . that ye have not found aught in my hand." And He said: "The Lord is a witness"* (1 Sam. 12:3-4). Why is it written *He said: "The Lord is a witness?"* Does not the context require *"And they said: The Lord is a witness?"* It was a heavenly voice, however, that came forth and said: *I am a witness for Samuel.*

17. The Holy Spirit also showed itself in the court of Solomon, for it is said *"Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof"* (1 Kings 3:27). [How did Solomon know? Is it not possible that the woman spoke craftily, so that Solomon should award the child to her?] ³⁸ It was a heavenly voice, however, that came forth and said: *"She is the mother thereof."*

18. Raba expounded:³⁹ At Sinai, six hundred and thirteen commandments were revealed to Moses; three hundred and sixty-five negative commandments, corresponding to the number of

days in the solar year, and two hundred and forty-eight positive commandments, corresponding to the number of organs in the body. R. Hamnuna said: What is the proof from Scripture? It is the verse *Moses commanded us Torah* (Deut. 33:4): The numerical value of the letters in the word *Torah* is six hundred and thirteen! But is not the numerical value of the letters in *Torah* only six hundred and eleven? ⁴⁰ Yes, but the two commandments *I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, and Thou shalt have no other Gods before Me* (Ex. 20:2-3), these we heard directly from the mouth of the Lord. R. Judah maintained, however, that the two commandments concerning circumcision and the observance of the Sabbath were given before the revelation of the Torah.⁴¹

19. When David came, he summed up the six hundred and thirteen commandments in eleven principles,⁴² for he said: *Lord, who shall abide in Thy Tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?* [I] *He that walketh uprightly*, [II] *and worketh righteousness*, [III] *and speaketh the truth from his heart*. [IV] *He that hath used no deceit in his tongue*, [V] *nor done evil to his neighbor*, [VI] *and hath not endured a reproach against his kinsman*. [VII] *In whose eyes a vile person is despised*; [VIII] *but he honoreth them that fear the Lord*. [IX] *He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not*. [X] *He that hath not given out his money upon usury*, [XI] *nor taken reward against the innocent*. *He that doeth these things shall never be moved* (Ps. 15). Now *He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness* applies to Abraham, to whom God said: "Walk before Me, and be thou upright" (Gen. 17:1). *And speaketh the truth from his heart* applies to such as R. Safra.⁴³ *He that hath used no deceit in his tongue* applies to Jacob, who said: "My father peradventure will feel me" (Gen. 27:12).⁴⁴ *Nor done evil to his neighbor* applies to a man who has not stolen away a neighbor's means of making a living. *And hath not endured a reproach against his kinsman* applies to one who has caused his kinsmen to come near him. Of this, R. Simon said: Come and see that the deeds of a mortal are not at all like the deeds of the Holy One, blessed be

He: when a mortal has a kinsman who is despised and poor, he denies him, but the Holy One, blessed be He, brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, out of the iron furnace, and yet called them "Children of Israel, a people near unto Him" (Ps. 148:14). *In whose eyes a vile person is despised* refers to Hezekiah, king of Judah, who ordered his own father's bones to be dragged on a pallet of ropes.⁴⁵ *But he honoreth them that fear the Lord* refers to Jehoshaphat who, whenever he saw a disciple of the wise, would stand up from his throne, embrace him, kiss him, and call him "My teacher, my master."⁴⁶ *He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not* applies to such as R. Johanan who used to say, "I shall continue fasting until I have read the weekly portion of Scripture." *He that hath not given out his money upon usury* applies to a man who does not lend out his money in usury even to a heathen.⁴⁷ *Nor taken reward against the innocent* applies to such as R. Ishmael ben R. Jose.⁴⁸

20. *He that doeth these things shall never be moved*: Does this mean that only he who does all these things shall not be moved, but that he who does only one of them shall be moved? No! The verse does not say, "He that doeth all these things," but *He that doeth these things*, implying that even he who does only one of them shall never be moved.⁴⁹

21. When Isaiah came, he summed up the six hundred and thirteen commandments in six principles, for Isaiah said: *Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?* (I) *He that walketh righteously*, (II) *and speaketh uprightly*; (III) *he that despiseth the gain of deceits*, (IV) *that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes*, (V) *that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood*, (VI) *and shutteth his eyes from looking upon evil*. *He shall dwell on high* (Isa. 33:14-16). *He that walketh righteously* refers to Abraham. *And speaketh uprightly* refers to a man who with his words will not provoke a neighbor. [*He that despiseth the gain of deceits* refers to such as R. Ishmael ben Elisha.⁵⁰ *That shaketh his hands from holding of bribes* refers to such as R. Ishmael ben R. Jose].⁵¹ *That stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood*

refers to a man who will not hear scholars defamed and remain silent. *And shutteth his eyes from looking upon evil* refers to a man who will not look upon women when they are doing the wash.⁵²

22. When Micah came, he summed up the six hundred and thirteen commandments in three principles, for he said: *It hath been told thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord doth require of thee: (I) Only to do justly, (II) and to love mercy, (III) and to humble thyself to walk with thy God* (Micah 6:8): *To do justly* refers to the maintaining of justice; *to love mercy* refers to the practice of loving-kindness; and *to humble thyself to walk with thy God* [applies even to walking in a funeral train or in a bridal procession].⁵³ Now if in commandments performed in public, such as dowering a bride, the Torah commands *humble thyself to walk with thy God*, how much more strongly does this precept apply to commandments performed in private.

23. Upon further meditation, Isaiah summed up the six hundred and thirteen commandments in two principles, when he said, *Thus saith the Lord: (I) Keep ye justice and (II) do righteousness* (Isa. 56:1).

24. When Amos came, he summed up the six hundred and thirteen commandments in one principle, for he said, *Thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel: Seek ye Me, and live* (Amos 5:4).

25. When Habakkuk came, he also summed up the six hundred and thirteen commandments in one principle, for he said: *The righteous shall live by his faith* (Hab. 2:2, 4).

PSALM EIGHTEEN

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David the servant of the Lord, who spoke unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord delivered him* (Ps. 18:1). The words *song in the day that the Lord delivered him* are to be read in the light of the verse *The day is Thine, the night also is Thine* (Ps. 74:16). R. Yudan taught in the name of R. Judah: All that David said in his Book of Psalms applies to himself, to all Israel, and to all the ages.¹ And so in the verse above David is saying to God: Master of the world! Thou didst miracles for us in the night, and we sang a song to Thee in the night, as *In the night His song shall be with me* (Ps. 42:9), and also *Ye shall have a song as in the night when a feast is hallowed* (Isa. 30:29); Thou didst miracles for us in the day, and we sang a song to Thee in the day, as in *A Psalm of David . . . who spoke unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord delivered him*.

2. In another comment, these words are read *For the leader. A Psalm of David . . . who spoke unto the Lord the words of this song all the day*; elsewhere Scripture says, *My mouth shall tell of Thy righteousness, and of Thy salvation all the day* (Ps. 71:15). You will find that in his praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, David did not omit mention of any part of the body: With his head, David praised God, saying: *Thou anointest my head with oil* (Ps. 23:6); with his eyes, David praised God, saying: *Mine eyes are ever turned toward the Lord* (Ps. 25:15); with his mouth, David praised God, saying: *My mouth shall tell of Thy righteousness* (Ps. 71:15); with his ears, David praised God, saying: *Mine ears hast Thou opened* (Ps. 40:7); with his throat, for he said: *I am weary with my crying; my throat is dried* (Ps. 69:4); with his tongue, for he said: *My tongue shall speak of Thy righteousness . . . all the day long* (Ps. 35:28); with his lips, for he said: *My lips shall utter praise* (Ps. 119:171); with his heart, for he said: *My heart overfloweth with a goodly matter* (Ps. 45:2);² with his reins, for he said: *Yea, my reins shall rejoice* (Prov. 23:16); with his hands, for he said: *I stretch forth my hands unto Thee* (Ps. 143:6); with his feet, for he said: *My foot standeth in an*

even place; in the congregations will I bless the Lord (Ps. 26:12); with his inmost parts, for he said: *Yea, Thy law is in my inmost parts* (Ps. 40:9); and finally, with all the parts of his body together, for he said: *All my bones shall say: "Lord, who is like unto Thee"* (Ps. 35:10). With his soul, also, David praised God, for he said: *Bless the Lord, O my soul* (Ps. 103:1); and with his breath, for he said: *Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord* (Ps. 150:6). And at the last, David said: Even though I praised Thee with all these, I must needs praise Thee more, as is said *My mouth shall tell of Thy righteousness; and of Thy salvation all the day* (Ps. 71:15). Hence it is said *A Psalm of David who spoke unto the Lord the words of this song all the day*.

3. A further comment on *For the leader. A Psalm of David the servant of the Lord*: Why did David presume to call himself *servant of the Lord*? To prove that when a man repents of a sin which enmeshed him, the Holy One, blessed be He, heaps honors upon him and bestows upon him the name "beloved." Come, see the truth of this in the story of Korah's sons. Before they repented they were not called *Shoshannim*; but after despairing of the deed of their father and repenting, they were called *Shoshannim* ("lilies"),³ as is said *For the leader; upon Shoshannim, for the sons of Korah* (Ps. 45:1). So it was with David: You find that before he repented of that deed of his,⁴ his name was not written among the host of heaven; but after he repented, his name was written among the host of heaven, and he could call himself *servant of the Lord*.

4. Another comment on *For the leader. A Psalm of David the servant of the Lord*. You find in Scripture that whenever a man calls himself a servant, the Holy One, blessed be He, also calls him a servant: Abraham called himself a servant, for he said, *My Lord . . . pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant* (Gen. 18:3); and the Holy One, blessed be He, called Abraham a servant, as is said *For My servant Abraham's sake* (Gen. 26:24). Jacob called himself a servant, for he said, *O God . . . I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies . . . which Thou hast shown unto Thy servant* (Gen. 32:11); and the Holy One, blessed

be He, called Jacob a servant, as is said *Fear not, O Jacob My servant* (Isa. 44:2). Moses called himself a servant, for he said, *O Lord God, Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness* (Deut. 3:24); and the Holy One, blessed be He, called Moses a servant, as is said *My servant Moses is not so* (Num. 12:7). David called himself a servant, for he said, *O Lord, truly I am Thy servant, I am Thy servant* (Ps. 116:16); and the Holy One, blessed be He, called David a servant, as is written *By the hand of My servant David I will save My people Israel* (2 Sam. 3:18). There are some also who did not call themselves servants, but whom, nevertheless, the Holy One, blessed be He, called servants: Isaac did not call himself a servant, but the Holy One, blessed be He, called Isaac a servant, as is written *Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Thy servants* (Ex. 32:13); Joshua did not call himself a servant, but the Holy One, blessed be He, called Joshua a servant, as is written *It came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died* (Josh. 24:29). In truth, there were many men like Saul, Elijah, Elisha, and more besides, who did not call themselves servant, but whom, nevertheless, the Holy One, blessed be He, called servants. On the other hand, there were those who called themselves servants, but whom the Holy One, blessed be He, did not call servants: Solomon called himself a servant, for he said, *O Lord my God . . . give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart* (1 Kings 3:9); and Daniel also, for he said, *Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of Thy servant* (Dan. 9:17); but the Holy One, blessed be He, did not call them servants.⁵

5. *A Psalm of David . . . who spoke unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord delivered him from all his enemies.* What is meant by the phrase *this song*? R. Yudan explained it by citing from another Psalm, *I am as a sign unto many* (Ps. 71:7), by which David meant: I sang no song until I was reviled, until four giants fell by my hand, yea, until the fourth of them fell by my hand, the one who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot; so the children of Israel will not sing a song to Thee, until they will have been reviled, until four giant

kingdoms will have fallen by their hand, yea, until there will have fallen by their hand that kingdom whose men have six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot.

And what is the evidence for this parallel? David was reviled by Goliath who also reviled the children of Israel while he was cursing David; then Goliath fell by David's hand; so, too, the fourth one fell, who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, as it is written *There was the man Madon,⁶ that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number . . . And . . . Jonathan the brother of David slew him* (2 Sam. 21:20-21); and four giants fell by the hand of David, as it is written *These four were born to Orpah⁷ in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants* (2 Sam. 21:22); and following this, *David spoke unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies* (2 Sam. 22:1).

Likewise, when the Messiah comes—may it be soon and in our own days—the children of Israel will not sing this song until the Messiah will have been reviled, of whom it is said *Thine enemies . . . O Lord . . . have reviled the footsteps of Thine anointed* (Ps. 89:52); will not sing it until by his hand there will have fallen that kingdom whose men have six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, these being men of wicked Rome, of which it is said *The toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay* (Dan. 2:42); will not sing it accordingly until there will have fallen four sovereign nations by the Messiah's hand, for it is said *I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle* (Zech. 14:2), and directly after, it is said *The Lord shall go forth and fight against those nations* (Zech. 14:3). Then will the children of Israel sing this song: *O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvellous things* (Ps. 98:1).

6. Another comment on *this song*. R. Simon said: A man is not permitted to sing this song whenever he wishes to sing it. But when a miracle is done for him, he is permitted to sing this song; then he may be sure that his sins will be forgiven him, and that he will be as if created anew. Thus, when a miracle was done

for the children of Israel, they were permitted to sing this song, for it is said *Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord* (Ex. 15:1). Thereupon all their sins were forgiven, for it is said at the song's end that *Moses took Israel away from the Red Sea* (Ex. 15:22). This is to say that Moses took the children of Israel away from the sin which they had continued in even at the Red Sea, as it is said 'Our fathers understood not Thy wonders in Egypt . . . the multitude of Thy mercies, but were rebellious . . . even at the Red Sea' (Ps. 106:7).⁸ You find also that a miracle was done for Israel in the days of Barak and Deborah, and then they were permitted to sing this song, for it is said *Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying . . . Bless ye the Lord* (Judg. 5:1, 2c). And the proof that the children of Israel were then forgiven their sins? The end of Deborah's song: *And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord* (Judg. 6:1). Of this verse R. Abbahu said: "Repeatedly it is written in Judges *The children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord* (Judg. 3:12, 4:1, 10:6, and 13:1); yet the end of Deborah's song reads *The children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*, as if to say that the beginning of their evil-doing came in the days of Deborah. But what of the evil they had done in earlier days? To this Scripture replies that on the day the children of Israel were permitted to sing this song with Deborah, the Holy One, blessed be He, forgave them." Of David also it is said that after a miracle was done for him, he was permitted to sing this song. And the proof that the evil which David had done was forgiven him? The song's end, where it is written *These are the later doings of David . . . the man who was raised up by means of repentance* (2 Sam. 23:1).⁹ And what of the evil which David had done formerly? To this Scripture replies that the Holy One, blessed be He, forgave David his earlier evil-doing.

In the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul (Ps. 18:1). Does this mean that on one and the same day God delivered David from the hand of all his enemies as well as from the hand of Saul? No.

The text implies that in the balance Saul's enmity was equal to all of David's enemies and troubles together. For when one Jew brings another Jew into court he is harder on him than are our enemies among the gentiles. As Scripture says, *Among my people are found wicked men; they set a trap, they catch men* (Jer. 5:26). So in the story of Samson, it was only after he said to the men of Judah *Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves* (Judg. 15:12), that he let them bind him.¹⁰ And Solomon said: *A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city* (Prov. 18:19).

7. *And he said: 'Erhamēka* ("I love Thee"), *O Lord, my strength* (Ps. 18:2). In the Aramaic version this reads "*Rahamit* ('I love') Thee, O Lord, my strength."¹¹ *Rhm* in Aramaic clearly means "to love," for in the Aramaic Targum the term *love* in *Thou shalt love*¹² *the Lord thy God* (Deut. 6:5) is also rendered *rhm*.

'*Erhamēka* may also be understood as "I call Thee compassionate (*rahum*) and gracious." Or: "I fill Thee with compassion (*rahāmim*) for Thy creatures." Or: "I make Thee loved by Thy creatures."¹³

R. Nehemiah said in the name of R. Simeon ben Lakish: David wished to use a single word which would include all the following meanings,¹⁴ such [as "rock," "fortress," "deliverer"], and so the Holy Spirit told David: Use the word *strength*.¹⁵

The Lord is my rock and my fortress (Ps. 18:3). *My rock*: my mountain fastness.¹⁶ *And my fortress*: Thou art my fortress because in Thy name I sally forth to capture the wicked.

What prompted David to praise God as a *rock*? Surely because a miracle was done for David at a rock, as it is said *David came down into a rock . . . And . . . Saul . . . pursued after David . . . and David made haste to get away . . . for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about . . . But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying: "Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land." Wherefore Saul . . . went against the Philistines; therefore they called that place "The Rock of Divisions"* (1 Sam. 23:25-28). R. Abba took the phrase *Saul*

and his men compassed David . . . round about to mean that Saul and his men encompassed David as a crown encompasses a man's head; but R. Yannai took it to mean that Saul and his men encompassed David as with a helmet.¹⁷

And David made haste implies that when David found himself hard pressed by Saul, he said: "In vain did Samuel anoint me and say to me 'The Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over His inheritance' (1 Sam. 10:1). Where now is Samuel's anointing? Where now is Samuel's promise?" David was referring to these questions when he declared, "I said in my haste: 'All men are liars'" (Ps. 116:11). To his questions the Holy One, blessed be He, replied: Callest thou Samuel liar? I bear witness of Samuel that he is trustworthy, for it is said "All Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was trustworthy as a prophet of the Lord" (1 Sam. 3:20).

But there came a messenger unto Saul (1 Sam. 23:27). Rabbi took *messenger* to refer to a messenger from heaven above, since David says, "He sent from above, He took me" (Ps. 18:17). But R. Yudan maintained that the messenger was an ordinary courier. R. Phinehas, however, said to R. Yudan: Would an ordinary courier have presumed to give a king counsel? Yet he said to Saul: *Haste thee, and come* (1 Sam. 23:27). And so he must have been a messenger from heaven above.

Therefore they called that place "The Rock of Divisions" (1 Sam. 23:28). Why was the place called *Rock of Divisions*? R. Samuel bar Nahmani said: The rock was so called because there Saul's mighty men were divided concerning David,¹⁸ some saying, "Now that the son of Jesse is in our hands, let us not turn away from him," others saying, "Israel's war comes first! This son of Jesse can always be found." R. Eliezer said: The rock was so called because it was divided completely from end to end, Saul and his mighty men standing on one part, and David and his men on the other part. To this division David refers in saying: *It is He that giveth salvation unto kings* (Ps. 144:10)—salvation to two kings, Saul and David; Saul who was delivered from the shedding of blood;¹⁹ and David who was delivered from the

sword of Saul, as is said *Who delivereth David His servant from the hurtful sword* (Ps. 144:10).

Another comment on *Therefore they called that place "The Rock of Divisions."* Whenever David and his troops passed the place where the miracle was done for him and his men, he would separate from his troops, he and the six hundred men who had been with him. Then, dismounting from their horses, they would bow down and fall upon their faces and say "Blessed is He who hath done miracles for us in this place."²⁰ Now the troops standing apart did not say this blessing, not having been with David at the time of the miracle; and so in that place the soldiers were divided from each other. Therefore, *They called that place "The Rock of Divisions."*

8. *My God, my Rock in whom I take refuge* (Ps. 18:3). The Rabbis said that David sang [a verse containing] ten words of praise to the Lord concerning ten enemies who fell by his hand: Saul, Doeg,²¹ Ahithophel, Sheba the son of Bichri, Shimei the son of Gera, Shobach, Goliath and his three brothers of whom it is said *These four were born to the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David* (2 Sam. 21:22).²² Five were of the nations of the earth, and five were of Israel. Concerning the ten, David sang [a verse containing] ten words of praise to the Lord: *O Lord, my Strength, my Rock, my Fortress, my Deliverer, my Rock in whom I take refuge, my Shield, the Horn of my salvation* (Ps. 18:2-3), and *my Refuge* (2 Sam. 22:3).

R. Judah said: Because David acknowledged God's gifts with ten words of praise in [one verse in] this Psalm, so at the end of the Book of Psalms in the Psalm *Hallelujah—Praise God in His sanctuary*, David returned thanks to God with ten exclamations of praise, the word *Hallelujah* being repeated ten times.

My Shield: Even as the blessing "Shield of Abraham" is said in the Eighteen Benedictions,²³ so is the blessing "Shield of David" said immediately after the lesson from the Prophets.²⁴

Horn of my salvation implies that the anointing oil flowing of itself came down over David.²⁵

9. *I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so*

shall I be saved from mine enemies (Ps. 18:4): "I call Thee One worthy of praise, and thereupon am saved from mine enemies."

R. Yudan said: Transpose the two halves of the verse *So shall I be saved from mine enemies: I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised*, and interpret them thus: "After Thou savest me from mine enemies, I sing Thee praise."

R. Huna bar Aḥa said: David spoke these words concerning Jehoshaphat, who *appointed singers unto the Lord, and praisers . . . And after they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set liers-in-wait against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, that were come against Judah; and they were smitten* (2 Chron. 20:21-22). This is to say that before the enemies set upon him, Jehoshaphat sang a song unto the Lord; and thereupon the enemies were smitten before him.²⁶

10. *The sorrows of death compassed me* ('āfafuni) (Ps. 18:5). What is the literal meaning of 'āfafuni? It means "Waves of sorrow have come up to the mouth";²⁷ or, in another sense, "Waves of sorrow have come up to the nose."²⁸

A different meaning: Do not read 'āfafuni but 'āfafuni—that is, sorrows, swift-flying, swoop down like birds of prey upon me. 'Āfafuni is here derived from 'of, "bird," as in the verse *Let birds fly (yē'ofef) above the earth* (Gen. 1:20).

Another meaning: Sorrows come rolling over me like solid wheels ('ofan) or spoked ones.

Another meaning of 'āfafuni: Rab said that it means "I am seized (*epiponos*)²⁹ by sorrows." But R. Aḥa said that it means "I turn (*panah*) here and there, and there is no redeemer except Thee."

Another meaning of 'āfafuni: "As a woman weaves a garment using double threads, the thick weave being called 'āfafon, just so," said David, "'Āfafuni!—Sorrows thick as a weaver's webs enmesh me!"³⁰ Here David is alluding to the four kingdoms: by *sorrows of death*, he means the kingdom of Babylon; by *floods of Belial*, the kingdom of Media and Persia; by *corde of Sheol*, the kingdom of Greece; and by *snares of death*, the kingdom of Edom.

Why does David use two words to describe each kingdom? Because each attacked Israel from all sides, for it is said they *compassed me, assailed me, surrounded me, confronted me* (Ps. 18:5,6). In the two words David also referred to the two names each kingdom bore. Thus in *death's sorrows*, he referred to Babylon and Chaldea; in *Belial's floods*, to Media and Persia; in *Sheol's cords*, to Greece and Macedon; in *death's snares*, to Ishmael and Edom.

The Rabbis asked: In *death's sorrows* and *death's snares* describing the first exile and the fourth exile, why does David use the word 'death' of both? Because one kingdom destroyed the first Temple, and the other destroyed the second Temple.

R. Abba bar Kahana said: Because one kingdom decreed persecution, and the other also decreed persecution.

11. David was referring to Babylon in saying, *In my distress I called upon the Lord* (Ps. 18:7); to Media and Persia,³¹ in saying, *And cried unto my God (ibid.)*; to Greece in *He heard my voice out of His Temple (ibid.)*; and to Edom in *My cry came before Him, even into His ears (ibid.)*.

God said: Because the men of Edom forced Israel to renounce the Torah, of which it is written *Thou shalt meditate therein day and night* (Josh. 1:8), therefore I shall punish Edom with fire, as is said *Edom . . . shall become burning pitch . . . the smoke thereof shall go up for ever* (Isa. 34:9-10). Moreover, because the men of Edom burned the Temple from which smoke came forth, as is said *The house was filled with smoke* (Isa. 6:4), therefore the words *A voice from the Temple* (Isa. 66:6) imply that God said to Edom: Do you not remember what you did in My Temple? Hear the *voice of the Lord that rendereth recompense to His enemies (ibid.)*.

R. Phinehas and R. Aḥa asked in the name of R. Ḥama bar Ḥanina: Why did David in speaking of the third kingdom mention the Temple of the Lord?³² Because the Temple remained standing during all the days of Greece. And why did David in speaking of the first kingdom, say *In my distress* and not "In my distresses?" Because all the Prophets when they

speak of the distresses of Israel speak of them in the singular, and thereby make them less distressing. Thus Moses said, *In thy distress when all these things are come upon thee* (Deut. 4:30); Jeremiah said, *Behold, O Lord, for I am in distress* (Lam. 1:20); David said, *He looked upon their distress* (Ps. 106:44); and David said again, *In my distress I called unto the Lord* (Ps. 120:1).

R. Judah proved from another passage in Scripture that it was ordained for the Temple to remain standing in the days of Greece. For by *lion* in *If a man did flee from a lion* (Amos 5:19), Scripture means Babylon, of which it is said "The first was like a lion" (Dan. 7:4); and by *bear* in *and a bear met him* (Amos 5:19), Scripture means Media and Persia, of which it is said "Behold another beast, a second, like to a bear" (Dan. 7:5); and by *house* in *and went into the house* (Amos 5:19), Scripture means the kingdom of Greece, in whose days the Temple remained standing. (The Greeks were not vexed because the Temple continued to stand; indeed, when they saw Simon the Just,³³ they would rise up in respect before him.) And by *serpent* in *and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him* (Amos 5:19), Scripture means Rome the wicked, of which it is said "The voice thereof shall go like a serpent" (Jer. 46:22).

R. Judah drew similar proof from still another passage: *Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night* (Song 5:2). By *sister*, Scripture means the congregation of Israel in Babylon who were in close kinship³⁴ with Torah. By *love*, Scripture means Israel in Media and Persia who were lovers of Torah. By *dove*, Scripture means Israel in Greece. Why does Scripture call Israel in Greece *dove*? Because the Temple continuing to stand, turtle doves and doves were offered on the altar. By *undefiled*, Scripture means Israel in Edom. Why does Scripture call Israel in Edom *undefiled*? Because attaching themselves to the Holy One, blessed be He, they gave up their lives for the hallowing of the Name; and thus, in spite

of many persecutions decreed against the children of Israel, they stood undefiled.³⁵

In *My head is filled with dew* (Song 5:2), Scripture is alluding to the time of the Messiah, when, as the dead come back to life, the Messiah will be told "Thy dew is as the dew of light, and the earth shall bring to life the shades" (Isa. 26:19). And in the following phrase, *My locks with the drops of the night* (Song 5:2), Scripture is alluding to the tears of those who will return from exiles dark as night—those who, it is said, "shall come with weeping" (Jer. 31:9).

12. *Then the earth shook and trembled* (Ps. 18:8). R. Samuel bar Naḥmani taught: Why do earthquakes come? Because of the chaos between [the fall of] one kingdom and [the rise of] another. As Scripture says, *And the earth shall tremble and shake: for every purpose of the Lord shall be performed against Babylon, to make the land of Babylon a desolation* (Jer. 51:29).

Elijah, ever remembered on good occasions, asked R. Nehorai: Why do earthquakes come? R. Nehorai replied: Because of the desecration of tithes: they are not rightly tithed nor set aside as they ought to be. Elijah said: Upon thy life, what thou sayest is vulgar opinion;³⁶ the root of the matter is³⁷ this: when the Holy One, blessed be He, looks upon His earth and sees theaters and circuses, sees the nations of the earth living in ease while the holy habitation is in ruins, then His wrath is kindled against His earth, and He seeks to destroy it. Then *The Lord roars from on high, and utters His voice because of His holy habitation* (Jer. 25:30). Thus, it is because of His holy habitation that *the earth shook and trembled* (Ps. 18:8).

R. Aḥa said: Earthquakes come because of pederasty.³⁸ For the Holy One, blessed be He, says, "Thou usest thy member in a manner unnatural to thee, and so because of thee I shake My earth, above and below."

The Rabbis, however, maintained that earthquakes come because of strife among men, as is said *Ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains . . . yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake* (Zech. 14:5).³⁹

Nevertheless, R. Samuel bar Nahmani insisted: The word "shaking" clearly refers to the chaos between kingdoms [as they rise and fall], for it is said *The earth shall tremble and shake* (Jer. 51:29). Wherefore? Because *Every purpose of the Lord shall be performed against Babylon* (*ibid.*).

Elijah, ever remembered on good occasions,⁴⁰ also asked R. Nehorai: Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, create animals and reptiles that are forbidden as food? R. Nehorai replied: When mortals sin, the Holy One, blessed be He, even as He looks at animals and reptiles, says: "If I preserve these for which there is no need, how much more ought I to preserve those for whom there is need, and who, upon repenting, become wholly righteous." But Elijah said: For these also there is need: the fly, against the hornet's sting;⁴¹ the bedbug, against [a swallowed] leech;⁴² the snake, against scabs; the snail, against lichen;⁴³ and the [crushed] spider, against the scorpion's bite.

13. Another comment on *The earth shook and trembled*. You find that when Moses went up to heaven and was delayed there, Israel made the golden calf, and five angels of punishment confronted him.⁴⁴ Thereupon Moses was frightened and began to pray for Israel, and thus turned 'Af, the angel of anger, away from Israel. Then he came down, as is said *Moses turned, and went down from the mount* (Ex. 32:15). What do the words *Moses turned* mean? R. Isaac said: Moses did not stir thence until he had turned away every face of wrath, even though, as it is written in the Book of Psalms, *The earth shook and trembled, the foundations . . . were shaken, because He was wroth. There went up a smoke out of His nostrils* (Ps. 18:8-9).

And when was it that God bowed the heavens, and He made him to go down (Ps. 18:10)? When *Moses turned, and went down from the mount* (Ex. 32:15). This happened in the period between the Festival of Weeks and the seventeenth day in Tammuz.

One⁴⁵ verse declares *Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven* (Ex. 20:19), but another reads *The Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mount* (Ex. 19:20). How can

both statements stand? Because a third reconciles them: *Out of heaven He made thee to hear His voice, that He might instruct thee; and upon earth He made thee see His great fire* (Deut. 4:36). Such was R. Ishmael's opinion. But R. Akiba maintained: The two verses prove that the Holy One, blessed be He, made the upper heavens bow down to the top of the mount, and it was thus that He spoke to Israel from heaven, as is said *He bowed the heavens . . . and came down* (Ps. 18:10).

14. *And He rode upon a cherub, and did fly* (Ps. 18:11). As Pharaoh was going forth to pursue the children of Israel, Pharaoh said: "Give me a stallion to ride upon." [Why a stallion?] Because he is swift. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? Over against Pharaoh, He caused a phantom stallion to appear and rode it Himself, as is said *Thou didst tread the sea with Thy stallions* (Hab. 3:15), and again *Thou didst ride upon Thy stallions* (Hab. 3:8). Pharaoh tried again, saying: "Give me a mare that can stand up to the battle." (Why a mare? Because a stallion, when he needs to make water, stops, and so delays, but a mare going into battle, makes water on the run). Then God said: "I shall make a phantom mare appear before Pharaoh, [and I will ride it Myself]," as is said *My mare against Pharaoh's chariots* (Song 1:9). Pharaoh tried again; he took arrows and scattered them against Israel; but the Holy One, blessed be He, brought fiery arrows and scattered them against Pharaoh, as is said *He sent out His arrows, and scattered them* (Ps. 18:15). Pharaoh tried again, and brought flashing weapons of steel; but the Holy One, blessed be He, brought flashing lightnings, as is said *He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them* (Ps. 18:15), that is, confounded the Egyptians and brought chaos among them; He took their battle standards⁴⁶ away, and they did not know what to do. And the pillar of cloud came down and turned the roads into mud and into all kinds of mire, and the pillar of fire made all things boil, so that the hoofs of their horses were entangled. Pharaoh tried again and brought up catapults to throw stones; and the Holy One, blessed be He, threw hailstones, as is said *The Most High gave forth . . . hailstones* (Ps. 18:14).

Pharaoh tried again and brought all kinds of missiles; but the Holy One, blessed be He, brought fiery coals, as is said *The Most High gave forth . . . coals of fire (ibid.)*. Pharaoh then sought to hearten his hosts with all kinds of horns and bugles, clarions and trumpets; but the Holy One, blessed be He, heartened His hosts with His voice, as is said *The Lord also thundered in the heavens; and the Most High gave forth His voice (Ps. 18:14)*.

When Pharaoh had finished trying all that he knew, and had nothing left in his hands, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "O wicked one, thou hast been spattering Me!" R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Eleazar: The Holy One, blessed be He, now riding upon a cherub, as is said *He rode upon a cherub (Ps. 18:11)*, asked Pharaoh: "O wicked one, perchance thou hast a cherub?" The Holy One, blessed be He, now flying, as is said *He . . . did fly (Ps. 18:11)*, asked Pharaoh: "O wicked one, perchance thou canst fly?" The Holy One, blessed be He, now moving from wing to wing of the wind, as is said *He did swoop down upon the wings of the wind (ibid.)*, asked Pharaoh: "O wicked one, perchance thou canst do this?"

Another comment on *He did swoop down upon the wings of the wind*. R. Judah said: The wind goes forth only from between the wings of the heavenly creatures,⁴⁷ as is said *He did swoop down upon the wings of the wind*.

15. Another comment on *He rode upon a cherub*. R. Aḥa told a parable of a king to whom it happened that kidnappers came and led away his son. As the king's servants made ready a coach to pursue the kidnappers, the king said: "If I wait for the coach to be made ready for me, my son will perish." What did the king do? He unhitched a horse from the coach and pursued the kidnappers. Just so did the Holy One, blessed be He. Out of the throne of glory He took a cherub and rode upon it and made war against Pharaoh and against Egypt, as is said *He rode upon a cherub, and did fly*. Whence did God take the cherub? From between the wheels of the chariot.⁴⁸

R. Ḥanina bar Papa said: A mortal, when carrying a burden,

is underneath it, but the Holy One, blessed be He, is above his burden, as is said *The eternal God is Thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms* (Deut. 33:27).

The Psalm says, *He did swoop down upon the wings of the wind*; but the corresponding verse in Samuel reads *He was seen upon the wings of the wind* (2 Sam. 22:11). From this it follows that God has many worlds, and can be seen in them all as He swoops down upon the wings of the cherubim.

16. *He made darkness His hiding-place* (Ps. 18:12). Whence did God bring darkness upon the Egyptians? From the darkness which is in His hiding-place. R. Eliezer said: From the darkness which is in Gehenna, *A land of thick darkness, as darkness itself* (Job 10:22).

His pavilion round about Him were dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies (Ps. 18:12). R. Eliezer⁴⁹ said: "The earth drinks only from the waters of the Great Sea."⁵⁰ R. Joshua asked: "But the waters of the Great Sea, are they not salty?" and R. Eliezer replied: The waters of the sea are made sweet in the clouds, as is said *The clouds . . . distill* (Job 36:28). Where are the waters of the sea distilled? In the clouds!

But R. Joshua maintained: The earth drinks from the upper waters, as is said *The earth . . . drinketh water of the rain of heaven* (Deut. 11:11). The clouds, rising up from earth to heaven, take water as from a gourd's mouth, for it is written *As from a gourd they gather water out of His vapor* (Job 36:27).⁵¹ They distill drops as through a sieve, so that not one drop touches another, as is said *Distilling waters from the thick clouds* (2 Sam. 22:12).⁵²

R. Abba said: Clouds, as they pour their waters from one to the other, work like the small bowels of a beast.

R. Simeon ben Laḳish taught: Why are clouds called *šēḥaḳim* ["grinders"]? Because they grind against one another.⁵³

R. Johanan said: In heaven, miracles are continually worked! If a man take up a little sieve and pour water from a height of two or three fingers, the drops will mingle with one another be-

fore the water falls; but rain falls a five hundred years' journey, and yet not one of the drops mingles with another. Of this it is written *He giveth food as through a sieve* (Job 36:31).⁵⁴

R. Judah bar Ezekiel said: At the falling of rain, my father used to recite the benediction: "May the Name of the Holy One, praised be He, be blessed and hallowed, for rain is made of thousands upon thousands and myriads upon myriads of drops, separated by as little as a hairsbreadth, and yet one drop does not touch another, as is said *He draweth drops of water away* (Job 36:27)."

R. Hiyya bar Abba and the Rabbis differed: One said: Dark clouds, much water, as is said *Dark waters, thick clouds of the skies* (Ps. 18:12). But another said: Light clouds, much water,⁵⁵ as is said *He scattereth His bright cloud* (Job. 37:11).

R. Simeon ben Lakish said: Clouds rise up from the earth, for it is said *There went up a mist from the earth* (Gen. 2:6). The Psalm speaks of *Dark waters and thick clouds of the skies* (Ps. 18:12), and the corresponding verse in Samuel speaks of *Distilling of waters* (2 Sam. 22:12); and so it is implied that as clouds take up the waters, they grow dark with the waters, and then distill them upon the earth.⁵⁶ Hence the two phrases *Dark waters* and *Distilling of waters*.

17. *At the brightness that was before Him, His thick clouds passed* (Ps. 18:13): When a wind blows and the brightness of the sun shines out, His clouds pass away.

R. Yudan said in the name of R. Abba: When the Holy One, blessed be He, was about to make war against the Egyptians at the Red Sea, the ministering angels came to help Him: some came with swords, others came bearing bows, and others came bearing spears. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "I have no need of you! Go hence!" At that instant *His thick clouds passed*.⁵⁷

R. Judah the Prince said: A mortal king when going out to war takes all his troops with him, but when going to his May festival takes only his body-guard to wait upon him. But the Holy One, blessed be He, when He goes out to war, goes alone, as is said *The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is His name* (Ex.

15:3); but when He goes to His May festival, the giving of Torah, note what Scripture says: *The chariots of God are . . . many thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place* (Ps. 68:18), and also *The Lord my God shall come, and all the holy ones with Thee* (Zech. 14:5).

18. *The Lord also thundered in the heavens* (Ps. 18:14). R. Abba said: The Holy One, blessed be He, promised Israel that at their entrance into the Land there would be three battles in which their enemies would be discomfited, for it is said *I will send My terror before thee, and will discomfit all the people to whom thou shalt come* (Ex. 23:27); and it is said *The Lord thy God shall deliver them up before thee, and shall discomfit them with a great discomfiture* (Deut. 7:23)—the repetition of “discomfit” implying the two other battles.

The Rabbis arrived at this conclusion because of the verses *The Lord discomfited them before Israel* (Isa. 10:10), *The Lord discomfited Sisera* (Judg. 4:15), and *The Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them* (1 Sam. 7:10).

R. Simon added two other references to discomfitures: *The Lord . . . shot out lightnings and discomfited them* (Ps. 18:14); and again *It shall come to pass that a great tumult from the Lord shall be among them* (Zech. 14:13).⁵⁸

Moreover, R. Simon said in the name of R. Abba: In time gone by one discomfiture was done to Pharaoh, and in time-to-come one shall be done to Gog and Magog.⁵⁹

19. *Then the channels of waters appeared* (Ps. 18:16). You find that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: *Lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the sea, and divide it* (Ex. 14:16). Then all fountains of the deep, all springs of water, and all pools on the earth were divided; and in that same moment, water even in jugs, in vats, in gourds, and in all manner of vessels on the earth was divided and split apart. Hence it is said in Samuel *The channels of the sea appeared* (2 Sam. 22:16), and in Psalms *The channels of waters appeared, and the foundations of the world were laid open* (Ps. 18:16), *foundations of the*

world referring to waters in the sea, in the rivers, and in the deeps.

R. Yudan said: *The waters saw Thee, O God* (Ps. 77:17) refers to the upper waters; and *the waters saw Thee, they were afraid* (*ibid.*) refers to the lower waters.

At Thy rebuke, O Lord (Ps. 18:16b). R. Hanina said: Scripture does not mean "at Thine actual smiting," but *At the blast of the breath of Thy nostrils* (*ibid.*), as it is said *Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them* (Ex. 15:10).⁶⁰

20. *He sent from on high, He took me* (Ps. 18:17). R. Yudan said: When the last of the children of Israel came up out of the sea, the last of the Egyptians went down into the sea.

R. Yudan also taught: How did the feeble among the children of Israel come up? The Holy One, blessed be He, reached out His hand—if one dare speak thus—and drew them out of the waters of the sea, as is said *He drew me out of many waters* (*ibid.*).

R. Simeon ben Lakish said: The waters of the sea whelmed the one as well as the other. What did the Holy One, blessed be He do? His right hand delivered the children of Israel and His right hand also sank the Egyptians: For it is said *Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power* (Ex. 15:6) for Israel; *Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy* (*ibid.*): the Egyptians.

R. Simeon ben Lakish again said: The foremost of the Egyptians also reached dry ground and sought to go further; but the Holy One, blessed be He, brought the sea upon them, and it pursued and covered them, as is said *The Lord . . . brought the sea upon them, and covered them* (Josh. 24:7).⁶¹

21. *He delivered me from my strong enemy* (Ps. 18:18). In R. Simon's exposition of the passage, *In the third month after the children of Israel were gone forth* (Ex. 19:1 ff.), he began thus:⁶² *He delivered me from my strong enemy*, that is, from Pharaoh, of whom it is written "The enemy said: I will pursue . . . my hand shall destroy them" (Ex. 15:9); [*He delivered me . . .*] *from them that hated me, for they were too mighty for me* (Ps. 18:18), that is, from the Egyptians. *They came upon me in the*

day of my calamity (ibid. 18:19): They, that is Amalek, who, it is said "came upon thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee . . . when thou wast faint and weary" (Deut. 25:18). But the Lord was my stay (Ps. 18:19): "When Moses' hands were heavy . . . Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands . . . and his hands were steady"⁶³ . . . And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword" (Ex. 17:12-13).

He brought me forth also into a large place (Ps. 18:20)—that is, He gave me the Torah which is called a large place because "The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (Job 11:9). He delivered me, because He delighted in me (Ps. 18:20b): He delivered me from the plague, and forgave me the sin of the golden calf.

The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness (Ps. 18:21)—that is, rewarded the tribe of Levi which had no part in that sin. What can be meant by According to the choice⁶⁴ of my hands hath He recompensed me (ibid.)? R. Phinehas explained that the tribe of Levi said: God recompensed me according to the choice my hands made. For at the making of the golden calf, I . . . kept the ways of the Lord (Ps. 18:22). And I have not wickedly departed from my God (ibid.) alludes to the verse "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said: Whoso is on the Lord's side, let him come unto me" (Ex. 32:26). R. Berechiah asked in the name of R. Simeon ben Lakish: "But would not everyone want to be of the king's household?" and then pointed out that when Moses said: "Whoso is on the Lord's side, let him come unto me" he meant: "Whoso did not give a ring for the making of the golden calf, let him come unto me." Whereupon, only the men of the tribe of Levi "gathered themselves together unto him" (ibid.).⁶⁵ The saying For all His ordinances were before me (Ps. 18:23a) alludes to the tribe of Levi, of whom it is said "They shall teach Jacob Thine ordinances" (Deut. 33:10). The end of the verse, And I did not put away His statutes from me (Ps. 18:23b), refers to the precept "Thou shalt come unto the Levites . . . and inquire, and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment" (Deut. 17:9). And I was upright

(*tamim*) before Him (Ps. 18:24a) refers to the words, "Of Levi he said: Thy Thummim and Thy Urim are with him whom Thou lovest" (Deut. 33:8). Why with Levi? Because *I [Levi] kept myself from mine iniquity* (Ps. 18:24b).

Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness (Ps. 18:25a) alludes to the verse "Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the Lord is his inheritance" (Deut. 10:9). *According to the choice of my hands in His eyes* (Ps. 18:25a), alludes to the verses "Behold, I give unto him . . . and his seed after him . . . an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God" (Num. 25:12-13).

With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful (Ps. 18:26a) alludes to the verse "And of Levi he said: Thy Thummim and Thy Urim are with him whom thou lovest" (Deut. 33:8). *With the upright man Thou wilt show Thyself upright* (Ps. 18:26b): the upright man is deemed worthy to wear the Urim and the Thummim.

22. *With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful, with the single-hearted Thou wilt show Thyself single-hearted; with the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the subtle Thou wilt show Thyself subtle* (Ps. 18:26-27). R. Judah interpreted this passage as referring to our father Abraham: When Abraham went to the Holy One, blessed be He, with [a petition for] mercy, the Holy One, blessed be He, met him with mercy; when Abraham went to the Holy One, blessed be He, in singleness of heart, the Holy One, blessed be He, met him in singleness of heart; when Abraham went to the Holy one, blessed be He, with subtlety, the Holy One, blessed be He, met him with subtlety; and when Abraham asked to be guided in his doings, the Holy One, blessed be He, guided his doings for him. When did Abraham go to God with [a petition for] mercy? When he said: *O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing that I go hence childless . . . and, lo, one born in my house is to be mine heir* (Gen. 15:2-3). And what was God's answer? *This man shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir* (Gen. 15:4). When did Abraham go

to God with singleness of heart? When he said: *My Lord, if now I have found favor in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant* (Gen. 18:3). And what does Scripture say further on in the passage? *Abraham stood yet before the Lord* (Gen. 18:22). This reading, according to R. Simon, represents a textual change [dictated by reverence],⁶⁶ for in truth it was the presence of the Lord which stood [single-hearted] before Abraham until he was finished attending the angels. When did Abraham go to God with subtlety? When he asked God: *Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?* (Gen. 15:8). And what was God's answer? *Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs* (Gen. 15:13). When did the Holy One, blessed be He, guide Abraham in his doings? When He said to Abraham: *Take now thy son, thine only son . . . and offer him . . . for a burnt-offering* (Gen. 22:2). And what does Scripture say directly after this? *Abraham rose early in the morning . . . and took . . . Isaac his son . . . and took the knife to slay his son* (Gen. 22:3).

R. Nehemiah interpreted this passage as referring to Moses: When Moses went to the Holy One, blessed be He, with love, the Holy One, blessed be He, met him with love; when Moses went to the Holy One, blessed be He, with singleness of heart, the Holy One, blessed be He, met him with singleness of heart; when Moses went to the Holy One, blessed be He, with subtlety, the Holy One, blessed be He, met him with subtlety; and when Moses asked to be guided in his doings, the Holy One, blessed be He, guided his doings for him. When did Moses go to God with love? When he said: *I will turn aside now, and see . . . why the bush is not burned* (Ex. 3:3). But God said to him: *My Glory stands in it! What does Scripture say directly after this?* *Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God* (Ex. 3:6). When did Moses go to God with singleness of heart? When he said: *Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel . . . and they shall say to me: What is His name? What shall I say unto them?* (Ex. 3:13). And God replied: *My name, now, for the present, is I am that I am* (Ex. 3:14). When did Moses go to God

with subtlety? When he said: *O Lord, send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou shouldst send* (Ex. 4:13). And what was God's answer? *He, Aaron, shall be thy spokesman unto the people* (Ex. 4:16). When was Moses guided in his doings? When he said to God: *Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory* (Ex. 33:18). And what was God's answer? *I will make all My goodness pass before Thee . . . and thou shalt stand upon the rock* (Ex. 33:19, 21).

R. Samuel said: Scripture teaches that during each of the seven days the bush was on fire, the Holy One, blessed be He, sought to persuade Moses to go to Egypt on His errand. Of this, it is written *Moses said unto the Lord: Oh my Lord, I am not a man of words neither since (gam) yesterday, nor since (gam) the third day, nor ever since (gam) Thou hast spoken to Thy servant* (Ex. 4:10). The word *gam*⁶⁷ intimates that more days than those specified in the verse are meant. How so? *Since yesterday* implies two days; *since the third day* implies another day.⁶⁸ *Gam* used three times implies three more days. Thus there were six days; and *ever since* implies a seventh. On the seventh day, Moses replied: *O Lord, send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom thou shouldst send* (Ex. 4:13); and still declining to go, said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, long ago I reckoned out what Thou didst say to our father Abraham at the covenant of the heifer:⁶⁹ 'Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs . . . and they shall afflict them four hundred years' (Gen. 15:13). But the four hundred years are not yet ended; the children of Israel have been in Egypt only two hundred and ten years." Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: "It is not as thou hast reckoned it out for thyself. I began the count of years from the day Isaac was born, and so I advanced the time of redemption for Israel because I skimmed on the time of affliction." (Thus also Scripture reads *My Beloved skimmed on [the time because of Isaac who was offered on] one of the hills* [Song 2:8]⁷⁰). "The time of affliction is ended now." Of this declaration by God, it is said *He made known His ways*

unto Moses; His devices for the children of Israel (Ps. 103:7): here *devices* refers to the way God reckoned the time for Israel's sake.

The Holy One, blessed be He, also said to Moses: "As thou livest, thy reluctance to go I shall hold against thee."⁷¹

And when did the Holy One, blessed be He, punish Moses? R. Berechiah said: On each of the seven days in the month of Adar when Moses besought the Holy One, blessed be He, to be allowed to enter the Land of Israel, and made many supplications before the Lord, as is said *I besought (w'thnn) the Lord at that time* (Deut. 3:23). (What is connoted by *w'thnn* [*I besought*])? It connotes that Moses made as many supplications before the Lord as there are ministering angels: for Moses said *w'thnn* [*I besought*], and it is written of the ministering angels *Their feet were ysrh* [*straight*] [Ezek. 1:7]. *W'thnn* has a numerical value of five hundred and fifteen which equals the numerical value of *ysrh*).⁷² Nevertheless, on the seventh day God said to Moses: *Thou shalt not go over this Jordan* (Deut. 31:2).

R. Helbo said: On each of the seven days of the investiture of the priests,⁷³ Moses performed the duties of the high priesthood. But what does Scripture finally say? *On the eighth day . . . Moses called Aaron and his sons* (Lev. 9:1).

23. *For Thou wilt save the afflicted people* (Ps. 18:28); that is, the people of Israel afflicted in exile. *But the haughty eyes Thou wilt bring down (ibid.)*; that is, bring down Edom and Ishmael who walk in arrogance on the earth. The corresponding verse in Samuel reads: *Thine eyes are upon the haughty, whom Thou wilt bring down* (2 Sam. 22:28) because they walk haughtily; Thine eyes are upon the haughty to bring them down from their haughtiness.

For Thou wilt light my lamp (Ps. 18:29) by means of Torah and by means of commandments, as is written "The commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light" (Prov. 6:23). *The Lord my God will light my darkness* (Ps. 18:29) by means of Talmud, so that I may have no doubt.

A different comment: *Thou wilt light my lamp* alludes to Mordecai;⁷⁴ and *The Lord my God will light my darkness* alludes to Esther.

A different interpretation: *Thou wilt light my lamp* alludes to Jehoiada, and *The Lord my God will light my darkness* to Jehoiada's wife, Jehosheba.⁷⁵ R. Eliezer said: The lad Joash⁷⁶ was hidden in the Temple's upper chamber; but R. Samuel bar Nahman said that he was hidden in the Temple [ground floor] compartments. R. Simon said: R. Eliezer's opinion is reasonable, since Joash was in the Temple's upper chamber during the dry season; and R. Samuel bar Nahman's opinion is also reasonable, for Joash was in the Temple's lower compartments during the rainy season. And who preserved him? Jehoiada the priest and Jehosheba his wife. Hence *Thou wilt light my lamp*.⁷⁷

Another comment: *Thou dost light my lamp . . . For by Thee I have run through a troop* (Ps. 18:29-30)—that is, through the troops of Amalek. R. Joshua ben Levi said: Freebooting troops of Amalek came upon David, and David made war against them for two nights and one day, as is said *David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day* (1 Sam. 30:17). Who gave light to David on the two nights? The Holy One, blessed be He, gave him light by lightning flashes and shooting stars. Hence David said: *Thou dost light my lamp*.

Bar Kappara taught that the Holy One, blessed be He, said: My lamp is in thy hand, as is said *The commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light* (Prov. 6:23), and thy lamp is in My hand, as is said *The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord* (Prov. 20:27): keep My lamp, and I shall keep thine.⁷⁸

24. *For by Thee I run through a troop* (Ps. 18:30). R. Hiyya taught in the name of R. Levi: When David went to make war upon the Jebusites, he began by saying *Whosoever getteth up the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites . . .* (2 Sam. 5:8), and added, as written in another verse, *Whosoever smiteth the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain* (1 Chron. 11:6). What did Joab do? He brought a green cypress and set it against the wall. The upper part of the cypress, which is springy, he bent back and,

getting up on David's head, held fast to the cypress; [when it sprang forward], he leaped upon the wall. David then said: *For good does the righteous [Joab] step upon me, and press down upon me* (Ps. 141:5).⁷⁹ What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He made the wall lower, and David followed after Joab. Of this, David said: *By my God do I scale a wall* (Ps. 18:30b).

25. *As for God, His way is perfect* (Ps. 18:31). Rab said: The Holy One, blessed be He, gave the commandments only that He might purify Israel by them, as is said *The word of the Lord is purifying* (*ibid.*).

Another comment on *As for God, His way is perfect*: If God, who is perfect, heeds His way, how much more ought you to heed yours? But of what concern can it be to Him, to the Holy One, blessed be He, whether a man, preparing his meat, do his slaughtering at windpipe or gullet? [His concern in giving precepts in a matter of this kind is to purify Israel.]

R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Jacob: It is written *Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself* (Deut. 14:21); *neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field* (Ex. 22:30); and again *The fat of that which dieth of itself, and the fat of that which is torn of beasts, may be used for any other service, but ye shall in no wise eat of it* (Lev. 7:24). If you eat any of these in this world, you will finally be held to account; if you do not eat any of these in this world, by your lives I swear to you, My children, that in the time-to-come, a great banquet shall be prepared for you out of Leviathan's flesh,⁸⁰ out of Behemoth and out of Ziz⁸¹ of the field, as is said *Ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied* (Joel 2:26).

Another comment: The verse beginning *As for God, His way is perfect*, alludes to our father Abraham. For the Holy One, blessed be He, upon seeing that Abraham followed Him, chose Abraham and said to him: "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1). *The word of the Lord is tried* (Ps. 18:31b) thus refers to Abraham whom the Lord proved in ten trials as follows: once, in a furnace of fire, of which God said: *I am the Lord that brought thee out of the fire*⁸² of the

Chaldees (Gen. 15:7); once again, when God said: *Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred* (Gen. 12:1); twice, when Sarah was taken away from him by Pharaoh and then by Abimelech⁸³—there you have four trials; again, when Sarah said of Hagar the Egyptian: *Go in, I pray thee, unto my handmaid* (Gen. 16:2)—there you have five; again, when Sarah said of Ishmael: *Cast out this bondwoman and her son* (Gen. 21:10)—there you have six; again, when Abraham *led forth his trained men* (Gen. 14:14) against the invading kings—there you have seven; again, when God said of circumcision: *Every male among you shall be circumcised* (Gen. 17:10)—there you have eight; again, when God showed to Abraham, between the halves of a heifer,⁸⁴ the four kingdoms enslaving his children—there you have nine; and finally, in the binding of Isaac, when God said: *Take now thy son, thine only son . . . and offer him . . . for a burnt-offering* (Gen. 22:2)—there you have ten. Abraham accepted these trials with reverence and with love and stood up to them like a man of might. And what was his reward? *He is a shield unto all them that take refuge in him* (Ps. 18:31c); for God said to Abraham: “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1b).

The nations of the earth asked: “Why does the Holy One, blessed be He, love Abraham and deliver him from the fiery furnace, from the nine kings,⁸⁵ from armed hosts, and from all the troubles which came upon him?” The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: I shall bring you close and show you that even if I tell Abraham to take his son and offer him up as a burnt-offering for My name’s sake, he will obey Me. Therefore I am his shield, even as he is a shield to all them that take refuge in him; and in days to come, Abraham’s children will begin their Eighteen Benedictions with “Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the Shield of Abraham.”⁸⁶

My Shield, and my Horn of salvation (Ps. 18:3). David demanded of the Holy One, blessed be He: Why is it that “the Shield of Abraham” and not “the Shield of David” is mentioned in the Eighteen Benedictions? God replied: “Because

I proved Abraham in ten trials." David said to Him: *Examine me, O Lord, and try me* (Ps. 26:2). So God tried David with Bath-sheba, but he did not stand up to the trial. Then David supplicated that "Shield of David" be mentioned in the benediction after the lesson from the Prophets; and indeed this benediction reads: "By Thy holy name Thou hast sworn unto him that his lamp shall not be quenched for ever and ever."⁸⁷ Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the shield of David."⁸⁸ Hence David said: *Thou hast . . . given me the shield of Thy salvation* (Ps. 18:36).

26. *For who is God, save the Lord? And who is a rock, besides our God* (Ps. 18:32). Hannah also said: *There is none holy as the Lord; for, there is none besides Thee (bilteḳa), neither is there any rock like our God* (1 Sam. 2:2). How should *bilteḳa* (besides Thee) be read? *Balloteḳa*: "there is none can outlive Thee." The mortal—the work of his hands outlives him; but the Holy One, blessed be He—He outlives the work of His hands.

And who is a rock (ṣur) except our God? (Ps. 18:32b). Hannah also said: *Neither is there any rock (ṣur) like our God* (1 Sam. 2:2). Do not read "Neither is there any rock," but *Neither is there any artist (ṣayyar) like our God*. The artist—he cannot draw in darkness; but the Holy One, blessed be He—He can draw any figure in darkness, as is said *My frame . . . was made in darkness, and curiously wrought in the deepest parts of the earth* (Ps. 139:15). The artist—he cannot draw figures in water; but the Holy One, blessed be He—He can draw any figure in water, as is said *Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures* (Gen. 1:20). The artist—he cannot paint unless he have many pigments, white, and black, and green, and red, and other hues; but the Holy One, blessed be He—He makes an embryo out of a drop of white and out of a drop of red. The artist—he can make nothing at all except by hard work; but the Holy One, blessed be He—He makes things by the mere breath of a word, as when *God said: "Let there be light"* (Gen. 1:3). The artist—he cannot draw a figure all at once, only little by little; but the Holy One, blessed be He—He makes a figure, all of it, in one stroke, as is said *He is One who forms all [at once]* (Jer.

10:16). The artist—the creation of his hands does not eat, but he eats; the Holy One, blessed be He—His creature eats, but He does not eat; nay more: He gives creatures what they eat. The artist—he dies, but the creation of his hands endures; the Holy One, blessed be He—His creature dies, but He lives for ever and ever and ever.

The mortal—he praises the creation of his hands, he sells it, and makes his living by it; but the Holy One, blessed be He—His creature praises Him, and He provides it with a living, as is said *The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their food in due season* (Ps. 145:15). The mortal—when he makes a figure, he cannot put spirit, breath, entrails, and bowels into it; but the Holy One, blessed be He—He makes the figure of an embryo within its mother, and then puts spirit, and breath, and entrails, and bowels into it. Of this it is written *Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name* (Ps. 103:1). And hence it is said *Who is an artist except our God?*

27. *The God that girdeth me with hayil*⁸⁹ (Ps. 18:33a)—that is, with “wealth” as in the verse “He giveth thee power to get wealth (*hayil*)” (Deut. 8:18). The verse concludes *And rewards me for the straightness of my way* (Ps. 18:33b)—that is, God gives me reward because of the uprightness of my way of life. The corresponding verse in Samuel, *He preserved me because of my straightness in His way* (2 Sam. 22:33b), implies that David said: Because in uprightness I followed in His way, God preserved me as king in this world and also in the world-to-come.

He maketh my feet like hinds' feet . . . (Ps. 18:34)—swift when I go to war outside the Land of Israel. *And upon my high places* (*ibid.*) in the Land of Israel, *He setteth me* (*ibid.*) when He brings about my return.

He traineth my hands for war, so that mine arms do bend a bow of brass (Ps. 18:35): This verse proves that David could take a bow of brass and bend it.

Or the verse may mean that it was easier for a man to bend a bow of brass than to bend David's arm.⁹⁰

In another comment, the clause is read *Mine arms do bend a*

*nehushah*⁹¹ bow, for David came out of the seed of Nahshon, who came out of the children of Judah, of whom it is written *He bade them to teach the children of Judah the use of the bow* (2 Sam. 1:18).

28. *Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy salvation* (Ps. 18:36): by *shield of Thy salvation* David means "strength." *And Thy right hand hath holden me up* (*ibid.*): by *Thy right hand* David means Torah, which was given by God's right hand. *And Thy gentleness hath made me great* (*ibid.*): by *Thy gentleness* David means humility. This verse proves that the three—strength, Torah, and humility—were to be found in David.

Another comment on *Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy salvation, and Thy right hand hath holden me up; and Thy gentleness hath made me great*: Three things were given as gifts to the world—Torah, rain, and light. Of Torah, it is said *He gave unto Moses . . . two tables of stone, written with the finger of God* (Ex. 31:18). Of rain, it is said *I will give you rain in due season* (Lev. 26:3). And of light, it is said *God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth* (Gen. 1:17).

R. Ze'era taught in the name of R. Simeon ben Lakish: And also the gift of peace, for God said, *I will give peace in the land* (Lev. 26:6).

The Rabbis said: And also vengeance, for God said, *I will lay My vengeance upon Edom by the hand of My people Israel* (Ezek. 25:14).

R. Joshua taught: And salvation, too, for David said, *Thou hast also given me Thy shield of salvation*. By what merit does salvation come? By the merit of Torah, given by God's right hand, as is said *From His right hand went a fiery law unto them* (Deut. 33:2).

The Rabbis taught: Salvation also by the merit of humility, for David said, *Thy gentleness hath made me great*.

29. Another comment: The verse *Thou hast also given me Thy shield of salvation, and Thy right hand hath holden me up; and Thy gentleness hath made me great* (Ps. 18:36) alludes to Abraham. For while the Lord stood, waiting for the guests to

finish eating, Abraham sat [with them]. So it follows that giving hospitality is greater than doing honor to the Lord's presence, for Abraham presumed to say to the Lord: *My Lord, if now I have found favor in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant* (Gen. 18:3).

R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Levi: Abraham wished to stand up, but the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Sit down as a model for thy children who, while I stand, are to remain sitting in their houses of prayer and houses of study," as is said *God standeth in the congregation of the mighty* (Ps. 82:1).⁹²

R. Samuel bar R. Hiyya and R. Yudan said in the name of R. Hanina: At each and every praise with which the children of Israel praise the Holy One, blessed be He, He sets His presence among them. And the proof? The verse *Thou art holy, O Thou that dwellest in the praises of Israel* (Ps. 22:4).

R. Simon taught: When the Holy One, blessed be He, appeared to Abraham, Abraham was in pain because of his [recent] circumcision. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the angels: "Go to him"; and the Lord followed them and tarried near Abraham until the angels were gone, as is said *The men turned from thence, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham stood yet before the Lord* (Gen. 18:22). According to R. Simon, the latter words have out of reverence been modified by the Scribes,⁹³ for in truth it was the Lord's presence which stood and waited for Abraham. Hence it is said *Thy gentleness hath made me great*.

R. Hiyya said: When a disciple walks before his master at night, who carries the lantern? Is it not the disciple who carries it for his master? Yet the Holy One, blessed be He, carried the lantern for the children of Israel, as is said *The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light* (Ex. 13:21). Hence it is said *Thy gentleness hath made me great*.

R. Lulyani said in the name of R. Isaac:⁹⁴ It is the way of the world that when a master speaks, the disciple answers. But this is not the way of the Holy One, blessed be He. *Moses spoke, and God answered him with a voice* (Ex. 19:19). What is meant by

*with a voice? With the voice of Moses himself!*⁹⁵ Hence *Thy gentleness hath made me great.*

Ben Azzai said: A mortal king, setting up a memorial for himself, records his name first and then records his creations. But the Holy One, blessed be He, does not do so: He records His creations first, and then He records His name, as is said *In the beginning God created* (Gen. 1:1).⁹⁶ Hence *Thy gentleness hath made me great.*

R. Abba said: Have you ever in all your days seen a master and disciple working at Torah, and heard the master say to the disciple: "Thou hast had enough: I have wearied thee?" Yet the Holy One, blessed be He, after teaching Torah for forty days to Moses, finally said to him: "I have wearied you!" as when *The Lord our God spoke unto us in Horeb, saying: You have had enough* (Deut. 1:6).

R. Simeon said: In the world's use, when a master and his disciple are with each other, and the master says to the disciple: "Go and wait for me at a certain place!" the disciple goes and waits for the master. So the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Ezekiel: "*Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there speak with thee*" (Ezek. 3:22); yet Ezekiel tells: *I arose, and went forth into the plain, and behold, the glory of the Lord already stood there* (Ezek. 3:23). Hence *Thy gentleness hath made me great.*

R. Yudan said in the name of R. Hama: In the time-to-come, when the Holy One, blessed be He, seats the lord Messiah at His right hand, as is said *The Lord saith unto my lord: "Sit thou at My right hand"* (Ps. 110:1), and seats Abraham at His left, Abraham's face will pale, and he will say to the Lord: "My son's son sits at the right, and I at the left!" Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, will comfort Abraham, saying: "Thy son's son is at My right, but I, in a manner of speaking, am at thy right": *The Lord [is] at thy right hand* (Ps. 110:5). Hence *Thy gentleness hath made me great.*

30. *Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, and my feet have not slipped* (Ps. 18:37): Would it not have been better if David's

steps had not been enlarged, and thus there would have been no possibility of his slipping? R. Joshua ben Levi explained the verse in this way: The impact of the shield that Ishbi-benob⁹⁷ lifted up, threw David eighteen cubits [into the air]. Yet David did not fall back to the earth, and so the two remained [apart] in fear of each other. Then David praised the Holy One, blessed be He: *Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, but my feet have not slipped* (Ps. 18:37). Instantly the Holy One, blessed be He, made Abishai fly to his side, as is said *Abishai the son of Zeruiah succored him* (2 Sam. 21:17).

Another version of this comment on *Thou hast enlarged my steps under me*: Of what event did David say this? Of his fight with Ishbi-benob, as is said *Ishbi-benob, who was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear was three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being girded with new armor, thought to have slain David* (2 Sam. 21:16). What is meant by the name Ishbi-benob?⁹⁸ R. Judah in the name of Rab defined it as "the man who was dispatched (*'iš šeba'*) [against David] because of the set-to at Nob," the city of priests. The Holy One, blessed be He, asked David: "How long shall the misdeed at Nob, the city of priests, go unatoned for by thee? Because of thee, Nob, a city of priests, was put to the sword. Because of thee, Doeg was banished from life in the world-to-come. Because of thee, Saul and his three sons were slain."⁹⁹ Therefore, is it thy choice that [the royal power of] thy descendants be abrogated, or that thou be given into the hands of thine enemy?" David replied: "Master of the universe, it is better to be given into the hands of mine enemy than to have [the royal power of] my descendants abrogated."

[Some time later] when David went out one day with net and falcon to hunt, Satan appeared in the guise of a gazelle. David shot an arrow at him, but did not hit him. All the while Satan drew him on until he brought him into the land of the Philistines. When Ishbi—despatched because of the set-to at Nob—saw David, he said: "This man is he who slew my brother Goliath." He seized David, tied him up, pressed his mouth down

upon his knees, and having thus fastened him,¹⁰⁰ placed blocks of wood upon him, and sat on him. But a miracle was wrought for David. The earth under him spread out and gave him room. Hence David said: *Thou hast enlarged my steps under me.*

On that day—it was the eve of the Sabbath toward sunset—as Abishai the son of Zeruiah¹⁰¹ was washing his head, the water kept turning to blood. Some say¹⁰² that a dove came and stood beating its wings before him. Abishai said: “The congregation of Israel is likened to a dove in the saying *Oh My dove, that art in the clefts of the rock* (Song 2:14). Now does this mean that God’s own dove, Israel the undefiled, is in distress, or that David, Israel’s king, is in torment?” He went to the house of king David, and not finding him, said: “What shall I do? For the Rabbis say: One may neither ride a king’s horse, nor sit on his throne, nor use his scepter.”¹⁰³ But he went up to inquire in the house of study where he was told that in a time of danger these things are permitted. Thereupon he mounted David’s own mule and rode after him. Now a miracle was also wrought for Abishai, for the earth which grew large under David, grew small under Abishai.

Orpah, Ishbi’s mother, was spinning flax when she saw Abishai. As soon as Orpah saw him, she broke the thread of her spindle and threw it to the ground, saying to Abishai: “Young man, young man, hand me my spindle!”¹⁰⁴ Abishai took the spindle and threw it at the top of Orpah’s head and slew her.

When Ishbi saw Abishai, he said: “Now that they are two, they will surely slay me.” Thereupon with his shield he threw David eighteen cubits into the air above the earth, and drove his spear into the ground. “He is right above it,” Ishbi said, “and he is sure to be impaled.” Abishai uttered God’s Ineffable Name, and so kept David suspended in the air between heaven and earth. Why did not David himself utter God’s Ineffable Name and so suspend himself in the air? Because David knew that a prisoner cannot release himself from prison. Abishai asked David: “What dost thou there?” and David replied: “God spoke to me, and thus have I chosen.” Thereupon Abi-

shai said: "Change thy prayer. Spare thyself sorrow, even if thy son's son shall have to sell wax."¹⁰⁵ (At that instant a decree that he be surrendered into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar was imposed upon Jehoiakim, king of Judah.)¹⁰⁶ Change thy prayer and be delivered." Of these events it is written *Abishai the son of Zeruiah succored him* (2 Sam. 21:17). For how can the words *Abishai . . . succored him* be understood except—as R. Judah said in the name of Rab—that Abishai by having David change his prayer delivered him.

When David and Abishai, in pursuit of Ishbi, came to Kubi, they said to Ishbi: "Come, boy, and fight!"¹⁰⁷ When they came to Be Terin, they said: "Can two¹⁰⁸ whelps be tearin' apart a lion?" As David and Abishai were still pursuing him, Ishbi said: "Two against one?" They replied: "After we slay thee, go up to the city and boast that ten men slew thee."¹⁰⁹ And then Abishai added: "Go, look in the grave for Orpah thy mother." When thus his mother's name was mentioned, Ishbi grew faint, his strength began to fail, and they were able to slay him.

Of this it is written *The men of David swore unto him, saying: "Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the lamp of Israel"* (2 Sam. 21:17).

David was referring to all these events when he said: *Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, and my feet have not slipped* (Ps. 18:37).

R. Samuel bar Nahmani said: When David saw the angel,¹¹⁰ David's blood ran cold with fear of the angel. Of this it is written *They covered him with clothes, but he could get no heat* (1 Kings 1:1), proving that his blood ran cold.

31. In *I have pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them* (Ps. 18:38), *enemies* refers to Amalek's troop concerning which David inquired of the Lord, saying: "Shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them?" (1 Sam. 30:8). The words, *Neither will I turn again till they are consumed* (Ps. 18:38), refer to the verse "David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day; and there escaped not a man of them" (1 Sam.

30:17). *I have smitten them through, so that they are not able to rise* (Ps. 18:39): Mine was a crushing blow.

For Thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle (Ps. 18:40). And since strength in battle was the purpose for which I was created, *Thou hast let me subdue those that rose up against me* (Ps. 18:40).

The verse in Samuel reads *Thou hast crowned me* (*watazĕreni*) *with strength* (2 Sam. 22:40), as though *watazĕreni* were formed from the stem *zer*, "crown of gold" (Ex. 25:24). Therefore, the verse hints at David's kingship. But the corresponding verse in Psalms, *Thou hast girded*¹¹¹ *me with strength* (Ps. 18:40), hints at David's strength in battle, as it is said *Gird up now thy loins like a mighty man* (Job 38:3).

32. *Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies* (Ps. 18:41): This verse alludes to Judah. R. Joshua ben Levi said: There is an oral tradition that Judah slew Esau. When? When our father Isaac died. Esau, Jacob, and all the tribes went to bury Isaac, as is said *Esau, Jacob, and his sons buried him* (Gen. 35:29), and they were all in the Cave of Machpelah sitting and weeping. At last the tribes stood up and paid their respects to Jacob, and all of them left the cave lest Jacob should weep [exceedingly] and be humbled before them. But Esau, [who had also gone out], squirmed back into the cave, saying: "Now that my father is dead, I shall slay Jacob," for it is said *Now that the days of mourning for my father are at hand, I shall slay my brother Jacob* (Gen. 27:41). But Judah looked and observed Esau go back in to Jacob, and said at once: "Esau means to slay my father within the cave." Quickly Judah slipped after him and squeezed into the cave where he found Esau about to slay Jacob. Judah rose up forthwith and slew Esau from behind. Why did he not slay him from in front? Because Esau's face resembled the face of Judah's own father. And out of respect for his father, Judah slew Esau from behind. To this, Jacob, Judah's father, referred when he said: *Thy hand shall be on the neck of thine enemies* (Gen. 49:8). Why did he bless Judah with the phrase

the neck of enemies? Because Joshua, prostrating himself, begged the Holy One, blessed be He, again and again that He give the neck of his enemies into his hand. But the Lord did not grant his prayer, even though Joshua said: *Oh, Lord, what shall I say, when Israel bend their necks to their enemies!* (Josh. 7:8). Joshua's prayer availed him nothing. The neck of the enemy was given into the hand of Judah alone, as is said *Thy hand shall be on the neck of thine enemies* (Gen. 49:8). Hence David declared: *Thou hast given me also the necks of mine enemies* (Ps. 18:41), as if to say, "This is my patrimony, since it was said to my father Judah *Thy hand shall be on the neck of thine enemies*" (Gen. 49:8).¹¹²

Whose story teaches us this? Goliath the Philistine's, for it is said *The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell upon his face to the earth* (1 Sam. 17:49). Would not one expect the text to read "He fell upon his back?" But the fact is that an angel came and threw Goliath upon his face, for the Holy One, blessed be He, said: He who reviles and blasphemes shall have his mouth stopped with dust, and of such it is said *Hide them in the dust together; and bind their faces in the hidden place* (Job 40:12).

Another explanation: Why did Goliath fall on his face [toward David]? In order that David should not be put to the least trouble, but could proceed at once to cut off Goliath's head, without having to go a distance of twelve cubits and two spans. How so? ¹¹³ Goliath's full height toward David, and his full height away from him, was six cubits and a span ¹¹⁴ each way. So when Goliath fell upon his face at David's feet, the Holy One, blessed be He, proclaimed it, saying: *The Lord saith unto my lord: "Sit thou at My right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool"* (Ps. 110:1).

Another explanation: Why did Goliath fall upon his face? Because Goliath's idol, Dagon, was painted upon Goliath's heart, Goliath was made to fall thus to fulfill the prophecy *I will . . . cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you* (Lev. 26:30).

Another explanation: Why did Goliath fall upon his face? To

confirm the verse *Thou hast given me also the necks of mine enemies* (2 Sam. 22:41).

I did cut off for ever ('ašēmiṭ) them that hate me (Ps. 18:41): This is to say, "I cut them off for ever with enfeebling affliction, with overwhelming affliction, from the rest of mankind." What was the affliction? Leprosy.¹¹⁵ For *lišēmiṭuṭ* (Lev. 25:23) in the Aramaic Targum is rendered *laḥāluṭin*, a derivative of *muḥlaṭ* ("for ever"), as proved by a passage in the Mishnah which reads: Except that the leper lets his hair go unshorn and tears his garments, one cannot distinguish between a man thought leprous and shut away, and a man proved leprous and cut off from the rest of mankind for ever (*muḥlaṭ*).¹¹⁶

Another interpretation of *I did cut off them that hate me*: "I destroyed them with an unnatural death."

33. *They cried, but there was none to save* (Ps. 18:42). The corresponding verse in Samuel reads *They looked, but there was none to save* (2 Sam. 22:42). They prayed to their carved images and looked to them for help, but the carved images could not save them, and so in rebellion and want of faith they died; then, in preparation for the day of judgment, as they were being afflicted in Gehenna, they prayed at last *unto the Lord, but He answered them not* (2 Sam. 22:42) because they had not repented during their lifetime.

Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind (Ps. 18:43). Elsewhere, Scripture says, *Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away* (Isa. 41:16), and also *The nations . . . are counted as the small dust of the balance* (Isa. 40:15).

In the Psalm it is written *I did empty them* (Ps. 18:43), while the corresponding verse in Samuel reads *I did make them little and did beat them down* (2 Sam. 22:43). In this world *I did make them little*, as is said "Behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing" (Isa. 40:15); in this world also *I did empty them*, so that they were left empty, without good works.¹¹⁷

'*Erka'em*, "I did beat them down" (2 Sam. 22:43) comes from the stem *rḳ'*, as does *wayrakḳē'u* in "They did beat (*wayrakḳē'u*) the gold into thin plates" (Ex. 39:3). They, the wicked, will be

trodden down under the soles of the feet of the righteous, as is said *Ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet* (Mal. 3:21).

34. *Thou deliverest me from the contentions of the people* (Ps. 18:44), so that I am not involved in a law-suit before them. The corresponding verse reads *Thou deliverest me from the contentions of my people* (2 Sam. 22:44), so that I am not brought down from my high position by having my people sit in judgment upon me.

Ben Azzai said: It was easier for David to rule the whole world than to rule two scholars.¹¹⁸ The Holy One, blessed be He, asked David: Wouldst thou be altogether free of public burdens? David replied: Master of the universe, *Make me the head of the nations* (Ps. 18:44) because the children of Israel are obstinate and will not acknowledge the truth; but the nations of the earth, once converted, are more inclined to repentance, as is said *As soon as they hear of Me, they obey Me* (Ps. 18:45).

*The sons of the stranger fade away*¹¹⁹ (Ps. 18:46): Once they have fallen, they will rise no more.

And come halting out of their close places (2 Sam. 22:46). They will be given over to me [in such numbers] that they will become lame from being crowded in the enclosure. The corresponding verse in Psalms *The sons of the stranger . . . come trembling (yahreḡu) out of their close places* (Ps. 18:46), means that they will tremble with the fear of death in the fastnesses of their hearts. For "in the chambers, fear" (Deut. 32:25) is rendered in the Aramaic Targum "In the inner chambers [of their hearts] lurks the fear (*hergaṭ*) of death."

The God that executeth vengeance for me (Ps. 18:48): Those who seek to destroy my honor and my kingdom, they are banished from the world.

God subdueth peoples under me (Ps. 18:48)—subdues them by loosing plagues upon them. This also is the meaning of *He subdueth peoples under us* (Ps. 47:4).¹²⁰

35. *He delivereth me from mine enemies; yea, Thou liftest me up above them that rise up against me; Thou deliverest me from*

the violent man (Ps. 18:49): *Mine enemies*—Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon; *them that rise up against me*—Media, Persia, and Haman; *Thou liftest me up above*—even in Greece; for although the Greeks ruled me, yet the sanctuary in Jerusalem remained standing (the word “lift” clearly alludes to the sanctuary of which it is said *He built His sanctuary like that which is lifted up* [Ps. 78:69]); *violent man*—Edom and Ishmael.¹²¹

Therefore at the ingathering of the exiled *I will give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, among the nations* (Ps. 18:50); and at the coming of the Messiah *will sing praises unto Thy name (ibid.)*, as is said *In that day shall ye say: Praise the Lord, proclaim His name* (Isa. 12:4).

36. *Great deliverance giveth He to His king . . . to David and to his seed for evermore* (Ps. 18:51). What verse follows this one? *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork* (Ps. 19:2). Even so when God makes secure the throne of David's descendants, all shall rejoice, for it was said to David: *Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations* (Ps. 89:5). And what verse follows this one? *The heavens shall praise Thy wonders, O Lord (ibid. 89:6)*.

In Samuel it is said *God . . . is the mighty tower (miḡdol) of deliverance for His king* (2 Sam. 22:51), while the corresponding verse in Psalms, taken literally, reads: *Mightily He enlargeth (maḡdil)¹²² deliverance for His king* (Ps. 18:51). “This means,” R. Yudan said, “that deliverance will not come to this people all at once, but little by little.” Can *Mightily He enlargeth* be understood in any other way except that deliverance for Israel will grow larger and larger gradually? The children of Israel now live in great sorrows, and if deliverance were to come all at once, they would be unable to bear such great deliverance, especially since it would be accompanied by even greater sorrows. Hence, deliverance will come little by little, and will be enlarged gradually for Israel. Therefore deliverance is likened to the dawn, as is said *Then shall thy light break forth as the dawn* (Isa. 58:8). Why is deliverance likened to the dawn? Because you know no

darkness greater than the hour nearest to dawn; if the whole sphere of the sun should wheel up at that hour when creatures are still sleeping, all creatures would be blinded. Therefore, the pillar of dawn rises first and gives light to the world; after that, the whole sphere of the sun wheels up and gives its light, and so creatures are not blinded, as is said *The path of the righteous is as the dawning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day* (Prov. 4:18).

And can *mighty tower* in the verse from Samuel be understood in any other way except that the lord Messiah will become as a tower unto them? Thus Scripture says, *The name of the Lord is like a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is set on high* (Prov. 18:10).

PSALM NINETEEN

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God* (Ps. 19:1-2). This verse is to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *The Lord hath made everything lamma'ānehu*¹ (Prov. 16:4)—that is, “to declare His glory.” Here *ānehu* is taken as related to *ēnu* as in the verse *Sing (ēnu) unto the Lord with thanksgiving* (Ps. 147:7). Or, *lamma'ānehu* means “to bear witness to His glory and declare His Godhead,” as in the verse *Thou shalt not bear . . . witness (ta'āneh) against thy neighbor* (Ex. 20:13b), and in the verse *As witness for (lēma'an) my brethren and companions* (Ps. 122:8).

R. Abbahu taught: Two principles the nations of the earth do not deny: they acknowledge that the Holy One, blessed be He, is He who created the world in six days and that He keeps the souls of the dead alive. And their proof? He who with necromantic incantations sets out to raise a ghost or a familiar spirit succeeds in raising one on week-days, but does not succeed in raising one on the Sabbath.² But the ghost of an animal will not rise even in the week, for in the time-to-come animals will not be brought back to life. And so *The Lord hath made everything to bear witness for him* (Prov. 16:4).

Another comment: *lamma'ānehu* means “to declare His praise”—all praise Him for His work, even as all His works praise Him. R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Simeon: That which has no head in the sight of mortals, has a head in the sight of the Holy One, blessed be He—the earth, for example, of which it is said *As yet He had not made . . . the head of the world's dust* (Prov. 8:26). That which has no eyes in the sight of mortals has eyes in the sight of the Holy One, blessed be He—the sea, for example, of which it is said *The sea saw it, and fled* (Ps. 114:3). And the sea which has no hands in the sight of mortals, has hands in the sight of the Holy One, blessed be He, as is said *Yonder sea, great and wide of hands* (Ps. 104:25). So, too, the earth, of which it is said *The earth is wide of hands*³ (Gen. 34:21). The earth also has ears in the sight of the Holy One,

blessed be He, for it is said *O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord* (Jer. 22:29). Heaven has a heart in the sight of the Holy One, blessed be He, for it is said *And he came near . . . and the mountain burned with fire unto the heart of heaven* (Deut. 4:11). The sea also has a heart, as is said *The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea* (Ex. 15:8). In the sight of the Holy One, blessed be He, the earth has a navel, for it is said *The people . . . that dwell in the navel of the earth* (Ezek. 38:12). In the sight of the Holy One, blessed be He, the earth has a mouth, for it is said *The earth opened her mouth* (Num. 16:32); and, in the sight of the Holy One, blessed be He, it has feet, for it is said *But the earth standeth for ever* (Eccles. 1:4); and in the sight of the Holy One, blessed be He, it has haunches, for it is said *Behold, I will gather them from the haunches of the earth* (Jer. 31:8). In the sight of the Holy One, blessed be He, heaven has a mouth, as is said *The heavens declare the glory of God*.

2. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork* (Ps. 19:2). This verse is to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Shall it be told Him that I would speak? If a man speak, surely he shall be destroyed* (Job 37:20). R. Abbahu taught in the name of R. Johanan: When a man in reciting the glory of the Holy One, blessed be He, endeavors to say more than what is enough, he will be driven to distraction and he will forfeit his life, for it is said *Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord or show forth all His praise?* (Ps. 106:2).

When R. Hanina and R. Jonathan were visiting certain towns in Judea, they came into a synagogue and observed that a reader was saying in his public prayer: ⁴ "The God, great, mighty, and awful, glorious, powerful, and majestic."⁵ They silenced him, saying: Thou hast no right to add words to the form of the benedictions as fixed by the Sages. Whence do we know the proper form of the benedictions? From Moses, our master, who said: *The great God, the mighty, and the awful* (Deut. 10:17), to which the Sages added the form of the benediction used by our Father Abra-

ham, *God Most High, Maker of heaven and earth* (Gen. 14:19).⁶

R. Huna said in the name of Rab: *Touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out* (Job 37:23)—that is, “We shall never find a limit to the power of the Holy One, blessed be He.”

R. Samuel bar Naḥmani said: *Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord* (Ps. 106:2)—that is, “Who can utter them as well as my companions and I?”⁷

R. Abin said: When Jacob of the village of Neboria was in Tyre, he interpreted *Praise is silence for Thee, O God* (Ps. 65:2) as meaning that silence is the height of all praises of God. For God is like a jewel without price: however high you appraise it, still you undervalue it.

R. Phinehas the Priest bar Ḥama taught: Moses instituted the order of prayer for Israel when he said: *The Lord your God, He is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great God, the mighty, the awesome* (Deut. 10:17).⁸ *Great*: God did great things in Egypt; *mighty*: God brought mighty things to pass on the sea; *awesome*: in the days of Moses the Tabernacle was set up, of which it is said *Awesome is God out of thy holy place* (Ps. 68:36). Jeremiah, in his order of prayer, said, *The great, the mighty God* (Jer. 32:18), but not “the awesome God.” Why did Jeremiah say “God the mighty?” Because, he explained, This One, though He saw His children put in chains and His Temple destroyed, remained silent; hence it is proper to call Him “mighty.” But he did not say “God the awesome” because the Temple—of which it is said *Awesome is God out of thy holy place* (Ps. 68:36)—was destroyed. Where, then, is the awe, if enemies came into His house and were not awed? Daniel, [in his order of prayer], said, *O Lord, the great and awesome God* (Dan. 9:4), but not “God the mighty.” Why not? Because, as Daniel asked: When His children were put in chains, where was God’s might? And why did Daniel say “God the awesome?” Because, as he explained, This One did awesome things for us in the lions’ den and in the fiery furnace; hence it is proper to call Him “awesome.”

However, when the men of the Great Assembly⁹ arose, they restored the manner of praising God’s greatness to its ancient

form, saying: *Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God* (Neh. 9:32). Why? Because, as they explained, God remains above every praise by which men would exalt Him.

R. Jacob ben R. Eleazar said: As for Jeremiah and Daniel, they knew of their God that He was truth-loving and did not attempt to flatter Him.

However, the praise wherewith Moses our master praised Him is sufficient.

3. *The heavens declare the glory of God* (Ps. 19:2). The prophet Isaiah said: *Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it* (Isa. 44:23), and they replied: Indeed, we shall sing the praise of God: *The Heavens declare the glory of God*. A parable of a king who had many provinces; the inhabitants of each province used to say, "So-and-so much gold has the king; so-and-so much silver, so-and-so many robes and manservants and maidservants has the king. So-and-so many precious stones and jewels has the king." Now in one province was a wise old man, who asked the inhabitants: "Whence do you know this, being so many parasangs removed from the king? In truth, only those of the province in which the king lives can properly declare the wealth and the glory of the king, because they alone know his wealth and his glory." Even so, David said: "The earth and all who are in it cannot declare the glory of the Holy One, blessed be He. Who can, in truth, declare the glory of God? *The heavens declare the glory of God.*"

And when will the earth and all its inhabitants praise God? When He will exalt the horn of Israel, for *Praise the Lord from the earth* (Ps. 148:7) occurs in the Psalm in which it is also said *He . . . exalteth the horn of His people . . . Israel . . . Praise ye the Lord* (Ps. 148:14).¹⁰

4. Another comment on *The heavens declare the glory of God*. Scripture says elsewhere: *Who can number the clouds by wisdom? Or who can pour out the bottles of heaven?* (Job 38:37). R. Samuel bar Abba said: "I know the lanes of heaven as well as the lanes of Nehardea."¹¹ Did Samuel mean that he had actually

gone up into the firmament? No: but laboring at Torah's wisdom, he learned from it what is in the firmament.

R. Hoshiaia said: Even as there is an empty space between the nether waters and the firmament, so is there an empty space between the upper waters and the firmament.

R. Phinehas the Priest bar Hama asked: Is not this point made clear in Scripture in the passage *God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament* (Gen. 1:7)? Scripture does not say "waters which were on the firmament," but *waters which were above the firmament*. Thus the upper heavens hang in space, and from the vapors of the upper waters fall the rains,¹² as is said *He watereth the mountains from His upper chambers* (Ps. 104:13). Did R. Hoshiaia mean, then, that he had actually gone up into the upper heavens? No: But laboring at Torah's wisdom, he learned from it all that is in the upper heavens.

5. A further comment on *The heavens declare the glory of God*: Another Psalm says *What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?* (Ps. 116:12). R. Samuel bar Nahmani taught: There are four Psalms one would have expected Adam to compose, but which David composed, etc. See the Midrash on the Fifth Psalm.¹³

6. Another comment on *The heavens declare the glory of God*. R. Jacob ben Zabdi told a parable of a mighty man who came to a certain city where the inhabitants did not know his strength. A knowing man said: "You can tell his strength from the size of the stone he lifts." Even so, we can tell the strength of the Holy One, blessed be He, from the size of the heavens.

R. Joshua ben Levi taught that because God declared: *Do I not fill heaven and earth?* (Jer. 23:24), might not one argue that the worlds above and below are filled with all the glory God has? And yet is it not said *When I behold Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers* (Ps. 8:4)? It follows, therefore, that the heavens filled with His glory still contain no more of Him than is in a single touch of a finger of the Holy One, blessed be He.¹⁴

Another comment on *The heavens declare the glory of God*:¹⁵

A parable of a king who stretched a veil across the entrance to his palace and said: "Let him who is wise say what this garment is, let him who is rich make one like it, and let him who is mighty touch it." Even so does the Holy One, blessed be He, stretch out the heavens as a veil before the eyes, for it is said *It is He . . . that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain* (Isa. 40:22). This verse proves that in stretching the heavens out as a kind of veil, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Let him who is wise say what this garment is, let him who is rich make one like it, and let him who is strong come and touch it."

R. Phinehas the Priest bar Ḥama said: Because of that which the heavens send down,¹⁶ the earth flourishes, and creatures eat, and then they praise the Holy One, blessed be He. Thus *The heavens declare the glory of God*. But when, God forbid, the children of Israel sin, what does Scripture say? *The heavens shall reveal their iniquity* (Job 20:27). How? *The anger of the Lord shall be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heaven* (Deut. 11:17). But when the children of Israel are well-deserving, what does Scripture say? *The Lord will open for thee His good treasure, the heaven* (Deut. 28:12).

7. *Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night revealeth knowledge* (Ps. 19:3). This verse alludes to our master Moses, who, it is said, *was with the Lord forty days and forty nights . . . and he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant* (Ex. 34:28). Does Scripture really mean to say that night also occurs in the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He? Is it not written *The night shineth as the day . . . both are alike to Thee* (Ps. 139:12b)? Is it not also written *God came . . . and His brightness was as the light* (Hab. 3:4)? And also *Light dwelleth with Him* (Dan. 2:22)? and again *Even the darkness hideth not from Thee* (Ps. 139:12a)? How then did Moses our master know when it was day and when night, that he could have reckoned forty days and forty nights in the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He? Scripture implies, however, that Moses knew it was day when the Holy One, blessed be He, instructed

him in Written Law; and Moses knew it was night when the Holy One, blessed be He, instructed him in Oral Law.

And the proof that the Holy One, blessed be He, is occupied with Written Law by day, and with Oral Law by night? The saying *My Beloved (dwdy) is bright, and dark* (Song 5:10). For when God is occupied by day with Written Law, His face is bright as snow—the word *dwdy (My Beloved)*, the sum of the numerical value of its letters being twenty-four,¹⁷ clearly refers to the twenty-four books of Written Law—and when God is occupied by night with Oral Law, His face is dark.

Or, when the angels began to offer praise to the Holy One, blessed be He, with the word “Holy,” Moses knew that it was day; and when the angels began to praise Him with the word “Blessed,” Moses knew that it was night.¹⁸

Or, when Moses saw the sun’s disk come and worship, he knew that it was night; and when he saw the stars, the moon, and the planets come and worship before the Holy One, blessed be He, he knew that it was day, for it is said *The host of heaven worshippeth Thee* (Neh. 9:6).

Or, when Moses saw that the angels were grinding manna for the people of Israel and preparing it to send down to them, he knew that it was day; and when he saw that the manna was coming down, he knew that it was night, for it is said *And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it* (Num. 11:9).

Or, when Moses heard the reading of the Shema precede the Eighteen Benedictions, he knew that it was day; and when the Eighteen Benedictions preceded the reading of the Shema,¹⁹ he knew that it was night.

R. Phinehas taught in the name of R. Abba: The angel whose charge is prayer—he waits until that congregation in Israel which assembles at the latest hour possible has concluded its prayers, and out of their prayers he fashions a crown which he places upon the head of the Holy One, blessed be He, as is said *Blessings are upon the head of the righteous* (Prov. 10:6): Here *righteous*

is the Holy One, blessed be He, of whom it is written "Just and righteous is He" (Deut. 32:4).²⁰

8. Another interpretation of *Day unto day uttereth speech*: Uttering speech? What were these two unusual days? The day of Moses which uttered speech to the day of Joshua. God, it is said, told Moses: *This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the peoples that are under the whole heaven, who, when they hear the report of thee, shall tremble* (Deut. 2:25). Perhaps you will say: Since the Holy One, blessed be He, had wiped out Sihon and Og, who was left to speak of Moses to the peoples of the earth? The sun which twice stood still for Moses! The first time when he made war against Amalek, as is said *When Moses held up his hand . . . Israel prevailed . . . until the going down of the sun* (Ex. 17:11-12),²¹ and *He lifted up his hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation* (Hab. 3:10-11). This was the day of Moses which uttered speech to the day of Joshua, saying: *Rehearse it in the ears of Joshua* (Ex. 17:14); that is, "Say to Joshua: 'May it be the will of God that as the sun stood still for Moses, so may it stand still for thee in the war with the thirty-one kings.'" ²²

At the war with Sihon and with Og the sun stood still for Moses a second time. Scripture intimates this in *By means of this day I will begin to give (teṭ) the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the peoples that are under the whole heaven* (Deut. 2:25), and asserts of Joshua's war against the Amorites *In the day when the Lord gave over (teṭ)* ²³ *the Amorites . . . Joshua said . . . : "Sun, stand thou still"* (Josh. 10:12).

9. In further interpretation of *Day unto day uttereth speech*, R. Ze'era said: The day of Joshua tells its wonders to the day of Deborah. For of the day of Joshua it is written *The sun stood still, and the moon stayed* (Josh. 10:13); and of the day of Deborah, it is said *They fought from heaven, the stars in their courses fought against Sisera* (Judg. 5:20). And the day of Deborah in its turn tells how many miracles and wonders were wrought in it.

And night unto night revealeth knowledge (Ps. 19:3): The

night of Abraham reveals the plague on Egypt's first-born to the night of this event; and the night of the plague on Egypt's first-born reveals the triumph of Gideon to the night of this event; and the night of Gideon reveals the discomfiture of Sennacherib²⁴ to the night of this event. In all these nights how many miracles and wonders were wrought!

10. Another interpretation of *Day unto day . . . revealeth knowledge*. R. Johanan said: When the elders of Israel come together to proclaim a leap-year, they take time from the day and give it to the night; and they take time from the night and give it to the day. How? There are twelve months in the year, and four seasons in the year: the vernal equinox with its three months, Nisan, Iyyar, and Sivan; the summer solstice with its three months, Tammuz, Ab, and Elul; the autumnal equinox with its three months, Tishri, Marheshvan, and Kislev; and the winter solstice with its three months Tebet, Shebat, and Adar. Beginning with the winter solstice, and up to the vernal equinox, the night yields time to the day; and beginning with the vernal equinox and up to the summer solstice, the day borrows time from the night.

How much does the night yield to the day? And how much does the day borrow from the night? One thirtieth of an hour.²⁵

From the beginning of the summer solstice, up until the autumnal equinox, the day yields time to the night; and from the autumnal equinox up until the winter solstice, the night borrows time from the day. From this it follows that a day in the vernal equinox equals the length²⁶ of a day in the autumnal equinox.

Now they borrow, the one from the other, in trust, and yield, the one to the other, in trust; and none hears any speech between them because they do not quarrel as men do who will neither borrow nor pay except before witnesses and except in court. For of the day and the night, it is said *There is no speech, there are no words, neither are their voices heard* (Ps. 19:4).

The wonder of it is that the elders of Israel on the earth below know the secret of the leap-year. They take from the day and give to the night, and take from the night and give to the day;

and after they have fixed the time of the new moons and of the new years and have proclaimed the leap-year and set the time for the festivals, they go forth from the assembly. Forthwith *Their line is gone out through all the earth* (Ps. 19:5), for all men say, "When will the new year fall? When do the festivals come?" *And their words to the end of the world*, for men ask each other: "What day of the month is it? What day in the season is it?"

11. *In them hath He set a tent for the sun* (Ps. 19:5). R. Phinehas said in the name of R. Abba: This means that the sun is kept within a sheath.

R. Samuel bar Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: The sun turns like a sail on a ship's mast. According to R. Berechiah, the sun goes forth like a ship from Karkunia²⁷ fitted with three hundred and sixty-five ropes, equaling the number of days in a solar year; or like a ship from Alexandria fitted with three hundred and fifty-four ropes, equaling the number in a lunar year.

What it takes the sun thirty days to run, the moon runs in two and one-half days; what it takes the sun two months to run, the moon runs in five days; what takes the sun three months to run, the moon runs in seven and one-half days; what takes the sun six months to run, the moon runs in fifteen days; and what takes the sun twelve months to run, the moon runs in thirty days.²⁸

R. Joshua ben Levi taught: Each day the sun and the moon are blinded by the radiance from above, and so they delay on their going forth. What does the Holy One, blessed be He, then do? He shines forth for them, and they come forth in His light, as is said *They come, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance* (Ps. 89:16). And when they are about to go back in, they cannot tell where to go because of the radiance from above, and they stand in the firmament and tarry before entering, but the Holy One, blessed be He, scatters torches, arrows, and spears of light before them, and toward the place where He scatters light they go, as is said *The sun and moon stand still in their habitation; toward the light of Thine arrows they go, toward the shining of Thy glittering spear* (Hab. 3:11).

R. Levi said: Each day the sun and the moon are called to

stand examination before the Holy One, blessed be He. Why? Because the sun and the moon are ashamed to go forth, for, say they, "Mortals bow down to us, and so anger the Holy One, blessed be He." What does God then do? He sends arrows of light before them, as is said *At the light of Thine arrows . . . they go*; and so reluctantly they go forth, as is said *Each morning doth He give down His judgment, and light faileth not; but the unrighteous knoweth no shame* (Zeph. 3:5). What can *light faileth not* mean? The light of the sun and moon fail not, and the phrase thus parallels the words *not one dare fail* in the verse *God calleth them all by names, by the greatness of His might: so strong is He in power, not one dare fail* (Isa. 40:26). And what does *But the unrighteous knoweth no shame* mean? It means that the unrighteous do not become wise, and therefore they know no shame: The idols which they worship are smitten, and still they feel no shame.

R. Hanina said in the name of R. Abbahu: The coursing of the sun is its praising Him, for it is said *From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, My name is great among the nations* (Mal. 1:11).

R. Huna taught that Joshua had the coursing of the sun in mind when he said: "*Sun, stand thou still in Gibeon*" (Josh. 10:12), as if to command: "Be thou still, whilst I rise up, and sing the praise of God."²⁹

12. *The sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber* (Ps. 19:6). Like a bridegroom entering the bridal chamber clean and coming out of it defiled,³⁰ so the sun is clean upon its entering the world and defiled on its coming out. Lest it might be supposed that the sun goes forth as to forced labor, the verse ends *The sun . . . rejoiceth as a strong man to run his course*, and teaches that the sun alone of all the spheres³¹ makes a course for itself.

Another comment: Like a bridegroom, who is strong entering the bridal chamber and weak coming out, so the sun is strong entering upon its course, but—because of men's sins—is weak coming out.

13. *His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof* (Ps. 19:7): On the first day of the summer solstice, there is no shade under the sun for any creature.

And his circuit unto the ends of it. The Rabbis say: Gehenna will exist in the age-to-come, for it is said *The Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem* (Isa. 31:9).³² But both R. Yannai and R. Simeon ben Lakish say: Though Gehenna will not exist in the age-to-come, the sun will consume them that do evil, as is said *For behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven, and . . . all that do evil shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall consume them* (Mal. 3:19).

You will find that the sun is kept within a sheath, that the sheath is set within a sphere, that under the sphere moves a pool of water which comes from above the firmament, and that although God tempers the heat of the sun with the water from above the firmament, yet *There is nothing hid from the heat thereof* (Ps. 19:7). Now, on the day of judgment, what will the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He will cause the sun to come forth and will draw it out of its sheath and will bring it down to the second firmament and will punish with it them that did evil and will consume them, as is said *For behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven . . . and all that do evil shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall consume them* (Mal. 3:19).

R. Joshua ben Levi said: The Holy One, blessed be He, showed mercy to all the creatures in the world in that He did not set the sun in the first firmament: for had He set it in the first firmament, there would have been no shade under the sun for any creature, as is said *There is nothing hid from the heat thereof*.

But of him who occupies himself with Torah, what does Scripture go on to say? *The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul* (Ps. 19:8). So again Scripture says, *For His eyes are upon the ways of a man . . . There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves* (Job 34:22). But who will be able to hide himself in the time-to-come? ³³ The man who occupies himself with Torah. For the

verse *Remember ye the Torah of Moses My servant* (Mal. 3:22) follows upon the verse *Behold the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace.*

Thus Scripture says also: *The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul*: that is, at the resurrection of the dead, the Torah will stand up for a man, for the restoring of his life, as is said *It shall be unto thee a restorer of life* (Ruth 4:15).

14. In interpreting *The Law of the Lord is perfect, it restores the soul* (Ps. 19:8), R. Jeremiah and the Rabbis differed. One argued: "Why is Torah said to be perfect? Because it restores the soul." The other replied: "Why is Torah said to be capable of restoring the soul? Because it is perfect." And the verse, *The testimony of the Lord is sure, it makes wise the simple* (*ibid.*), is interpreted: "Why is the testimony of the Lord said to make the simple wise? Because it is sure."

A different reading: *The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is faithful, making wise the simple.* "When is the Law of the Lord perfect? When it comes from the mouth of a righteous man, a man perfect in righteousness. And when is the testimony of the Lord faithful? When it comes from the mouth of a faithful man."

The Law of the Lord is perfect, etc. R. Tanhuma interpreted the verse as referring to the six orders of Mishnah: Thus, *The Law of the Lord is perfect* refers to the order of "Women," for it is said of a woman, "Thou art all fair, my love; and there is no spot in thee" (Song 4:7). *The testimony of the Lord is sure* refers to the order of "Seeds," for only the man who believes that the life of the world is sure sows seeds. *The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart* (Ps. 19:9) refers to the order of "Feasts" with its regulations concerning the Booth and the Palm-branch and all the feasts in the year, of which it is written "Thou shalt rejoice in thy feast" (Deut. 16:14). *The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes* refers to the order of "Holy Things," which enlightens the eyes of the Sages. *The fear of the Lord is clean* (Ps. 19:10) refers to the order of "Clean Things" with its regulations distinguishing between impurity and purity.

The ordinances of the Lord are true refers to the order of "Civil Laws," which contains the greater portion³⁴ of laws regulating the relations between man and man.

15. In another comment on *The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart*, Hezekiah bar Hiyya taught: The Torah is like a chaplet upon the head, for it is said of Torah's precepts *They shall be a chaplet of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck* (Prov. 1:9); like a poultice for the heart, for it is said *The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart*; like a salve for the eyes, for it is said *The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes*; like a compress for a wound, for it is said *Fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel* (Prov. 3:7b-8); like a cup of root drink³⁵ for the bowels, for the verse ends by saying *and medicine to thy bones* (*ibid.*). How do we know that when the words of the Lord are absorbed, they give health to the two hundred and forty-eight parts of the body? Because it is said *My words . . . are health to all their parts* (Prov. 4:22).

Another comment on *The fear of the Lord must be kept undefiled*.³⁶ R. Levi said: Because Aaron feared the Name of the Lord, as it is said *Levi . . . feared Me, and was afraid of My name* (Mal. 2:5), therefore one section of Torah was given to him. Its provisions concerning Aaron himself, concerning his sons, concerning his sons' sons, will never be rescinded until the end of all the generations. What is the section? The section concerning the dead, which prescribes that Aaron must not defile himself by contact with the dead, as it is said *Speak unto the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say unto them: There shall none defile himself for the dead among his people* (Lev. 21:1).

The ordinances of the Lord are true, they are righteous altogether (Ps. 19:10). R. Simeon ben Lakish said: [Oral laws derived from the written ordinances] are true, for they are held together by the relation of a minor to a major premise. The Rabbis said: They are true, for they are held together by inferences from analogy.

16. *More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine*

gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb (Ps. 19:11). We could not tell who spoke this verse—whether the people of Israel or the nations of the earth—until Solomon came and made it plain that Israel was speaking: *I sat down under His shadow with great desire, and His fruit was sweet to my taste* (Song 2:3).

Moreover, by them is Thy servant warned; in keeping of them there is in the end great reward (Ps. 19:12): Whoever keeps the ordinances of the Lord finally becomes a great man.

Another reading: *In keeping of them, to the last of them, there is great reward*: Whoever keeps the ordinances of the Lord from the first to the last one is a great man, and doors of greatness shall open for him.

Another comment on *In keeping of them there is great reward*: Abraham who kept the ordinances of the Lord was made great, as is said *Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation* (Gen. 18:18).

Still another comment on *In keeping of them there is great reward*: Moses who kept the ordinances of the Lord was made great, as is said *The man Moses was very great* (Ex. 11:3).

17. *Who can discern errors?* (Ps. 19:13). R. Simeon ben Yoḥai taught: How powerful are the righteous, for they know how to win the favor of their Creator; they know just how to praise Him! Behold how David praised His Creator. He began to praise Him by making mention of the heavens, saying *The heavens declare the glory of God*. The heavens say: "Is there anything whatever Thou wouldst have of us?" And *The firmament showeth His handiwork*. The firmament says: "Is there anything whatever Thou wouldst have of us?" David, continuing to sing his Psalm, now praised God by making mention of the Torah, as is said *The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever* (Ps. 19:10). Then the Holy One, blessed be He, asked David: "What wouldst thou have?" David said: "*Who can discern errors?*" I would have that Thou forgive me the errors I have committed!" God replied: "This error is forgiven thee, and that error is forgiven thee," and David continued *Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins* (Ps. 19:14), that is, from deliberate sins.

*Then will the mightiest ('eṭam) have no dominion over me*³⁷—that is, the mightiest of iniquities, the word 'eṭam, "mightiest," being read like 'eṭan in the verse "Mighty ('eṭan) is thy dwelling-place" (Num. 24:21). *And I shall be clear from the great transgression*, that is, from my one great transgression.³⁸

According to R. Levi, David said: Master of the universe, Thou, God, art great, and I, my sins are great. It is fitting that a great God forgive great sins, as is said *For Thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity for it is great* (Ps. 25:11).

R. Aḥa said: Those Cutheans, they really know how to beg at doorways! At first they say, "Give us water, and we shall drink." After they drink, they say "Give us one onion." Given an onion, they say, "But an onion without bread is not solid food." Even so, the righteous know how to win the favor of their Creator, as is said *The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable* (Prov. 10:32). Of the wicked, however, the verse goes on *But the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness*: that is, they do not know how to speak acceptably to the Holy One, blessed be He.

Or, *The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable* alludes to Moses. When he sought to intercede for Reuben, what did he say first? *The Lord came from Sinai* (Deut. 33:2); then, *Yea, He loveth the peoples* (Deut. 33:3); then, *Moses commanded us a law* (Deut. 33:4), and finally, *Let Reuben live, and not die* (Deut. 33:6).

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable before Thee (Ps. 19:15). David prayed: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be written down for the generations, even graven for the generations.

O Lord, my Rock, and my Redeemer (Ps. 19:15): *my Rock*, at the Red Sea;³⁹ *my Redeemer* from Amalek.⁴⁰ *My Rock* at Marah;⁴¹ *my Redeemer* at Sinai. *My Rock* in this world; *my Redeemer* in the world-to-come.

PSALM TWENTY

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David. The Lord answer thee in the day of anguish* (Ps. 20:1-2a). Elsewhere Scripture says this: *He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in anguish* (Ps. 91:15), by which the Holy One, blessed be He, means: When anguish comes upon the children of Israel, and they call upon Me, let them but partner My glory with them, and I shall answer them forthwith, as Scripture says, *He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him*.

What is meant by *I will be with him in anguish*? R. Yudan told a parable of a pregnant woman who was angry with her mother. Even as the woman was giving birth, she made her mother go into an upper chamber. And as the woman below groaned with pain, the mother above, hearing her voice, groaned with her.¹ The neighbors asked: "What sort art thou that thou criest? Givest thou birth with her?" She replied: "My daughter, is she not in pain? How can I endure her cries? So behold me groaning with her, for my daughter's anguish is likewise mine." Just so, when the Holy Temple was destroyed, there was heard through the whole world a sound of weeping and wailing, as is said *In that day did the Lord, the God of hosts, call to weeping and to mourning* (Isa. 22:12). Thereupon the ministering angels asked: "Can such things be in Thy presence?" Is it not written of Thee *Glory and honor are in His presence; strength and gladness are in His place* (1 Chron. 16:27)? God replied: "Is not My Temple destroyed, are not My children thrown in chains, and should I not therefor be in anguish?" Is it not written *I will be with him in anguish* (Ps. 91:1)? It is also written *Now, therefore, what do I here? saith the Lord . . . My people is taken away . . . They that rule over them make them to howl . . . And My name continually all the day is blasphemed* (Isa. 52:5).

2. R. Joshua the Priest said: In this Psalm are nine verses corresponding to the nine months that a woman carries a child. And what do the nine verses say? "May He who answers a woman in the anguish of her labor, answer you also!"

R. Simeon bar Abba said: You find that from the beginning of

the Psalter to this Psalm there are eighteen Psalms—the Psalms *Blessed is the man* (Ps. 1:1) and *Why do the nations rage* (Ps. 2:1) being taken together as one—corresponding to the Eighteen Benedictions which a man prays every day.² And even as it is said to a man [concluding the Eighteen Benedictions], “May thy prayer be answered,” so it was said to David after he concluded eighteen Psalms, *The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble* (Ps. 20:2).³

Should it be argued: “But there are really nineteen Psalms!” say in reply: “In the daily prayer of Benedictions, counting ‘Blessed art Thou . . . who causest the horn of salvation to flourish,’⁴ there are also nineteen benedictions.”

3. Another comment. *The Lord answer [for] thee in the day of trouble*. What day of trouble? The day which all acknowledge is a day of trouble above and below, a day which even the ministering angels fear. Mark what is written of it! *Thus saith the Lord: We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear . . . Wherefore do I see . . . all faces turned to paleness* (Jer. 30:5-6), *faces* clearly being the faces of the ministering angels, of whom it is said *Every one had four faces* (Ezek. 10:14). Of this day, the nations of the earth say, *Alas! for this day is great, so that none is like it* (Jer. 30:7); and the people of Israel say through David, *The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble*, the day of trouble above and below. On this day, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to [the guardian angels of] the nations of the earth: Come and show your cause against My children, the children of Israel: *Produce your cause, saith the Lord* (Isa. 41:21). And when these reply: “Master of the universe, who will make up the pleas for Israel?”⁵ God will say, if one may speak thus of Him, “I,” as is said *The God of Israel is He who will give His people strength and strong defenses* (Ps. 68:36). Thereupon the nations of the earth will ask: “Does this mean that in divine judgment there is partiality? These committed incest, and those committed incest; these shed blood, and those shed blood. Why, then, are these made to go down into Gehenna, and why are those not made to go down?”⁶

Hereupon the angelic defender of the children of Israel will find himself unable to answer, as is said *Then shall Michael stand still, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was* (Dan. 12:1). What can "standing still" mean here except "inability to answer," as in the words "They stand still and answer no more" (Job 32:16). And because Michael will be unable to answer, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say: "Michael, thou art unable to answer and unable to speak in defence of My children, and so I shall speak of their righteousness and save them," as is said *I that speak of righteousness, am mighty to save* (Isa. 63:1). Of what particular act of righteousness? R. Phinehas, R. Eleazar, and R. Johanan gave different answers. One maintained: God will say, "Of that righteousness which you did Me when you accepted the Torah at Sinai. Had you not taken the Torah at Sinai, I would have destroyed you." Another maintained: God will say, "Of that righteousness which you did Me when you accepted the Torah. Had you not accepted it, where would My kingdom be?" And another maintained: God will say, "Yours the reward for accepting the Torah. Had you not accepted it, I would have destroyed the world and reduced it to waste and desolation," as is said *If My covenant be not . . . I would not have appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth* (Jer. 33:25).

And at that time thy people shall be delivered (Dan. 12:1). Through whose merit? Through the merit of Joseph. For what will the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He will look among all the tribes, finding none like Joseph among them; for behold, Joseph hearkened not to his master's wife, as is said *He hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her* (Gen. 39:10). And the proof that the children of Israel are called by the name of Joseph? The verse *It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph* (Amos 5:15).

R. Samuel bar Nahmani said: Through the merit of their lineage, for it is said *Bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the end of the earth; every one that is called by My name* (Isa. 43:6b-7).

R. Levi said: Through the merit of circumcision. For the verse of this comment says that *At that time thy people shall be delivered*, and in another place it is written *At that time⁷ the Lord said unto Joshua: "Make thee knives of flint, and circumcise . . . the children of Israel"* (Josh. 5:2).

4. Another comment on *The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble*: A parable of a father and son who were journeying on a road. The son, growing weary, asked his father: "Where is the city?" and the father replied: "My son, take this as a sign: when thou seest a burial ground before thee, then surely the city is near thee." Likewise, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the children of Israel: When you see troubles hard by you, surely in that hour you will be redeemed, for it is said *The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble*.

The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble, the name of the God of Jacob defend thee (Ps. 20:2). Not "the God of Abraham," nor "the God of Isaac" is written here, but *the God of Jacob*. Why? R. Simeon ben Lakish told the parable of a pregnant woman who was suffering hard labor pains. She was told: "We know not what to say to ease thee. But let Him who answered thy mother in the time of her labor, answer thee in the time of thy labor!" Likewise Jacob said: *God who answered me in the day of my trouble* (Gen. 35:3). And David told Israel: Let Him who answered Jacob in the day of his trouble, answer you in the day of your trouble.⁸ Hence *The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee*.

5. *Send forth Thy help because of hallowing* (Ps. 20:3): Because martyrs among you hallow the Name, and because good works among you hallow it. *And may He sustain thee by [distinctive] marks⁹* (*ibid.*): By the commandments, the performance of which is your mark of distinction.

Another interpretation. *Send forth Thy help because of hallowing*, Thy help as a reward for hallowing Sabbaths, festivals, and new moons. *And may He sustain thee by [the distinctive] marks*, with which you indicate new years¹⁰ as full, regular or defective,¹¹ the marks being *ŠWH*, *KHZ*,¹² *HDW*. *ŠWH* indicates

that when a year is full (*šēlemah*—abbreviated to *Š*) and unintercalated, Passover in that year falls six ($W = 6$) days later than in the previous year;¹³ but when the year is full and intercalated, Passover falls eight ($H = 8$) days¹⁴ later. *KHZ* indicates that when a year is regular (*ḵēsīdrah*—abbreviated to *K*) and unintercalated, Passover in that year falls five ($H = 5$) days later than in the previous year; but when the year is regular and intercalated, Passover falls seven ($Z = 7$) days later. *HDW* indicates that when a year is defective (*hāserah*—abbreviated to *H*) and unintercalated, Passover in that year falls four ($D = 4$) days later than in the previous year; but when the year is defective and intercalated, Passover falls six ($W = 6$) days later.¹⁵

6. Another comment on *May He sustain thee out of Zion*. All the blessings, the comforts, and the boons which the Holy One, blessed be He, brings to Israel will be out of Zion, for it is said *May He sustain thee out of Zion*. This passage is found above, in the comment on Psalm Fourteen.¹⁶

7. A further comment on *Send thee help . . . and sustain thee* (Ps. 20:3). The verse teaches that all creatures require help. Hear what happened to a spirit who haunted a certain well. Once, as Abba Jose ben Dosai passed the well, the spirit came to him and said: "My master, I have been here in this place many years, and no creature has ever been injured by me. But of late, a certain spirit has been contending with me each day, and seeks to banish me from this place—a very cruel and wicked spirit who does not suffer any creature to remain alive. And if it is thy wish that no creatures be injured, help me against him and I will kill him." Abba Jose asked: "How can I help thee?" The spirit replied: "At high noon, come thou and all thy disciples with your sticks and strike everywhere about the well and say, 'Let me!' and 'Strike him!' And he will hear you and will think that ye are come to my help, and I shall be able to kill him."

So they did as he asked, and when they saw a kind of blood-spot upon the well they knew the first spirit had slain the other.

This anecdote proves that even demons and spirits require help.

8. *Remember all thy meal-offerings* (Ps. 20:4). R. Hama said:

All offerings *shalt thou season with salt* (Lev. 2:13), in order that God shall be like one who says, "Yes, I remember well that portion which was salted."¹⁷

R. Tanhuma said: *Remember all thy meal-offerings* in the Tent of Meeting, at Nob, at Gilgal, in Shiloh, and in the Temple in Jerusalem.¹⁸ And in *And consider Thy burnt-sacrifice [as if] reduced to ashes* (Ps. 20:4b), there is an allusion to Isaac who, like a burnt-sacrifice, was bound to an altar.

9. *Grant thee according to thine own heart* (Ps. 20:5). Once it happened that Rabban Gamaliel went to R. Helbo at Kirwa¹⁹ and asked: "Pray for me." R. Helbo replied: *God grant thee according to thine own heart*. (R. Huna ben R. Isaac maintained, however, that R. Helbo did not reply with these words, but with *The Lord fulfill all thy petitions* [Ps. 20:6b]). Then R. Helbo went on: This is a prayer which one may not utter for every man. Why? Because at times it is in a man's heart to steal, to commit a sin, or do any other kind of evil he ought not do. So dare one say to a man *Grant thee according to thine own heart*? But because Rabban Gamaliel's heart was whole before his Creator, R. Helbo prayed thus for him.

10. *We will shout for joy in Thy victory, and in the name of our God we will set up our standards* (Ps. 20:6). In this world, each man recognizes his own standard by its special device, as is said *The standard of the camp of Reuben* (Num. 2:10); by a standard he recognizes the house of his fathers;²⁰ and by the house of his fathers, he recognizes his own family. But things will be different in the age-to-come, for at that time *In the name of our God we will set up our standards*.

Let the King answer us in the day that we call (Ps. 20:10). This Psalm begins with a prayer pleading for immediate answer, and ends with a prayer pleading for immediate answer. In *The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble*, the Psalm begins with a prayer pleading for immediate answer; and in *Let the King answer us in the day that we call*, the Psalm ends with a prayer pleading for immediate answer.

PSALM TWENTY-ONE

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David. The king shall joy in Thy strength, O Lord* (Ps. 21:1-2). These words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the peoples; unto him shall the nations seek* (Isa. 11:10)—that is, seek the king Messiah, David's son, who will remain hidden until the time of redemption.¹

R. Tanhuma said: The king Messiah will come for no other purpose than to teach the nations of the earth thirty² precepts, such as those of the Booth, the Palm-Branch, and the Tefillin. But all the children of Israel will be taught precepts of Torah by the Holy One Himself, blessed be He, for it is said *All thy children shall be taught by the Lord* (Isa. 59:13). Why not by the Messiah? Because of the Messiah it is said *Unto him shall the nations seek*.

R. Hanina said in the name of R. Aha: What can *His rest shall be glory* (*ibid.*) mean except that God will bestow a portion of His supernal glory upon the king Messiah. Hence it is said *The king shall joy in Thy strength, O Lord*.

2. Another comment on *The king shall joy in Thy strength, O Lord*. Scripture says elsewhere, *Who is this King of glory?* (Ps. 24:10). R. Simon asserted: To whom can *this King of glory* refer except to that one King who bestows upon those who fear Him a portion of His own glory—the Lord, *He is the King whose glory is for ever in [His] hosts* (*ibid.*). Thus, our Masters taught in the Mishnah: A mortal king—one may not ride on his horse, nor sit on his throne, nor take his scepter.³ Yet Moses was allowed to take the scepter of the Holy One, blessed be He, for it is said *Moses took the scepter of God in his hand* (Ex. 4:20); and Elijah was allowed to ride on the Lord's horse. What is the horse of the Holy One, blessed be He, but the whirlwind and the storm, of which it is said *In the whirlwind and in the storm is His way* (Nahum 1:3). And Scripture says, *It came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah by a whirlwind into heaven* (2

Kings 2:1). A mortal king—one may not wear his crown, yet the Holy One, blessed be He, sets His own crown on the head of the king Messiah, as it is said *Thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head* (Ps. 21:4). A mortal king—one may not wear his purple, yet the Holy One, blessed be He, puts His honor and majesty upon the king Messiah, as is said *Honor and majesty dost Thou put upon him* (Ps. 21:6). A mortal king—one may not sit on his throne, yet it is written of Solomon, *Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord* (1 Chron. 29:23). A mortal king—one may not call his viceroy “king,” yet the Holy One, blessed be He, called Moses god, when He said to him *See I have made thee a god to Pharaoh* (Ex. 7:1). God said also to the children of Israel: *Ye are gods* (Ps. 82:6); and He called them holy ones, as is said *They shall be holy unto their God* (Lev. 21:6); and He said: *Thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God* (Deut. 7:6). God will call the king Messiah after His own name, for it is said of the king Messiah *This is his name whereby he shall be called: The Lord our righteousness* (Jer. 23:6). Jerusalem also shall be called after the Lord’s name, for it is said of Jerusalem *The name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord. That shall be her name*⁴ (Ezek. 48:35). R. Levi said of Jerusalem: It will be good for the city when her name is the same as the name of her king, and the name of her king is the same as the name of her God. Accordingly when Scripture says, [*The king*] *shall stand, and rule in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God* (Micah 5:3), it refers to the time when *The king shall joy in Thy strength, O Lord*.

Another comment: *Strength* clearly refers to Torah, for it is said *The Lord gave strength unto His people* (Ps. 29:11).

Or, *strength* clearly refers to the Ark of the Covenant, for it is written *He delivered His strength into captivity* (Ps. 78:61).

Or, *strength* clearly refers to kingship, for it is said *He will give strength unto His king* (1 Sam. 2:10).

Or, finally, *strength* refers to the Temple, for it is said *I will break the pride of your strength* (Lev. 26:19).⁵

3. *Thou hast given him his heart’s desire* (Ps. 21:3) means that

Thou, O Lord, in the presence of the king Messiah, didst declare Edom's guardian angel wrong.

And the 'ärešet⁶ of his lips Thou hast not withholden. Selah (Ps. 21:3b). What is meant by *the 'ärešet of his lips*? "The authority (*rašut*) of his lips": For when it is reported to the king Messiah, "A certain land is in rebellion against thee," he will say: "Let locusts come and smite that land," as is said *He shall smite the land with the rod of his mouth* (Isa. 11:4); or, when it is reported to him "A certain province is in rebellion against thee," he will say: "Let the angel of death come and slay the wicked of that province," as is said *With the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked (ibid.)*.⁷

Another comment: *The request of his lips Thou hast not withholden* means that whatever the king Messiah decrees, the words of his decree stand.

4. *For Thou meetest him with the blessings of goodliness* (Ps. 21:4): The phrase *blessings of goodliness* refers, according to R. Judah, to the blessings which were given to Moses who was called "a goodly child," as is said *She saw him that he was a goodly child* (Ex. 2:2). According to the Rabbis, this phrase refers to the blessings of Torah, of which God said: *I give you goodly doctrine; forsake ye not My law* (Prov. 4:2).

He asked life of Thee, Thou gavest it him; even length of days for ever and ever (Ps. 21:5). R. Joḥanan taught: Scripture mentions three men—Solomon, Ahaz, and the king Messiah—to each of whom the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Ask of Me." For the rest of R. Joḥanan's comment, see this Midrash on the Psalm *Why do the heathen rage?*⁸

R. Berechiah said: The verse means that the king Messiah asked that even Korah and his companions, men who went alive down into their graves, be raised up again, for it is said *The Lord . . . bringeth down to the grave, and raiseth up* (1 Sam. 2:6).⁹

His honor is great through Thy salvation (Ps. 21:6). That is to say, even the honor of the king Messiah is great only through God's works.

Glory and great worship shalt Thou lay upon him (Ps. 21:6)

means that Thou, O God, layest a master's glory and a disciple's great worship upon the king Messiah. *Glory*, accordingly, is to be understood as in God's command to Moses concerning Joshua: *Thou shalt put of thy glory upon him* (Num. 27:20). Note that it is said *of thy glory*, and not "all thy glory." Where, then, was all the glory of Moses put upon Joshua? R. Yudan said it was put upon him at the Jordan, for as it is written of Moses *They were afraid to come nigh him* (Ex. 34:30), so is it written of Joshua at the Jordan, *They feared him, as they feared Moses* (Josh. 4:14).

5. *For Thou shalt make him most blessed for ever* (Ps. 21:7) means that all the nations shall bless themselves in the king Messiah.¹⁰

Thou shalt make him exceeding glad with Thy countenance (Ps. 21:7). R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Samuel: One verse reads of the king Messiah that *One, like the son of man . . . came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before Him* (Dan. 7:13), but in another verse God says, *I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto Me* (Jer. 30:21). How reconcile the two? ¹¹ Angels will bring the king Messiah to the outer edge of their encampment, and then the Holy One, blessed be He, will reach out His hand and bring the king Messiah near to Him. Hence it is said *I will cause him to draw near*.

All thine enemies shall feel thy hand (Ps. 21:9) means, according to R. Levi, that God said to the king Messiah: Thy hand shall seek them out for punishment.

Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger . . . and the fire shall devour them (Ps. 21:10). The Rabbis say that Gehenna will still exist in the time-to-come, for it is said *Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven . . . and all that do wickedly shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up* (Mal. 3:19), and so on, as above.¹²

PSALM TWENTY-TWO

1. *For the leader; upon Aijelet hash-Shahar* (Ps. 22:1). The word *Aijelet* ("Hind") is to be taken in the same sense as *Aijaloth* in *God, the Lord, is my strength, and He made my feet like hinds' (Aijaloth) feet, letting me walk upon bamotay*¹ (Hab. 3:19). R. Phinehas said: Scripture does not say here "like stags' feet," but *like hinds' feet*, because the feet of the female deer are surer than the feet of the male. What is meant by *bamotay*? As in Greek *bēmata*, *bamotay* means "upon the balls of my feet."² *Letting me walk* is an allusion to my walking upon the Egyptians. When the Egyptians sank in the sea, the Holy One, blessed be He, made a sign to the sea, and it cast them up on dry land, and the children of Israel saw them dead, as is said *When the morning appeared . . . Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore* (Ex. 14:27c, 30b). What did the children of Israel do to them? Each man in Israel took his dog, and went down, and placed his foot upon an Egyptian's neck, and said to his dog: "Eat of this hand which used me as a slave! Eat of these bowels which had no mercy on me!" You can prove for yourself that this actually happened, for of the Egyptians it is written *The Lord said: . . . I will bring them back . . . that thy foot may wade through blood, that the tongue of thy dogs may have its portion from thine enemies* (Ps. 68:23-24). Whereupon the children of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: From of old, Thou didst perform all such miracles for us, and indeed we are not ingrates. But what else can we do, except sing Thee songs and praises: *Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord* (Ex. 15:1). So *For the leader; upon Aijelet hash-Shahar* ("the hind of dawn") means "Upon the rising of the sun, a song."

A different comment. *Upon Aijelet* ("hind"), when read as the plural *Aijaloth*, may be taken as referring to two women likened to hinds, to Deborah and to Esther: to Deborah who came from the tribe of Naphtali—Jacob meant her when he said *Naphtali is a hind let loose* (Gen. 49:21)—and to Esther who is also likened to a hind. In this Psalm, however, *The hind of the morning* refers to Esther.

2. *My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?* (Ps. 22:2). These words are to be considered in regard to the verse *The light of Israel shall be for a fire, and His holy one for a flame; and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day* (Isa. 10:17): *The light of Israel* means Hezekiah;³ *His holy one* means Isaiah; *and it shall burn* means that Sennacherib shall burn; *and devour his thorns and his briers* means that Sennacherib's hosts shall be devoured. Thus when Sennacherib moved upon Jerusalem Isaiah and Hezekiah sat in the Temple, and from between the two of them came forth a fire which devoured Sennacherib and his hosts.

Or, *The light of Israel* means Mordecai; *His holy one* means Esther; *and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers* means that Haman and his sons shall be devoured. Our Masters said: Haman had a hundred sons, ten of whom were slain, ten hanged, ten dismembered and thrown to dogs; and the remaining seventy went begging for twelve months from door to door, and at the end were also slain. How then shall one interpret *it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day*? In this way: as a man measures, so is he measured. As Haman made a decree *to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all Jews* (Esther 3:13), so it was decreed against him and his: *it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers*.

3. A different comment on *The light of Israel shall be for a fire*. *Light of Israel* refers to Esther who shone like the light of morning for Israel. But is not light the same as fire, and fire the same as light? The verse implies, however, that the Holy One, blessed be He, said: I shall make the day have two faces, a face of light for the people of Israel, and a face of darkness for the nations of the earth of whom Scripture says, *Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! Wherefore would ye have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light* (Amos 5:18). In this world's use, when a man lights a lamp in his parlor, can he possibly say: "Such and such a man who is my friend is free to use the light of the lamp, but my foe is not free to use the light of the lamp?" The truth is that all men alike can use the light of a

lamp. But the Holy One, blessed be He, does things differently. Though all men alike can make use [of light] in this world, and God gives darkness to all alike in this world, God in the time-to-come will say only to Israel: *Arise, shine, for thy light is come . . . darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but upon thee the Lord will arise* (Isa. 60:2).

R. Hanina also said: The words *The Lord is good to all* (Ps. 145:9) mean that the Lord is good to all only in this world. But it is said of the world-to-come in the time-to-come *Do good, O Lord, unto those that are good, and to them that are upright in their hearts* (Ps. 125:4). Even so, Mordecai and Esther were a darkness for the gentiles; but for the Jews they were a light, for it is said, on account of Mordecai and Esther *The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor* (Esther 8:16).⁴

Why is Esther called Hadassah? Esther means "the hidden one"; for she remained hidden fast in her chambers;⁵ but she came forth into the world when there was need of her to give light to Israel. As for her name Hadassah, of which it is written *Mordecai . . . brought up Hadassah* ("myrtle") (Esther 2:7), it was given to her because of her righteousness. Mordecai, too, was called *Hadas* or "myrtle," this being a name for righteous men as in the verse *I saw a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle-trees* (Zech. 1:8).

Like a myrtle-tree, whose odor is good and whose taste is bitter, so Mordecai and Esther were a light to Israel and a darkness to the peoples of the earth. Do not wonder at this. For of Egypt, one verse reads *There was a darkness in all the land of Egypt three days* (Ex. 10:22), and the next says *But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings* (Ex. 10:23).

And so God says to the people of Israel: Even as I have done in this world, so will I do in the world-to-come, for it is said *Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but upon thee the Lord will arise, and His glory shall be seen upon thee* (Isa. 60:2).

4. A different comment on *For the leader; upon Aijelet hash-Shahar* ("Hind of the dawn"). This verse is to be considered in

the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me* (Micah 7:8). In saying *For the leader; upon the Hind of the dawn*, David meant "For Him who leaps up like a hind in a time of darkness to give light to the world." When does God Himself give light to the world? Surely not at night. For though it be night, one has the light of the moon, the stars, and the planets. Then when is it really dark? Before dawn! After the moon sets, and the stars set, and the planets vanish, there is no darkness deeper than the hour before dawn, and in that hour the Holy One, blessed be He, answers the world and all that are in it: Out of the darkness, He brings forth the dawn and gives light to the world.

5. Another comment. *For the leader; upon Aijelet hash-Shahar* ("Hind of the dawn") refers to Him who leaps up like a hind in the midst of darkness to give light to the children of Israel.

Thus in saying *And it came to pass, that when the sun was going down a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and lo, a dread, even a great darkness, fell upon him* (Gen. 15:12), Scripture is referring to the several exiles, during which the Holy One, blessed be He, will be a light in the midst of darkness for the children of Israel. *Dread* refers to Babylon, described in Daniel's vision as "dreadful and terrible" (Dan. 7:7); *darkness* refers to Media, which darkened the light in the eyes of Israel, until in the days of Mordecai and Esther the Holy One, blessed be He, restored the light, for it is said "The Jews had light and gladness" (Esther 8:16); *great* refers to Greece, described in Daniel's vision as "the great horn" (Dan. 8:8); *fell* refers to Edom, meant to fall by the hand of Israel, when the Holy One, blessed be He, will give light to Israel, saying, *Arise, shine, for thy light is come* (Isa. 60:1). And so *For the leader; upon the Hind of the dawn* means "For Him who shall leap up like a hind, and break forth like the dawn upon Israel, as it is said *Then shall thy light break forth as the morning*" (Isa. 58:8).

Note also that it is written of Esther: *Then called Esther for*

Hathach (Esther 4:5), etc. up to the verse in which Mordecai sends word to Esther: "*Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape*" (Esther 4:13), that is, "Do not think to thyself: 'Because I am queen I shall not perish!'" *For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time* (Esther 4:14), "A time of trouble unto Jacob, out of it shall he [nevertheless] be saved" (Jer. 30:7). *For relief and deliverance will arise to the Jews from another place* (Esther 4:14)—that is, from Him, of whom it is written "Israel shall be saved by the Lord with everlasting deliverance" (Isa. 45:17). *But thou and thy father's house will perish; and who knoweth whether thou art not come to royal estate for such a time as this?* (Esther 4:14). From this verse you may learn a rule of conduct: a man ought not to push his fellow away with both hands; while he may be pushing him away with his left hand, he ought to be pulling him near with his right. For this reason, [Mordecai said: *Thou and thy father's house will perish*, but added:] *Who knoweth whether thou art not come to royal estate for such a time as this?*

Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye with me (Esther 4:16). From this verse comes proof that the solemn gathering is the most important part of a fast, as is said *Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders* (Joel 1:14).

Neither eat nor drink three days (Esther 4:16). Having already said *fast ye with me*, why did Esther find it necessary to add *Neither eat nor drink three days*? Can one who fasts eat and drink? What was in her mind? By *fast ye with me*, she meant "Fast ye because you ate and drank at the feast of Ahasuerus."⁶ Accordingly, the proverb: "Here the palm-heart, here its branch; you have eaten the heart, now be smitten with the branch."⁷

It might be thought that they had to fast continuously night and day: but can men fast continuously three days and three nights, and not die?⁸ In truth, they were allowed to break their fast while it was still daylight. And why only a three-day fast? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, does not leave the children of Israel in distress for more than three days.⁹ Thus [when Abra-

ham was taking his son to the land of Moriah to offer him there for a burnt-offering], Scripture says, *On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off* (Gen. 22:4); and [when Joseph charged his brothers with being spies], it is said *He put them all together into ward three days* (Gen. 42:17); and [when Israel went out into the wilderness of Shur], it is said *And they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water* (Ex. 15:22); and again, when Hezekiah was sick unto death, the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, saying: *Return, and say to Hezekiah: Behold, I will heal thee; unto the house of the Lord thou shalt go on the third day* (2 Kings 20:5). In like manner, Rahab the harlot said to the spies sent out by Joshua: You need suffer but three days, as is said *Get you to the mountain . . . and hide yourselves there three days . . . and afterward may ye go your way* (Josh. 2:16).¹⁰ And likewise of Jonah: *Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights* (Jonah 2:2), and then *The Lord spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land* (Jonah 2:11). The prophet Hosea also said: *After two days He will revive us, on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight* (Hos. 6:2).

Accordingly, Esther decreed a fast for three days. And so *the hind of the dawn* refers to Esther who brought forth the morning out of darkness.

6. *My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?* (Ps. 22:2). On the first day of a fast, one says: *My God*; on the second day, one says: *My God*; only on the third may one say *Why hast Thou forsaken me?* So it was only after Esther cried in a loud voice, *Why hast Thou forsaken me?* that her cry was heard.

O my God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not. . . . For Thou art holy, O Thou that art enthroned upon the praises of Israel. Our fathers . . . cried unto Thee, and were delivered (Ps. 22:3-6). Esther said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Didst Thou deal with our fathers in Egypt as now with us? Indeed not. As soon as our fathers cried, Thou didst hear them, as is said *The Lord said: "I have . . . heard their cry . . . and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians"* (Ex. 3:7-8).

Yet which is the greater trial, this one or the one in Egypt? Pharaoh charged all his people, saying: *Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive* (Ex. 1:22), but Haman sent letters to destroy . . . *both young and old, little children and women, in one day* (Esther 3:13). Pharaoh commanded that only when a man did not complete his work, was he to be walled up alive; when a man did complete his work, nothing was done to him; but Haman decreed to *destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all Jews* (Esther 3:13). Those who were in Egypt Thou didst hear at once when they cried out; but to us who have been fasting for these three days and praying and crying and calling, Thou dost not reply: even if there be no good deeds in us, deal mercifully with us for the hallowing of Thy name. *For Thou art holy, O Thou that art enthroned upon the praises of Israel* (Ps. 22:4).

7. A different exposition of *Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me* (Micah 7:8). The people of Israel say to [hostile] nations of the earth: *Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy*. Why not? *Because if I fall, I arise*: Swift upon a falling, there is a rising up.

R. Samuel drew the same meaning from the verse *A righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up again* (Prov. 24:16). But when the wicked fall, they shall not rise up again. Upon the stumbling of the wicked follows calamity, as is said *The wicked stumble into calamity* (*ibid.*): Once they fall, there is no rising up for them. Scripture says this again in the verse *In one blow their folly shall be made manifest, and they shall be destroyed* (Jer. 10:8).¹¹

When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me (Micah 7:8). Our Masters taught: "Hard upon wrath, there is favor; hard upon darkness, light; hard upon anger, compassion; hard upon trouble, comfort; hard upon rejection, acceptance; hard upon falling, a rising up." Indeed, "Hard upon wrath, favor," for God said: *Let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, that I may consume them* (Ex. 32:10),¹² but directly after

this, it is said *The Lord repented of the evil which He said He would do unto His people* (Ex. 32:14). Indeed, "Hard upon darkness, light," for it is said *When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me* (Micah 7:8). Indeed "Hard upon anger, compassion," for it is said *In wrath remember compassion* (Hab. 3:2). Indeed, "Hard upon trouble, comfort," for it is said *It is a time of trouble unto Jacob, but out of it shall he be saved* (Jer. 30:7). Indeed, "Hard upon rejection, acceptance," for it is said *It shall come to pass that instead of that which was said: "Ye are not My people," it shall be said unto them: "Ye are the children of the living God"* (Hos. 2:1). Indeed, "Hard upon falling, a rising up," for it is said *When I fall, I shall arise* (Micah 7:8).

Upon the abasement of righteous men follows their exaltation. Of this it is written *When thou fallest, thou shalt be lifted up* (Prov. 30:32).¹³ Thus it was with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Out of their being cast into the fiery furnace came their exaltation, as it is said *Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego* (Dan. 3:30).¹⁴ And thus it was with Daniel, with Mordecai, and with Joseph.

You will find no days as fearsome as those days of the time of Haman, for then the children of Israel were in deep darkness, living in gloom and in anguish. This was when Haman said to Ahasuerus: *"There is a certain people scattered abroad . . . their laws are diverse . . . neither keep they the king's laws"* (Esther 3:8). Esther being told of this, immediately said to Mordecai: *Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me . . . I also and my maidens will fast in like manner* (Esther 4:16). And as she was saying *And so I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law* (Esther 4:16), the people of the palace began to say: "Now the king will be angry at Esther, and death will be decreed for her." And every one said: "I shall take Esther's apparel," this one saying "Me, I shall take her ornaments"; and that one saying "Me, I shall take her earrings"; and another one saying "Me, I shall take her royal vesture," as is known from Esther's statement: *They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture* (Ps. 22:19).

Now because Esther perceived and understood what was going on, she prayed and said: *Be not Thou far from me, O Lord, O my Strength, haste Thee to help me* (Ps. 22:20).

As soon as David foresaw by the help of the Holy Spirit that *O my Strength (Aijelet)* was the apostrophe wherewith she would call upon the Holy One, blessed be He, David, thinking upon Esther, arranged this Psalm *For the leader; upon Aijelet hash-Shahar*.

8. In another comment, *For the leader; upon Aijelet hash-Shahar* is interpreted as "For the leader; upon strength at dawn." Elsewhere Scripture says, *Awake, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp; I myself will awake at dawn* (Ps. 57:9). This is as though David said: "I will awake the king's glory for the sake of my Maker's glory, my glory being nothing before my Maker's glory." R. Phinehas said in the name of R. Eleazar ben Menahem: What did David use to do? He used to take a psaltery and a harp, put them above his head, and upon waking himself at midnight, used to play upon them; thereupon the Sages of Israel, hearing the sound of David's playing, used to say: "If David, king of Israel, occupies himself at midnight with Torah, with songs and praises, so much the more should we!" And it turned out that because of David all the children of Israel sat down and occupied themselves with Torah.

R. Levi said: A window was left open above David's couch—left open to the north—and across the window hung a harp, and when the north wind came up at midnight it blew through the harp, which then played of itself; and David would say, *Awake my glory*. How awakened? By the psaltery and the harp. *I will awake the dawn*: That is, "I shall be he who awakes the dawn, the dawn shall not awake me." All night long his Inclination-to-evil would tempt him, saying "David! David! Is it the way of kings that the dawn wake them? Kings sleep three hours into the day."¹⁵ Yet thou declarest *I will awake the dawn*, and thou risest at midnight, saying: 'At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto Thee' " (Ps. 119:62).

9. Another comment. The verse *Awake, my glory; awake,*

psaltery and harp; I will awake the dawn alludes to the four kingdoms. *Awake, my glory* means that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were to rise for us in ¹⁶ Babylon; *awake, psaltery* means that Mordecai and Esther were to rise for us in Media; *awake . . . harp* means that the house of the Hasmoneans was to rise for us in Greece; *I will awake the dawn* means that the Messiah is to rise for us in Edom.

Or, *Awake, my glory* alludes to the ruined First Temple, which was to be rebuilt by the hands of Ezra. *Awake, psaltery and harp; I will awake the dawn* alludes to the ruined Second Temple, which is to be rebuilt—the whole structure—by Thy hand. Of this it is written *The Lord doth build up Jerusalem, He gathereth together the dispersed of Israel* (Ps. 147:2).

10. Another comment. *Awake, my Glory; awake, psaltery and harp; I will awake the dawn* means that the congregation of Israel said to the Lord: Master of the universe, awake as in the days of Esther, who is likened to the dawn, so that upon psaltery and upon harp we may again sing Psalms before Thee!

The question was asked: Why is Esther likened to the dawn? When the dawn awakes the stars set, and so in the court of Ahasuerus, as Esther awakened, the stars of Haman and his sons set.

In another comment, R. Benjamin bar Japheth taught in the name of R. Eleazar: "As the dawn ends the night, so all the miracles ended with Esther." But what of Hanukkah? We speak, however, only of the miracles which are recorded in Scripture.¹⁷

11. Another comment. The phrase *the hind of morning* is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Who is this that cometh up as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?* (Song 6:10). Who is the *this* the verse refers to? Israel, to whom God said: *This thy stature is like to a palm-tree* (Song 7:8). When the people of Israel were journeying in the wilderness the Ark went before them, as is said *The Ark of the Lord went before them* (Num. 10:33). R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Jose ben Zimra: From

between the two poles by which the Ark was carried, something like flaming darts would fly out and consume [fiery] serpents thick as the beams of an olive-press, and scorpions big as the trunks of sorb-trees,¹⁸ as is said *The Lord thy God . . . led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions* (Deut. 8:15); and would likewise consume thorns and briers before Israel. The nations of the earth saw the smoke, and asked: *Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness like pillars*¹⁹ *of smoke?* (Song 3:6). They saw how the Holy One, blessed be He, did miracles for Israel, causing manna to fall for them, making the well come up for them, bringing quail to them,²⁰ and even giving them light with His own glory, as is said *The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light* (Ex. 13:21). And when the nations of the earth saw the cloud by day and the light of fire by night, they asked: *"Who is this that cometh up as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?"* (Song 6:10): who is this people, each of whose instruments is made of light? Israel's Law is made of light, for it is said *The commandment is a lamp, and the Law is light* (Prov. 6:23). Israel's God is made of light, as is said *The light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame* (Isa. 10:17). Israel's Redeemer is made of light, as is said *Arise, shine for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee* (Isa. 60:1). Israel's joy is made of light, as is said *The light of the righteous rejoiceth* (Prov. 13:9). And of the time-to-come, it is written *Light is sown for the righteous* (Ps. 97:11). Surely, said the nations, they are gods, not men.

12. *Who is this that cometh up . . . fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?* (Song 6:10). Why is Israel likened to the moon? Because, like the moon which rules by day as well as by night,²¹ Israel shall rule in this world and in the world-to-come. Lest it be thought, however, that like the moon which wanes in the course of the month, Israel

will also wane, the verse goes on to say *clear as the sun*: like the sun which is always full, so Israel will always be full because of good deeds.

Commenting on *terrible as troops with banners* (Song 6:10), R. Eliezer and R. Joshua differed. R. Eliezer said: [To the nations] Israel resembled the ministering angels who stand arrayed like troops with banners.²² R. Joshua said: Israel looked as when going out of Egypt they stood drawn up in their places like troops under banners.

R. Hiyya told a parable of a king's daughter who was reduced to glean among the sheaves. A king passing by, recognized her as the daughter of a king,²³ fell in love with her, and took her up and set her in his chariot.²⁴ Her companions marveled at her and said: "Yesterday thou wast glean among sheaves, and now thou sittest in a chariot with a king!" She answered: "Even as you marvel at me, so I marvel at myself." So, too, when the children of Israel were made to slave with clay and with bricks in Egypt, they were despised by the Egyptians. But when they were redeemed and made free men and even lords and governors ruling over all mortals, then the Egyptians began to marvel at them, and the children of Israel said: "Even as you marvel at us, so we marvel at ourselves." Of this it is written *Before I was aware, my God set me upon the chariot of a princely people* (Song 6:12).

13. Another interpretation of *Who is this that cometh up as the morning* (Song 6:10). R. Hiyya bar Abba and R. Simeon ben Ḥalafta walking at dawn in the valley of Arbel²⁵ saw "the hind of the morning," its light raying out as it rose. R. Hiyya remarked: "The redemption of Israel will be like this!" R. Simeon replied: "Yes, for it is written *When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me*" (Micah 7:8). At the beginning, light comes little by little; then spreads wider and wider; grows and increases; and at last bursts into shining glory. Likewise at the beginning, *While Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains . . . sought to lay hands on the King Ahasuerus*, etc. (Esther 2:21); then *When the king saw Esther, the*

queen, standing in the court . . . she obtained favor in his sight (Esther 5:2); then *Haman took the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai* (Esther 6:11); then *They hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai* (Esther 7:10); then Ahasuerus said to Esther and Mordecai: *Write ye also concerning the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring* (Esther 8:8); then *Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel* (Esther 8:15); and at last, *The Jews had light and gladness* (Esther 8:16).²⁶

14. Another comment on *For the leader; upon the hind of the morning*. R. Judah bar R. Simon taught: A hind's horn is brought into a house in which snakes nest, and the interior of the house is fumigated with it so that every snake quickly flees.²⁷ Even so, when Esther came into the king's house, Haman quickly fled.²⁸

You find also that when a hind is thirsty, she digs a hole, puts her horns into it, and pants. Thereupon the deep causes waters to come up for her sake, for it is said *As the hart panteth after the water brooks* (Ps. 42:1).

But the Rabbis said: The hind is the most God-fearing of all animals, for her love for her young is very great. And so when the other animals are thirsty, all of them come to the hind, knowing that her deeds are God-fearing and that when she lifts her eyes to heaven, the Holy One, blessed be He, will show mercy to them also. And what does the hind do? She digs a hole, puts her horns into it, and pants; and the deep causes waters to come up for her sake, for it is said *As the hart panteth after the water brooks*.

When David realized this, namely, that the Holy One, blessed be He, hears the hind, he arranged in her honor the Psalm *For the leader; upon the hind of the morning*.

15. Another comment on *For the leader; upon the hind of the morning*. Scripture says elsewhere: *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light* (Isa. 9:1), a verse which alludes to the generation of Mordecai: No day was more dark and evil for the people of Israel than the one at Shushan the castle, when it was decreed to *destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews*

. . . *in one day* (Esther 3:13). But they saw a great light: A redeemer rose up for them and saved them. And who was he? Mordecai. Of him it is written *Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white* (Esther 8:15). And what followed? *The Jews had light and gladness* (Esther 8:16). Of this it is written *Say unto God: "How terrible are Thy works!"* (Ps. 66:3), a verse which R. Eliezer the son of R. Jose the Galilean interpreted as follows: How terrifying are Thy works! For they that were to be slain, slew those who would have slain them; and they that were to be hanged, hanged those who would have hanged them; and they that were to be drowned, drowned those who would have drowned them; and they that were to be burned, burned those who would have burned them; and they that were to be cast into the lions' den, cast into it those who would have cast them. And the instances? Pharaoh charged all his people, saying: *Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river* (Ex. 1:22), but he himself was cast into the sea, as is said *Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea* (Ex. 15:4). Nebuchadnezzar said to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego: *Ye shall be cast . . . into the midst of a burning fiery furnace* (Dan. 3:15), but paralysis which twisted his mouth came upon him;²⁹ and the men who cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego into the burning fiery furnace, were at once themselves consumed, as is said *The flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego* (Dan. 3:22). The Persians and the Medians sought to slay Daniel and decreed of him that he be cast into the lions' den, as is said *Whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man . . . save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions* (Dan. 6:8); but a miracle was wrought for Daniel, and he was saved, and they themselves were cast into the lions' den, as is said *Those . . . men were cast . . . into the midst of the burning fiery furnace* (Dan. 3:23).³⁰ The wicked Haman was up all night preparing a gallows fifty cubits high to hang Mordecai on; but in the morning, Haman himself and his sons were hanged thereon, as is said *They hanged Haman on the gallows that he had pre-*

pared for Mordecai (Esther 7:10), and as is also said *The king . . . commanded . . . that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows* (Esther 9:25). The Jews, of them it was decreed *to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day* (Esther 3:13), but the tables were turned upon those who hated them, as is said *It was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them* (Esther 9:1).

16. *My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?* (Ps. 22:2). Esther said: *My God*, Thou wert at the Red Sea; *my God*, Thou wert at Sinai. *Why hast Thou forsaken me?* Why should the order of things, even the story of Matriarchs, turn out differently for me? Our mother Sarah was taken for only a single night unto Pharaoh, and he and all the people of his house were smitten with great plagues, as is said *The Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife* (Gen. 12:17); but I who have been forced all these years to endure the embrace of such a wicked person—for me, Thou workest no miracles.

My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? (Ps. 22:2). *Thou art my God from my mother's womb* (Ps. 22:11). Why did Esther say *my God* three times? Because Esther was implying to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, three laws Thou gavest me—one concerning menstruation,³¹ one concerning the priests' portion of the bread,³² and one concerning the kindling of the Sabbath light. And even though I am in the house of this wicked person, have I in any way violated even one of these laws?"

17. It is written *Death is come up into our windows, it is entered into our palaces; to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets* (Jer. 9:20). The words *to cut off the children from without* would appear to promise that [during the destruction of Jerusalem] children within houses of prayer would not be cut off; the words *and the young men from the streets* would appear to promise that [during the destruction of Jerusalem] young men within houses of study would not be

cut off. And yet when Jerusalem was destroyed, it is written *Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldeans, who slew their young men with the sword, in the house of their sanctuary* (2 Chron. 36:17). Again, it is written *Thou shalt not take the dam with the young* (Deut. 22:6); yet when Jerusalem was destroyed, *The mother was dashed in pieces with her children* (Hos. 10:14).

R. Judah ben R. Simon said: It is written *Whether it be cow or ewe, ye shall not kill it and its young both in one day* (Lev. 22:28); yet in Shushan the castle, letters instructed to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews . . . in one day (Esther 3:13). Again it is written *Whatsoever man there be . . . that taketh in hunting any beast or fowl that may be eaten, he shall pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust* (Lev. 17:13); and yet when the heathen came into Thine inheritance, it is written *They have given . . . the flesh of Thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them* (Ps. 79:2-3).

On these verses, R. Berechiah commented further that the congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, Thou hast given burial even to asses, but promisest no burial to Thy saints: to asses, that is, to the Egyptians, "whose flesh is like the flesh of asses" (Ezek. 23:20), but to whom *Thou stretchedst out Thy right hand—the earth swallowed them* (Ex. 15:12). It is known that when the sea was casting the Egyptians up on the earth, and the earth was casting the Egyptians back into the sea, the sea said to the earth: "Receive thy hosts," and the earth said to the sea: "Receive those whom thou hast done to death." But the earth said finally: "When I received no more than the blood of Abel alone, the Holy One, blessed be He, cursed me, saying *Cursed is the earth* (Gen. 3:17)—if now I open my mouth and receive all these hosts, how much greater the curse upon me!" But then the Holy One, blessed be He, swore to the earth that He would not summon her to judgment, for it is said *Thou stretchedst out Thy right hand—the earth swallowed*

them; here *right hand* clearly signifies an act of swearing, as in the words *The Lord hath sworn by His right hand* (Isa. 62:8).

And so the congregation of Israel could say to God: Thou hast given burial to the Egyptians, but [promisest none to] the Jews, against whom the hateful oppressor decreed: *to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish* (Esther 3:13). *Why hast Thou forsaken me?*

18. *O my God, I cry in the day-time, but Thou hearest not; and in the night-season also I take no rest* (Ps. 22:3). From this passage the Sages drew Scriptural support for the practice of reading the Scroll of Esther on the night of Purim, and for repeating the reading on the next day, since it is said *O my God, I cry in the day-time . . . and in the night-season also I take no rest.*

A further comment on *O my God, I cry in the day-time, but Thou hearest not; and in the night-season also I take no rest.* R. Phinehas taught in the name of R. Hoshiaia that Esther said: Our fathers cried out to Thee in Egypt, and Thou didst hear their groaning, for it is written *The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light* (Ex. 13:21). We have fasted and afflicted our souls, beseeching Thee and praying both day and night, but Thou hast done no miracles for us, neither by day, nor by night. Even if we lack good deeds, deal mercifully with us for the hallowing of Thy name: *For Thou art Holy* (Ps. 22:4).

19. *Thou art holy, O Thou that art enthroned upon the praises of Israel* (Ps. 22:4). R. Samuel said in the name of R. Hanina: At every praise and song of praise which the children of Israel offer to the Holy One, blessed be He, His glory is enthroned amidst them, for it is said *Thou art holy, O Thou that art enthroned upon the praises of Israel*.⁸³ And so Esther pleaded: If Thou hearest us not and they destroy us, then how can one say that *O Thou . . . enthroned upon the praises of Israel* is true? But if Thou dost save us, then the truth of *O Thou . . . enthroned upon the praises of Israel* will be maintained through us.

R. Joshua ben Levi said: May evil befall me, if ever in my entire life I looked into a book of *'Aggadah*,³⁴ except once, when coming upon such a book I read the following in it: The one hundred and seventy-five sections of the Pentateuch,³⁵ in which the words "speech," "saying," and "command" occur, correspond in number to the one hundred and seventy-five years of Abraham. And the proof? What God said to Moses: *Thou hast ascended on high. . . . thou hast received gifts because of a man* (Ps. 68:19).³⁶ This *man* was Abraham, described as "the greatest man among the Anakim" (Josh. 14:15).³⁷ The one hundred and forty-seven Psalms of praise in the Psalter³⁸ correspond in number to the years of Jacob. And the proof? The verse, according to R. Abba bar Kahana, *O Thou that art enthroned upon the praises of Israel*.³⁹ The one hundred and twenty-three times that the congregation responds with *Hallelujah* as the reader recites the *Hallel*⁴⁰ correspond in number to the years of Aaron. And the proof? The verse *Ye that fear the Lord, praise Him* (Ps. 22:24), and also the verse *O fear the Lord, ye His holy ones* (Ps. 34:10), Aaron being a "holy one," as in the saying "Aaron, the holy one of the Lord" (Ps. 106:16).

R. Samuel said in the name of R. Ḥanina: Israel offers praise to the Holy One, blessed be He, with all kinds of songs of praise, yet behold, He Himself is exalted above all praise. And the proof? The verse *Thy glorious name . . . is exalted above all blessing and praise* (Neh. 9:5).

R. Berechiah taught in the name of R. Levi: Of Abraham, it is written *The Lord appeared unto him by the terebinths of Mamre, when he was sitting* (Gen. 18:1). According to the *ḥētiḇ*, the last phrase ought not to be translated "when he was sitting," but "when he had sat down."⁴¹ Thus it may be deduced that as Abraham was about to stand up, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "Sit down as a model to thy children; whenever the children of Israel come into houses of prayer or into houses of study and read the Shema⁴² and pray, they also are to sit, while My Glory shall stand in their midst." And the proof?

The verse *God standeth in the congregation of the mighty* (Ps. 82:1).⁴³

R. Haggai said in the name of R. Isaac: Scripture does not merely say that God stands ('*omed*'), but that God stands ready (*niṣṣaḅ*)—ready at His post to answer. Here *niṣṣaḅ* has the same meaning as *niṣṣaḅta* in the verse *Thou shalt stand ready (niṣṣaḅta) upon the rock* (Ex. 33:21). Again God said: *And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer* (Isa. 65:24).

20. The passage beginning *Our fathers trusted in Thee* (Ps. 22:5) refers to the time our fathers were in Egypt. *They trusted, and Thou didst deliver them (ibid.)* from Pharaoh's hand. *Unto Thee they cried* (Ps. 22:6): "The children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried" (Ex. 2:23). *And were saved* (Ps. 22:6): "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians" (Ex. 14:30). And why did all these things come to pass? Because *In Thee did they trust, and were not confounded* (Ps. 22:6): all these things came to pass because of the merit of their trust in God.

But I am a worm, and no man (Ps. 22:7).^{*} Like a worm whose

* At this point several manuscripts add the following supplements:

(a) When the Holy One, blessed be He, confers greatness upon the righteous, they speak of the insignificance of their own persons. Thus Abraham said: *I . . . am but dust and ashes* (Gen. 18:27). Moses and Aaron said: *What are we?* (Ex. 16:7). David said: *I am a worm, and no man* (Ps. 22:7). Saul said: *Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin?* (1 Sam. 9:21). Gideon said: *My family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house* (Judg. 6:15). But the wicked, when the Holy One, blessed be He, confers greatness upon them, they curse and taunt Him that is on high. Thus Pharaoh said: *Who is the Lord, that I should hearken unto His voice?* (Ex. 5:2). The Philistine Goliath said: *I do taunt the armies of Israel* (1 Sam. 17:10). Sennacherib asked: *Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?* (2 Kings 18:35). Nebuchadnezzar asked: *Who is the God that shall deliver you out of my hand?* (Dan. 3:15). To Belshazzar it was said: *Thou . . . hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven* (Dan. 5:23); and to Hiram, King of Tyre, it was said: *Thou didst set thy heart as the heart of God* (Ezek. 28:2). [Cf. B. Hul 89a].

I am a worm, and no man: Like the worm whose only resource is its mouth, so have the children of Israel no resource other than their mouths.

(b) Another interpretation: Like the worm which fells cedars with no more

only resource is its mouth, so the children of Israel have no resource other than the prayers of their mouths. Like a worm which roots out a tree with its mouth, so the children of Israel with the prayers of their mouths root out the evil decrees which [hostile] nations of the earth devise against them. Of this it is written *Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye few men in Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord* (Isa. 41:14); and the passage goes on to say, *Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having mouths; thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small* (Isa. 41:15).

In another comment, the verse is read: *But I, the empurpler,⁴⁴ am no [ordinary] man* (Ps. 22:7). According to R. Joshua ben Levi, the people of Israel said: I am he who clothed Thee at the Red Sea in royal purple, and none other in the world has ever done such a thing.

According to R. Samuel bar Nahmani, Israel said: I am he who made the Tabernacle for Thee with curtains of purple, for it is written *Thou shalt make the Tabernacle with ten curtains . . . blue, and purple, and scarlet* (Ex. 25:1, 26:1), and none other in the world has ever done such a thing.

A reproach of men, and despised of the people (Ps. 22:7). Like a worm despised among creatures of the earth, so the children of Israel are despised among the nations of the earth.

R. Berechiah had four sayings, three concerning men, and one concerning women: Woe unto the living who needs help from

than its mouth, and though frail, fells the strong, so the children of Israel have no resource other than prayer. The nations of the earth are likened to cedars, as it is said *The Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon* (Ezek. 28:2). And when the nations of the earth prevail against the children of Israel, then the children of Israel in their penitence return to God and cry out in prayer: *Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah . . . and be Thou a help to him from his enemies* (Deut. 33:7), or, *Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a javelin; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel* (1 Sam. 17:45). Hence the children of Israel seize always upon the special skill of their fathers, as evident from the words *The Lord shall scatter you among the nations. . . . But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart, and with all thy soul* (Deut. 4:29). [Cf. Mēkilta, Bēšallah, ed. Lauterbach, 1:206 ff.]

the dead. Woe unto the strong who needs help from the weak. Woe unto the seeing who needs help from the blind. Woe unto the generation whose leader is a woman, as when *Deborah, a prophetess . . . judged Israel* (Judg. 4:4).⁴⁵

21. Another comment. The passage beginning *Our fathers trusted in Thee* (Ps. 22:5) refers to Mordecai and to Esther. Thus *They cried unto Thee, and were delivered* (Ps. 22:6) refers to the verse where it is said "These days of Purim . . . they decreed for themselves and for their seed, the fasting and the cries for aid" (Esther 9:31). *They trusted in Thee* (Ps. 22:6) refers to the verse "And so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law" (Esther 4:16). *And were not confounded* (Ps. 22:6) refers to the verse where it is said "The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor" (Esther 8:16). Finally *All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head* (Ps. 22:8) refers to Haman's sons who laughed Jews to scorn, shot out their lips at them, and shook their heads at them, saying, "On the morrow these will be slain, or hanged."

22. *Gol upon the Lord, and He will deliver him* (Ps. 22:9). Again David said: *Gol thy way upon the Lord; trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass* (Ps. 37:5-6). R. Bebai explained, in the name of Rab, that the word *gol* may come from the stem *galah*, "uncover," or "lay open," or from the stem *gilgel*, "roll."⁴⁶ If *gol* is from *galah*, the verses mean "Confess thy sins," for *Whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy* (Prov. 28:13). If *gol* is from *gilgel*, the verses mean "Roll it upon Me, and I shall bear it," for it is written *Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee* (Ps. 55:23). R. Joĥanan told the parable of a king's son who was given a heavy beam to carry. When his father saw it, he said: "Lay upon me every burden you wish to, and I shall bear it." Even so the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: "Roll the burden of your sins upon Me, and I shall bear them."

Of *For He delighteth in him* (Ps. 22:9), R. Simeon ben Laĥish said: The Holy One, blessed be He, expressed his love for Israel with three words of passion: "cleaving," "longing," and "delight":

"cleaving"—*Ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive* (Deut. 4:4); "longing"—*The Lord did long for you* (Deut. 7:7); "delight"—*The Lord delighteth in thee* (Isa. 62:4). We infer the force of these words from the story of the wicked Shechem in the chapter beginning *Dinah . . . went out* (Gen. 34:1): "cleaving"—*His soul did cleave unto Dinah* (Gen. 34:3); "longing"—*My son Shechem longeth for your daughter* (Gen. 34:8); "delight"—*He had delight in Jacob's daughter* (Gen. 34:19).

R. Abba bar Elisha added two more such words: "love," and "comforting speech"; "love"—*I have loved you, saith the Lord* (Mal. 1:2); "comforting speech"—*Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Bid Jerusalem take comfort* (Isa. 40:2). And from the story of the wicked Shechem we learn also the force of these words, for it is said *He loved the damsel, and spoke comfortingly unto the damsel* (Gen. 34:3).

He will rescue him, for He delighteth in him (Ps. 22:9). Esther said: His desire to rescue me rose up within Him.

23. *But Thou art He that took me out (gohi) of the womb* (Ps. 22:10). *Gohi* is derived from the same stem as *giho* in the verse *Who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth (giho) as if it had issued out of the womb* (Job 38:8).

The end of the verse *Thou keptest me in safety, when I was upon my mother's breast* (Ps. 22:10) means that Esther said: "After my mother conceived me, my father died; and my mother died while giving birth to me. But Thou keptest me safe, for Thou gavest me breasts in place of my mother's breasts." *Mordecai . . . brought up Hadassah, that is Esther* (Esther 2:7) is to say that Mordecai's wife gave suck to Esther, and that Mordecai brought her up.

24. *Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help* (Ps. 22:12). When did Esther speak these words? At the time when Ahasuerus decreed *to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all Jews* (Esther 3:13); at that time, Esther came into the king's house without permission, as is said *Esther . . . stood in the inner court of the king's house* (Esther 5:1).⁴⁷ The king had seven courts: Esther went through the first court, the second.

and the third. But as she came into the fourth court, Ahasuerus began gnashing his teeth and grinding them in rage, and said: "Oh, for those who are gone and cannot be replaced! How I entreated and besought the queen Vashti that she come into my presence! And because she would not come, as is said *But the queen Vashti refused to come* (Esther 1:12), I decreed death for her. But this one comes like a harlot without permission!" Since Esther was standing in the middle of the fourth court, however, the guards of the outer courts had no right to lay hands upon her because she had already gone beyond their authority, while the guards of the inner courts had no right to lay hands upon her because she had not yet come into their authority. (R. Levi said in the name of R. Hama: It was on account of Esther that David composed a Psalm containing prayers wherein creatures both above and below praise the Holy One, blessed be He—the Psalm beginning *Hallelujah. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens. Praise Him in the heights* [Ps. 148:1]).⁴⁸ At that moment Esther spoke the words *Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help*.

25. *Many bulls have compassed me* (Ps. 22:13)—that is, the hosts of Ahasuerus have compassed me. *Strong bulls of Bashan have closed me in* (*kittëruni*) *on every side* (*ibid.*): *Kittëruni*, a cognate of the Aramaic *ktr*, "to inclose," means the same as *kittëru* in the words "They inclosed (*kittëru*) the Benjamites round about" (Judg. 20:43). R. Aḥa maintained that Haman's sons waiting for Esther to fall are referred to in the phrase *strong bulls of Bashan*; thus *kittëruni* means *have compassed me about* as in the words "The wicked doth compass about the righteous" (Hab. 1:4).

They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion (Ps. 22:14) implies that Esther said: As a lion crouches upon his prey and ravens it, so Ahasuerus crouches upon me and ravishes me.⁴⁹

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are separated (Ps. 22:15)—not one of my bones cleaves to another; *my heart is become like wax* (*donaḡ*); *it is melted within me* (*ibid.*). Like Aramaic *ša'awta*, *donaḡ* means beeswax.

My strength is dried up like a potsherd (Ps. 22:16)—like a bone-dry potsherd. *And my tongue is made to cleave to my jaws* (*malḵohay*) (*ibid.*).⁵⁰ Why are jaws called *malḵohayim*, “tongs”? Because when taking hold of food, they work like a pair of tongs. *Malḵohayim* also means “palate,” as is evident from the verse “Let my tongue cleave to the palate of my mouth” (Ps. 137:6), and from the verse “As the palate tasteth its food” (Job 12:11).

Another comment. Reading *My tongue was restrained from my “double doctrine”* (*malḵohay*), the verse means that my tongue was silenced in the study of Torah, for Ahasuerus made me renounce both doctrines of the Lord, the written and the oral, of which God said: “I give you good doctrine” (*leḵah*) (Prov. 4:2).

Thou hast set me into the dust of death (Ps. 22:16). What am I like? Like a hearth laid down at a crossroad where all those coming and going set down their pots.

26. *For dogs have compassed me* (Ps. 22:17)—that is, Haman’s sons have compassed me; *the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me* (*ibid.*)—that is, Haman’s hosts have inclosed me.

My hands and my feet they made repulsive (Ps. 22:17). According to R. Judah, Esther said: Though Haman’s sons practiced sorcery on me so that in the sight of Ahasuerus my hands and feet were repulsive,⁵¹ yet a miracle was wrought for me, and my hands and feet were made to shine like sapphires.

But R. Nehemiah said: The verse is to be read *At my hands and at my feet he was favored with blessing*,⁵² and conveys much the same meaning as the verse “The Lord hath blessed thee at my foot” (Gen. 30:30). Thus Esther meant: Because of the work of my hands, blessing came to Ahasuerus. Though at the beginning Ahasuerus reigned from one end of the earth to the other, as is said *From India even unto Ethiopia* (Esther 1:1), after he slew Vashti all provinces of the earth rebelled against him. But as soon as he married me, a hundred and twenty-seven provinces—corresponding in number to the one hundred and twenty-seven years which our mother Sarah lived—returned to him because of me. And when Haman fell and authority was returned

to Mordecai, all the provinces of the earth were given back to Ahasuerus, for it is said *The king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the earth, and upon the isles of the sea* (Esther 10:1).

27. *They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them* (Ps. 22:18b, 19). One said: "I shall take Esther's royal cloak and coat"; and another said: "I shall take Esther's ring and Esther's armor." The end of the verse, *and cast lots upon my vesture*, means, according to R. Huna, that they were casting lots for the royal cloak, which it is not seemly for commoners to use.

But be not Thou far from me, O Lord (Ps. 22:20). Esther said: "O Lord, pity me, and have compassion for me." The end of the verse, *O my Hind, haste Thee to help me*, means, according to R. Johanan, that Esther said: "As at the Red Sea, when swift as a hind, Thou didst haste to help my forefathers, haste Thee also this day to help me."

In that instant, an angel came down from heaven and struck Ahasuerus in the face, saying: "Wicked one, thy lady stands outside, while thou art seated here inside." Note that it is not written "*When the king*," etc., but *After the king had seen Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favor in his sight* (Esther 5:2)—that is, Esther obtained favor in the sight of Ahasuerus against his will and not because of the goodness of his heart.

[Then *The king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand* (*ibid.*)]. R. Taḥalifa said: We have a tradition that Ahasuerus' sceptre was lengthened in that instant by thirty-two cubits. And the second miracle was even greater than the first, for, as Esther drew nearer, the sceptre shrank back to its former length.

R. Isaac said: If the sceptre of a mere mortal brings life to an entire people, how much more life does the sceptre of the Holy One, blessed be He, bring, for it is written *Tend Thy people with Thy sceptre* (Micah 7:4).

28. *Save me from the lion's mouth; for Thou hast heard me from the horns of the remim*⁶³ (Ps. 22:22). R. Huna bar Idi

told the following: While David was tending sheep, he came upon the *rē'em* asleep in the wilderness, and thinking it was a mountain, climbed upon it and continued to tend his sheep. The *rē'em* waking up, arose, and David, astride its horns, was lifted as high as the heavens. At that moment David said: Master of the universe, if Thou bringest me down from the horns of this *rē'em*, I shall build Thee a Temple, a hundred cubits high like the horns of the *rē'em*. (Some say that David measured the *rē'em*'s horn along its length; while others say that he measured the horn around its circumference. And the proof that David paid his vow to God? The verse *He built His sanctuary like the ramim* ⁵⁴ [Ps. 78:69]). What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do for David? He caused a lion to come towards the *rē'em*, and when the *rē'em* saw the lion he was afraid of it and cringed before it, for the lion is king of all animals and beasts. When David saw the lion, he also was afraid of it. Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, caused a gazelle to come along, and as the lion sprang away after it, David descended and went his way. Hence David said: *Save me from the lion's mouth; for Thou hast heard me from the horns of the remim.*

29. *Ye that fear the Lord, praise Him* (Ps. 22:24). R. Joshua ben Levi said: *Ye that fear the Lord* refers to pious gentiles.⁵⁵ But R. Samuel bar Nahmani maintained that the phrase refers to complete proselytes.⁵⁶

R. Hezekiah and R. Abbahu said in the name of R. Eleazar: If complete proselytes are to be accepted in the time-to-come,⁵⁷ the first of all such to be accepted will be Antoninus.⁵⁸

All ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him (*ibid.*) must mean that eleven tribes are to glorify Him.⁵⁹ Else why should the verse go on to say *Stand in awe of Him, all ye the seed of Israel*? As R. Benjamin explained, however, *seed of Israel* includes the tribe of Benjamin, descendants of the last-born of the twelve sons.⁶⁰

The Rabbis maintained that *Ye that fear the Lord* refers to complete proselytes; *all ye the seed of Jacob*, to priests and Levites; and *all ye the seed of Israel*, to lay Israelites. Similarly, in the verses *O Israel, trust Thou in the Lord! . . . O house of*

Levi,⁶¹ *trust ye in the Lord! . . . Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord!* (Ps. 115:9-11), *O Israel* refers to lay Israelites; *house of Levi*, to priests and Levites who are descendants of the house of Levi; and *Ye that fear the Lord*, to complete proselytes.

30. *For He hath not despised nor abhorred the lowliness of the poor* (Ps. 22:25). In the world's use, when two men, one poor and the other rich, appear before a judge, to which one is the judge likely to show favor? Not to the rich? Yet it is said of God *He hath not despised nor abhorred the lowliness of the poor*.

In the world's use, when two men, one poor and the other rich, appear in a court, toward which one is the judge likely to turn his face? Not toward the rich? Yet the verse goes on to say of God *He hath not hid His face from him*.

In the world's use, when a rich man and a poor man appear in a court, to which one does the judge feel he must listen? Not to the rich man? Yet of the poor man appearing before God, it is said *When he cried unto Him, He heard* (*ibid.*).

When R. Haggai decreed a fast, and rain fell, he said: Rain fell, not because I am worthy, but because *He hath not despised nor abhorred the lowliness of the poor*. And as God does not despise nor abhor the prayer of the poor, so does He not despise nor abhor the offering of the poor.

31. King Agrippa⁶² desired to bring a thousand burnt-offerings in one day. He sent word to the High Priest: "Let no man except me be allowed to bring an offering this day." And so, when a poor man with two doves in his hand came and said to the High Priest: "Offer up these doves for me," the High Priest answered: "The king charged me, saying that no man except him should be allowed to bring an offering this day." But the poor man said: "My Lord High Priest, each day I capture four doves; two I eat, and two I offer up. And if thou dost not offer these up for me, mark!—thou cuttest off my livelihood." So the High Priest rose and offered up the doves.

In a dream it was disclosed to Agrippa: "A poor man's offering preceded thine!" Agrippa sent word to the High Priest: "Did I not say this to thee: Let no man except me be allowed to

bring an offering on this day?" The High Priest replied: "A poor man came with two doves in his hand and said to me: 'Offer up these for me.' I said to him, 'Thus and thus has the king charged me,' and he said to me: 'Each day I capture four doves; two I offer up, and two I eat. And if thou wilt not offer up for me, mark!—thou cuttest off my livelihood.' And should I not have offered them up?" Agrippa replied to the High Priest: "Thou hast done well. For thus it is written *He hath not despised nor abhorred the lowliness of the poor.*"

It happened that an ox who was being led to the altar would not let himself be drawn along. There came a poor man who had in his hand a bunch of greens—some say it was a bunch of endives—and he held it out to the ox who ate, and thus let himself be drawn along. In a dream it was disclosed to the owner of the ox: "A bunch of greens preceded thine offering."

It happened that a woman brought one handful of fine flour for a meal-offering,⁶³ and the priest, ridiculing her, said: "See what she offers up! What is there in this to offer up? What is there in this to rise as incense?" Then in a dream it was disclosed to the priest: "Do not despise her. I reckon it for her, as if she had offered up her very own soul." How so? This may be proved by the following argument: If the word *soul* in *when a soul bringeth a meal-offering* (Lev. 2:1) is used even to describe one who does not bring his own soul as an offering, how much more does the word *soul* fit one who brings his very soul as an offering?

It happened that from Gaul, or Spain, or from some such distant country a man brought his offering. When he saw the High Priest take a handful, and let the handful rise up in incense, and then eat the remainder of the offering, the man said: "Have I gone to all this trouble only that this one might eat?" Everyone comforted the man, saying: "If this priest who has troubled to walk merely from the hall to the altar is found worthy of eating thy meal-offering, of how much greater worth wilt thou be found, thou who hast suffered all the trouble of thy

journey! Indeed, thou wilt be found worthy of eating the good stored up in the world-to-come!"

And the proof? *He hath not despised nor abhorred the lowliness of the poor.*

32. *The poor shall eat and be satisfied* (Ps. 22:27). *The poor* applies to Mordecai and to Esther who were found worthy to eat at the table of kings. There is a Tannaitic tradition that Haman's wealth was divided up into three parts: a third to Mordecai and Esther, a third to those who unsparingly occupied themselves in the study of Torah, and a third toward the rebuilding of the Temple. And all three inheritors are alluded to in a single verse. For by *The poor shall eat and be satisfied* is meant Mordecai and Esther; by *They that seek after the Lord shall praise Him* is meant those who unsparingly occupy themselves in study of Torah; and by *Your heart shall live for ever* is meant the building of the Temple, of which it is written "Mine eyes and heart shall be there perpetually" (2 Chron. 7:16).

R. Yudan said: From what the Holy One, blessed be He, has done for you in this world, you may guess what is prepared for you in the world-to-come.⁶⁴

A seed shall serve Him; it shall be told of the Lord unto the next generation (Ps. 22:31). R. Eleazar said: *A seed shall serve Him* refers only to those who are of seed that has come to fruition in live-birth, and excludes still-births which will not have life even in the world-to-come. For it is said in the following verse *They shall come and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done it* (Ps. 22:32), and the phrase *that shall be born* clearly refers to those who are of seed that come into live-birth.

R. Yudan said: The verse just cited means that later generations shall come and declare the righteousness which the Holy One, blessed be He, has done for former generations.

R. Johanan said: The verse *A seed shall serve Him; it shall be told of the Lord unto the next generation* (Ps. 22:31) implies

that both the righteous and the wicked shall look upon the face of the Shekinah, for directly before this verse it is said *All they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him, even he that cannot keep his soul alive* (Ps. 22:30). Why should the wicked be allowed to look upon the face of the Shekinah? Only that the wicked who rebelled against the Holy One, blessed be He, may be shown at their death the face of the Shekinah and be told: "Come and look upon the face of the King against whom you rebelled, for it is He who will punish you!" The righteous also, at the time of their departure, are shown the face of the Shekinah, and are told: "Come and look upon the King whom you served, for it is He who gives you your reward."

R. Eleazar ben Shammua said: Even little children shall look upon the face of the Shekinah, for it is said *A seed shall serve Him* (Ps. 22:31).

PSALM TWENTY-THREE

1. *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want* (Ps. 23:1). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *My Beloved is mine, and I am His: He feedeth His flock among the lilies* (Song 2:16), by which is meant that the congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: As He is God to me, so am I a people to Him. As He is God to me, having said: *I am the Lord thy God* (Ex. 20:2), so am I His people to Him, He having said: *Attend unto Me, O My people* (Isa. 51:4). As He is father to me, having said: *I am a father to Israel* (Jer. 31:9), so am I son to Him, He having said: *Israel is My son* (Ex. 4:22). As He is shepherd to me, Asaph having said: *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel* (Ps. 80:2), so am I sheep to Him, He having said: *Ye My sheep, the sheep of My pasture* (Ezek. 34:31). As He is brother to me, Solomon having said: *Oh that Thou wert as my brother* (Song 8:1), so am I sister to Him, He having said: *Open to Me, My sister, My love* (Song 5:2). As I said to Him: *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*, He said to me: *Thy navel is like a round goblet, wherein no mingled wine is wanting* (Song 7:2).

2. Another comment on *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want*. These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *I understand more from the ancients* (Ps. 119:100). R. Jose bar Hanina taught: In the whole world you find no occupation more despised than that of the shepherd, who all his days walks about with his staff and his pouch. Yet David presumed to call the Holy One, blessed be He, a shepherd! But David said: *I understand more from the ancients*, meaning that Jacob called God Shepherd, as it is said *The God who hath been my shepherd all my life long* (Gen. 48:15); so I, too, call God shepherd: *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*.

3. Another comment on *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want*. These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *The Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the work of thy hand* (Deut. 2:7). R. Jacob¹ said: Lest I think that God will bless even him who sits in idleness, Scripture reads *The Lord*

thy God hath blessed thee in all the work of thy hand, implying that when a man works, behold, he is blessed; but if he does not work, he is not blessed. For what can the following words, *He hath known thy walking through this great wilderness*, mean except that God knows of thy traveling, thy travailing, in the dust, thy suffering to get a living?

R. Judah said in the name of R. Eleazar: The road does three things: it makes a man's clothes worn, his body lean, and his money scarce. But the Holy One, blessed be He, dealt not thus with Israel. For it was said to Israel, *Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee* (Deut. 8:4); *the Lord thy God hath been with thee* (Deut. 2:7) in thy health of body; and *thou hast lacked nothing* (*ibid.*) for thy spending.

The following words *These forty years* (Deut. 2:7) mean, according to R. Yudan, that God said to Israel: Because you sang *This² is my God, and I will glorify Him* (Ex. 15:2), therefore for these forty years I have given you your raiment.

R. Judah said: As when a king is in a city, the city lacks nothing, so *These forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee, and thou hast lacked nothing* (Deut. 2:7). In the world's use, when a man receives a wayfarer, the first day he kills a calf for him; the second day, a lamb; the third day, a chicken; the fourth day, he serves pulse to him; the fifth day he gives him even less, so that the last day for the wayfarer is not like the first. Now lest one think that it was the same with the wayfaring children of Israel, Scripture states, *These forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee, thou hast lacked nothing*, and the last day in the wilderness for the children of Israel was like the first.

R. Nehemiah said: *Thou hast lacked but saying a word³* means that God said to Israel: Ye had to say no more than a word. No more than a word was needed, and it was done. Ye said, "Let the manna taste like veal in my mouth"; it did. Ye said, "Let the manna taste like fat capon"; it did. When ye desired meal, ye *gathered [manna,] and ground it in mills* (Num. 11:8). When ye desired spice, ye *beat it in mortars*. A potted

dish?—ye *seethed it in pots*. Cakes?—ye *made cakes of it*. When ye desired rich oil, *The taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil*. Hence *Thou hast lacked but saying a word*: Whatever ye desired, there it was in your mouth: Bread? *Behold, I made bread rain from heaven for you* (Ex. 16:4). Ye desired water? *Moses smote the rock with his rod . . . and water came forth abundantly* (Ex. 20:11). When ye said: "I desire the flesh of fowl," *The quails came up* (Ex. 16:13). Then ye said: "I desire the flesh of wild or of tame beasts." Now when Moses heard the children of Israel ask for the flesh of beasts, he went to the Holy One, blessed be He, and said to Him: "The children of Israel want flesh." The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "Give it to them." Moses asked God: *Whence should I have flesh?* (Num. 11:13) *shall flocks and herds be slain for them?* (Num. 11:22). *If Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, for I am about to be killed* (Num. 11:15). What can Moses have meant by saying *Kill me, I pray Thee, for I am about to be killed*? He was saying to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, if I do not give them flesh, they will kill me; if I speak up against them, they will kill me. Either way, I am about to be killed. Therefore, I beg Thee, kill him who is about to be killed!" When Moses said, *Kill me, I pray Thee, for I am about to be killed*, instantly, the Holy One, blessed be He, was angered, as is said *They angered Him also at the waters of Meribah, and it went ill with Moses because of them* (Ps. 106:32). And God said to Moses: "Give flesh to My children!" When again Moses asked God: *Whence should I have flesh?* God said: "In Egypt thou hadst frogs! In Egypt thou hadst gnats! In Egypt thou wast indeed rich! Hast thou now become poor?" Moses said to God: "But what I had in Egypt came from Thee!" Thereupon God said: "What I had in Egypt, have I not here?" *Is the Lord's hand waxed short?* (Num. 11:23).

The Rabbis said: *Thou hadst no need to say a word*⁴—that is, the children of Israel did not need to say a single word, but whatever they craved in their hearts was given to them. This interpretation is in accord with what R. Berechiah said in the

name of R. Abbahu: The verse *They tried God in their heart by asking for food of their craving* (Ps. 78:18) teaches that God gave them whatever they craved in their hearts, so that the children of Israel asked at Massah and at Meribah: *Is the Lord truly within us?* (Ex. 17:7).

R. Simeon ben Yoḥai said: *Thou hast lacked only the Word* (Deut. 2:7) means that they lacked nothing [in the wilderness] but words of prophecy.⁵ You can prove this for yourself. In all the years that the children of Israel were under the ban there was no divine speech with Moses: note that only after it is said *It came to pass, when all the men of war were consumed and dead from among the people* (Deut. 2:16), Moses declared *The Lord spoke unto me, saying* (Deut. 2:17), as if to say, "Only then was there again divine speech with me."

R. Johanan said: *Thou hast lacked only the word*—that is, words of repentance; as Scripture says, *Take with you words and return unto the Lord* (Hos. 14:3).

R. Aibu read *daḥar*, "a thing," as *deḥer*, "pestilence," and thus took the verse to say *Thou hast not lacked pestilence (deḥer)*. For in each of the forty years that the children of Israel were in the wilderness, the angel of death smote fifteen thousand and an odd number of them. And how large was that odd number? Four hundred and eighty-nine.

4. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures* (Ps. 23:2). R. Eliezer asked R. Simeon, saying to him: "As the children of Israel were going out of Egypt, did weavers' gear go out with them?" R. Simeon replied: "No." "Then how did they clothe themselves those forty years?" R. Simeon replied: "With garments which the ministering angels gave them for clothing: For God said of Israel in the wilderness, *I clothed thee also with broidered work* (Ezek. 16:10). How is *broidered* to be defined except, so R. Simai said, 'as garment of royalty.'"—"But did not their garments wear out?"—"Have you not read that Moses said to Israel in the wilderness, *Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee* (Deut. 8:4)?"—"But did not the little ones among the children of Israel grow up?"—R. Simeon replied: "Go out and

learn from the snail: all the while that he grows, his shell grows with him!"—"But did not the garments require washing?"—R. Simeon replied: "The cloud of fire cleansed their garments, and made them shine."—R. Eliezer asked: "But were not the garments burnt?"—R. Simeon replied: "Go out and learn from the amiant,⁶ which is cleansed only by fire."—"But did not the children of Israel get vermin?"—R. Simeon replied: "Since worms and maggots have no power over dead children of Israel,⁷ how much less have they over living children of Israel!"—"But since the children of Israel did not change their garments, did they not reek with sweat?"—R. Simeon replied: "The well of living waters brought up certain plants and certain spices for the children of Israel, and in these they were made to lie down, as is said *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside refreshing waters* (Ps. 23:2), and so the fragrant smell of them was carried from world's end to world's end." Solomon came and said to Israel: *The odor of thy garments is like the odor of Lebanon* (Song 4:11). He also said to Israel: *Thy plants are . . . spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices* (Song 4:14). And whence did all these come? Out of *the fountain of gardens, the well of living waters* (Song 4:15). When the children of Israel saw how the Holy One, blessed be He, led them and refreshed them in the wilderness, they began to offer praise to Him, saying: Thou art a good shepherd, for Thou hast made us never to lack Thy goodness.

He leadeth me beside refreshing waters. R. Samuel said: There are waters which are fit to drink, but not fit to wash in; and other waters are fit to wash in, but not fit to drink. But the waters of the well were fit to drink and fit to wash in: They brought refreshment to the body and health to the soul, as is said *He leadeth me beside refreshing waters*.

5. *He restoreth my soul* (Ps. 23:3) means that Israel said: God restores my soul with Torah, of which it is said "The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul" (Ps. 19:8). *He leadeth me in the paths of mercy*—that is, to manna, to quail, to waters

of the well, to clouds of glory; and these are given to me not because I have merit, but *for His name's sake* (Ps. 23:3). *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death* (Ps. 23:4)—that is, “Though I walk upon the parched scalp⁸ of the wilderness,” *I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me*, as it is said “The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud” (Ex. 13:21). *Try rod and Thy staff, they comfort me*: the *rod* is Thy chastisement; the *staff*, Thy Torah.

Or, *Thy rod and Thy staff* may be read as “Thy stay and Thy staff” (Isa. 3:1), “stay” being the Written Law, and “staff,” the Oral Law. Lest *Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me* might lead one to think that comfort from the Written and the Oral Law may be had without chastisement, therefore the word *only* which begins the next verse (Ps. 23: 6a) makes the comforting conditional. Lest one might think that they comfort one only in this world, therefore the verse says first, *Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*, that is, in this world, and then says, *And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever*, that is, in the world-to-come.⁹

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies (Ps. 23:5), a table of manna and quail. *A table . . . in the presence of mine enemies*: Issi ben Akiba took these words to imply that the heaps of manna were sixty cubits high.¹⁰ And he who does not believe this—he shall not look upon the sweetness [to-come], as is said *He shall not look upon the rivers, the flowing streams of honey and curd* (Job 20:17).¹¹

6. Another comment: *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures* (Ps. 23:2) alludes to David when he fled from Saul. Note well whither he fled: “David departed, and came into the forest of Hereth” (1 Sam. 22:5). Why was it called forest of Hereth? Though it was once dry as a potsherd,¹² the Holy One, blessed be He, covered it with blossoms out of the richness of the world-to-come, as is said “In a dry and thirsty land, where no water is . . . my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness” (Ps. 63:2c, 6a).

He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of mercy

for His name's sake (Ps. 23:3): Here David is saying that kingship came to him not for his own merit, but for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:4) means that David said: In the wilderness of Ziph,¹³ *I will fear no evil (ibid.)*. Why? *Because Thou art with me (ibid.)*.

Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me: the rod is chastisement, as in the phrase "The rod of his oppressor" (Isa. 9:63); and staff is the Law which is as a staff unto Israel. Now lest the words *they will comfort me* might lead one to think that comfort from the Written and the Oral Law may be had without chastisement, therefore the word 'only' which begins the next verse (Ps. 23:6a) makes the comforting conditional. Lest one think that they comfort me only in this world, the verse goes on to say, *Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever* (Ps. 23:6)—goodness and mercy both in this world and in the world-to-come.¹⁴

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies (Ps. 23:5): a table refers to royalty; enemies, to Doeg and Ahithophel.¹⁵ *Thou hast anointed my head with oil* (Ps. 23:5b), with the oil of royal anointing; and *My cup runneth over*—that is, the cup of salvation, of which the Psalmist says, "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord" (Ps. 116:13).

What is meant by *rēwayah* ("runneth over")? "Full to overflowing," as in the words "Abundantly watering (*rawweh*) her ridges" (Ps. 65:11), or, if you like, as in the verse "They are abundantly satisfied (*yirwēyun*) with the fatness of Thy house" (Ps. 36:9).

And what is to be the measure of David's cup in the world-to-come? According to Rab, it is to be two hundred and twenty-one *log*s,¹⁶ two hundred and twenty-one being the numerical value of the letters in *ruyh*¹⁷ ("runneth over").

I shall dwell in the house of the Lord (Ps. 23:6), that is, in the Temple; *for length of days (ibid.)*, that is, for a never-ending day.

7. The Rabbis taught that this entire Psalm applies to the children of Israel. Thus *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures* refers to God's promise, "I will feed My sheep, and I will cause them to lie down" (Ezek. 34:15). *He leadeth me beside refreshing waters* also refers to God's promise, "And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow every tree for food . . . and the fruit thereof shall be for food, and the leaf thereof for healing (*liṭṛufah*)" (Ezek. 47:12). Rab and Samuel differed as to the meaning of *liṭṛufah*. One said: it means "to heal," as to open the mouth of the dumb (*lēhattir peh*); and the other said: it means "to heal," as to open the womb¹⁸ (*lēhattir peh*) of barren women.

He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of mercy for His name's sake (Ps. 23:3) means that Israel said: In the age-to-come God will restore me from exile, not for my own merit, but for *His name's sake*.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:4) alludes to chastisement in Gehenna, whose fire God will cool for me. *Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me* (Ps. 23:4b): *rod* is the afflictions in exile, which I bore to hallow Thy name; *staff* is the sustaining merit of Thy Law with which I occupied myself in exile. *They comfort me*: Scripture says, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Bid Jerusalem take heart" (Isa. 40:1).

Thou preparest a table before me (Ps. 23:5), a table upon which the flesh of Leviathan, of Behemoth, and Ziz¹⁹ of the field shall be set out.

A table in the presence of mine enemies (ibid.): From the midst of Gehenna the wicked will see the table and be put to shame, as is said "They shall see Thy zeal for Thy people, and be put to shame; yea, fire shall devour Thine adversaries" (Isa. 26:11).

Thou hast anointed my head with oil (Ps. 23:5b) refers to the king Messiah who will be anointed with the oil of anointing.

My cup runneth over (ibid.), that is, the cup of deliverance which is a cup of comforting.²⁰

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life (Ps. 23:6), follow me for the thousand years which the Holy One, blessed be He, will grant anew to His world.²¹

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord (ibid.), in the Temple. May it be built soon and in our own days. Amen, and Amen!

For length of days (ibid.)—for time never-ending, that is, life in the world-to-come.

PSALM TWENTY-FOUR

1. *To David, a Psalm* (Ps. 24:1). This phrase is to be considered in the light of Job's saying *I put on righteousness, and it clothed me* (Job 29:14). R. Ḥanina taught: There is one to whom clothes are becoming, but whose clothes are not comely; and another whose clothes are comely, but to whom clothes are not becoming. There is one who is rich, but whose character does not go with his riches; and another who is poor, but whose character does not go with his poverty. As Solomon, king of Israel, said: *There is he who gets richer and richer, yet hath nothing; there is he that gets poorer and poorer, yet hath great wealth* (Prov. 13:7). There is one who is strong but whose character does not go with his strength; and another who is weak, but whose character does not go with his weakness. There is one who is youthful, and his countenance comely, but whose wife is ungainly and repulsive, so that when she is carried in a litter,¹ people ask: "Who is the husband of that creature?" And they are told: "That man is." But upon seeing the handsome and young man, they say, "This young man has thrown himself away on that ungainly creature." If, however, the bride is comely, but the husband is ungainly and squat, people say: "This bride has thrown herself away on that man." But Job said: "I am not like that man!" Righteousness clothes Job, and Job clothes righteousness. "Behold!—I put on righteousness, and it becomes me." Just so David became his Psalm, and his Psalm became David.

Note that in the preceding Psalm, the introductory phrase is *A Psalm of David* (Ps. 23:1), while in this Psalm it is *To David, a Psalm*. How explain the different word order? When David besought the Holy Spirit to rest upon him, he summoned it with the words *A Psalm of David*; but when the Holy Spirit came to him of its own accord, he said: *To David, a Psalm*.

2. Another comment. *To David, A Psalm. The land is the Lord's* (Ps. 24:1): A parable of a king who had a retainer in a certain city. The inhabitants of the city honored him because they knew that he was the king's retainer; and whenever he came to

the king, the king also honored him, so that he was honored here as well as there.² When the king gave up his city, however, its inhabitants began to rebel against the king's retainer, so that he had to return to his king. But later, when the king reclaimed his city, and when, as before, the king's retainer began to go about in the city, its inhabitants honored him again as the king's retainer. Thereupon the king said: "When I gave up my city, you rebelled against him!³ Was he not my retainer then, even as he is my retainer now? Yet only now do you again honor him."

The king is the Holy One, blessed be He; and the city is the Land of Israel; and the king's retainer is David, king of Israel. During all the days that the land belonged to the Holy One, blessed be He, when David went out and came in before the children of Israel, he was honored by them.⁴ But when God gave up His land, saying *I . . . sell the land into the hand of evil men* (Ezek. 30:12), the children of Israel began to rebel against the king's retainer, for they said: *What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse; to your tents, O Israel* (1 Kings 12:16). When the Holy One, blessed be He, reclaims His land, however, the children of Israel will return to His retainer, as is said *Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God; and David their king* (Hos. 3:5). Hence it is said *To David, a Psalm. The land is the Lord's.*

Another comment: Say a man owns a ship, but the cargo in it is not his; or if the cargo is his, then the ship is not his. It is not so with the Holy One, blessed be He, for *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.*

Or, say a mortal builds a house of fifty cubits, maybe a large house of a hundred cubits, and all together he stands no more than three cubits high! But it is not so with the Holy One, blessed be He, for He created the earth and He fills it. As Scripture says, *The whole earth is full of His glory* (Isa. 6:3).

3. Another comment on *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*: When the Holy One, blessed be He, created days, He set aside the Sabbath. When He created months, He set aside the festivals. When He created years, He chose Sabbatical years

for Himself. When He created Sabbatical years, He chose the years of Jubilee for Himself. When he created the nations of the earth, He chose the nation of Israel for Himself. When He created the nation of Israel, He chose the Levites for Himself. When He created the Levites, He chose the priests for Himself. When He created countries, He set aside the Land of Israel out of all the countries as a heave-offering, as is said *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*. Here *fulness* alludes to "heave-offering," as in the verse, "Thou shalt not delay to offer of the fulness of thy harvest, and of the outflow of thy presses" (Ex. 22:28). So it is said *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*.

Our Masters taught: In the Book of Psalms, all the Psalms which David composed apply either to himself or to all Israel: Each Psalm that speaks in the singular applies to David's own person, and each Psalm that speaks in the plural, applies to all Israel.⁵ Wherever *For the leader; with string-music* is used,⁶ it introduces a Psalm which deals with the age-to-come. Wherever *A Psalm of David*⁷ is used, it denotes that David played [upon his harp], and that then the Holy Spirit rested upon him. But where it is said *Unto David, a Psalm*,⁸ it denotes that the Holy Spirit rested upon David, and that then he played.

The phrase *Maschil of David*⁹ [the term *Maschil* meaning that which requires elucidation] indicates that the Psalm has to be explained by a *Turgeman*,¹⁰ that is to say, by a skillful commentator.

The phrase *A song; A Psalm*¹¹ indicates that the Psalm has to be rendered by singers.

And why these several directions? Because the Holy Spirit does not come to rest in the midst of idleness, or sadness, or laughter, or frivolity, or idle talk, but only in the midst of joy, as is said *It came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him* (2 Kings 3:15); and also *When he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the Spirit of Jacob their father revived* (Gen. 45:27); and directly after that, Scripture says, *God spoke unto Israel in the visions of the night* (Gen.

46:2), a verse, which the Aramaic Targum renders, "The Holy Spirit rested on Jacob."¹²

4. Another comment: Consider *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof* in the light of the verse *Thou, even Thou art Lord alone, Thou hast made heaven . . . with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein* (Neh. 9:6). On what day was the host of heaven created? R. Joḥanan maintained that the host of heaven was created on the second day for, directly after it is said *The Lord . . . who layeth the beams of His chambers*¹³ *in the waters* (Ps. 104:3), there follow the words *Who maketh His angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire* (Ps. 104:4).

But R. Simeon¹⁴ maintained that the host of heaven was created on the fifth day, for on that day God said: *Let the waters bring forth abundantly . . . fowl, that may fly* (yē'ofef) *above the earth in the open firmament of heaven* (Gen. 1:20). Here, the word *fowl* is to be understood in its usual sense: but the words *that may fly* (ye'ofef) *in the open firmament of heaven* refer to the host of heaven, for it is said *With twain he did fly* (yē'ofef)¹⁵ (Isa. 6:2).

R. Lulyani [Julianus] said: All agree that the host of heaven was not created on the first day, lest heretics might say, "While Michael was stretching out the heavens in the east, and Gabriel was stretching out the heavens in the west, the Holy One, blessed be He, was stretching the middle portion." The fact is, that the Holy One alone, blessed be He, made all things: *I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretched the heavens alone; that spread abroad the earth by Myself* (me'itti) (Isa. 44:24). *Me'itti* (by Myself) when read as *mi'itti* (who with me?)¹⁶ is to say, "In the work of creation, who was partner with Me?"¹⁷

Therefore David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Since Thou alone didst create the heaven and the earth, I shall call them after Thy name alone: *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof*.

5. Another comment on *The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof*: R. Azariah, R. Nehemiah and R. Berechiah told the parable of a king who had two stewards, one in charge of the

house, and the other in charge of the fields. The one in charge of the house knew all that happened in the house and all that happened in the fields;¹⁸ but the one in charge of the field knew only what happened in the fields. Even so, Moses, who had gone up to heaven, knew the upper as well as the nether worlds, and with the names of both praised the Holy One, blessed be He, as is said *Behold, the heaven, and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's, thy God's, the earth also with all that therein is* (Deut. 10:14); but David, who had not gone up to heaven, praised the Holy One, blessed be He, only with what he knew, as is said *The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof*.

The Holy One, blessed be He, changed the original order of things and caused the earth to be watered from above¹⁹ for four reasons: (1) to favor [the germination] of seeds; (2) to prevent noxious dews; (3) to water the high places as well as the low; and (4) to make all living things lift their heads to heaven. What is the proof from Scripture? The verse *God . . . sendeth rain upon the earth . . . to make all things below turn toward the High* (Job 5:11); and also the saying *Toward the Lord is the earth and the fulness thereof*.

R. Phineas said: A mortal king when in his bedchamber cannot be in his banqueting-hall, and when in his banqueting-hall cannot be in his bedchamber; but the Holy One, blessed be He, fills worlds above and below, as is said *His glory is above the earth and heaven* (Ps. 148:13), and again *Do not I fill heaven and earth?* (Jer. 23:24).

With mortals, there may be one who has a flock, but no pasture; and another who has a pasture, but no flock; and still another who has both flock and pasture, but who does not know how to feed his flock or what a good pasture is. But with the Holy One, blessed be He, it is not so. He has a flock, the house of Israel, to whom He said: *Ye my flock* (Ezek. 34:31); He knows what a good pasture is, as is said *I will feed them in a good pasture* (Ezek. 34:14); He owns a pasture: *The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof*; and He knows how to feed His flock, as is

said *I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God* (Ezek. 34:15).

6. *He hath founded it upon the seas* (Ps. 24:2) refers to the Land of Israel which is situated on seven seas: the Great Sea,²⁰ the Sea of Tiberias,²¹ the Sea of Salt,²² the Sea of Sibkay,²³ the Sea of Hūlṭa,²⁴ the Sea of Elath,²⁵ the Sea of Aspamia.²⁶ But not on the Sea of Emessa also? No, because Diocletian brought the waters of several rivers together and made them into a sea.²⁷

He established it upon the floods (Ps. 24:2): upon four rivers, the Jordan, the Jarmuk, the Keramiyon, and the Piga.²⁸

[From] *the top of Pisgah, it is seen upon the face of Jeshimon* (Num. 21:20). R. Hīyya bar Abba said: This verse implies that when a man comes up to the top of Mount Nebo, he sees in the Sea of Tiberias a whirlpool, sieve-like, which is Miriam's Well.²⁹

7. Another comment: The passage beginning *Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord* (Ps. 24:3) alludes to Moses, of whom it is said "Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain" (Ex. 19:3). Thus *Who shall stand in His holy place?* alludes to Moses, to whom God said: "Stand thou here by Me" (Deut. 5:28). *He that hath clean hands* (Ps. 24:4) alludes to Moses, who said: "I have not taken one ass from them" (Num. 16:15). *And clear understanding* alludes to the clear understanding of God's message³⁰ which Moses sought when the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "Go with My message to Pharaoh," and Moses replied: "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them: The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me: What is His name? What shall I say unto them?" (Ex. 3:13).

Who hath not taken without cause any life (Ps. 24:4) alludes to Moses who, not without good cause, took the life of the Egyptian, for it is said "He looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian" (Ex. 2:12). What can "He looked this way and that way" mean except that Moses beheld in that instant a court of angels, and

with them he consulted, so that, rightly empowered, he smote the Egyptian. Moses also had foreknowledge that a proselyte would never descend from this Egyptian, a fact implied by the words "He saw that there was no man."

Nor having been sworn deceived his neighbor (Ps. 24:4) alludes to Moses, of whom the words "Jethro adjured (*wayyo'el*) Moses to dwell with him" (Ex. 2:21), prove that Moses swore to Jethro not to go back to Egypt without Jethro's consent. *Wayyo'el* clearly indicates adjuration as in the verse "Saul adjured (*wayyo'el*) the people" (I Sam. 14:24). Note well what Scripture says of Moses when he wished to go back to Egypt with the message of the Holy One, blessed be He: "Moses went, and returned to Jethro his father-in-law" (Ex. 14:18).

Hence it is said *He shall receive the blessing from the Lord* (Ps. 24:5): Moses was made king and master of all Israel. *And righteousness from the God of His salvation (ibid.)*: Moses was thought so deserving that the Torah was given to Israel by his hand.

8. Another comment: The passage beginning *Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord?* alludes to Abraham, to whom God said: "Get thee into the land of Moriah . . . upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Gen. 22:2). *And who shall stand in His holy place?* alludes to Abraham, of whom it is said "Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord" (Gen. 19:27). *He that hath clean hands* alludes to Abraham, who held himself aloof from spoil, saying to the king of Sodom: "I will not take a thread nor a shoe-latchet nor aught that is thine" (Gen. 14:23). *And a pure heart* alludes to Abraham's heart, of which it is said "Thou . . . foundest his heart faithful before Thee" (Neh. 9:8); and "He believed in the Lord" (Gen. 15:6). *Who without cause hath not taken any life* (Ps. 24:4) alludes to Nimrod, whose life [Abraham took].³¹ *Nor sworn to deceive his neighbor* alludes to Abraham who said to the King of Sodom: "I have lifted up my hand unto the Lord" (Gen. 14:22). Hence it is said *He shall receive the blessing from the Lord*: as Scripture says, "The Lord had blessed

Abraham in all things" (Gen. 24:1). *And righteousness from the God of his salvation*: as Scripture says of Abraham, "He believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

9. Another comment: The passage beginning *Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord?* alludes to Jacob, to whom God said: "Arise, go up to Beth-el" (Gen. 35:1). *And who shall stand in His holy place?* alludes to Jacob, of whom it is said "He lighted upon a certain place" (Gen. 28:11).³² *He that hath clean hands* alludes to the matter of Laban's robbing Jacob, of which Jacob said: "I bore the loss of it" (Gen. 31:39). *And a pure heart* alludes to Jacob's heart, for he said to Laban: "Whereas thou hast felt about all my stuff, what hast thou found?" (Gen. 31:37). *Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity* alludes to the fact that Jacob had not lifted up his soul to Laban's [teraphim]. *Nor sworn to deceive his neighbor* alludes to Jacob, of whom it is said "Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac" (Gen. 31:53). Hence it is said *He shall receive the blessing from the Lord*; as Scripture says: "God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him" (Gen. 35:9). *And righteousness from the God of his salvation*, for Jacob said: "So shall my righteousness witness against me hereafter" (Gen. 30:33).

10. *Lift up your heads, O ye gates* (Ps. 24:7). You find that after Solomon built the Holy Temple, he sought to bring the Ark into the Holy of Holies, but the gate was strait: This gate was five cubits in height, and two and a half cubits in width; the Ark was only a cubit and a half in length, a cubit and a half in width, and a cubit and a half in height. But cannot that which measures a cubit and a half be put in a space that is two cubits and a half? But the truth is that the gates held fast one to the other, and although Solomon cried out twenty-four times,³³ he was given no response. When he said: *Lift up your heads, O ye gates* he received no response. Again when he said: *Lift up your heads, O ye gates . . . that the King of glory may enter* (Ps. 24:7), he received no response. But when he said: *O Lord God,*

turn not away the face of Thine anointed; remember the good deeds of David Thy servant (2 Chron. 6:42), at that moment the gates lifted up their heads, the Ark entered, and a fire came down from heaven.³⁴ (Why was Solomon put to such trouble? Because he was arrogant, having said: *I have surely built Thee a house of habitation* [1 Kings 8:13]). When the children of Israel saw what had happened, they said: "Surely, the Holy One, blessed be He, has forgiven David that sin of his," and then their faces turned as black as the bottom of a pot, for they felt ashamed of themselves.³⁵

Hence David said, *Show me a token for good, that they who hate me may see it, and be ashamed, because Thou, Lord, hast helped me, and comforted me* (Ps. 86:7): "Thou hast helped me in this world; and comforted me in the world-to-come."

Another comment on Solomon's saying *I have surely built Thee a house of habitation* (1 Kings 8:13). R. Jacob, the son of R. Judah bar Ezekiel, said: The literal meaning of these words is: "I have built Thee a house, a house, indeed, which built itself."³⁶

And R. Aḥa said in the name of R. Jose: Every one is of service to a king;³⁷ and the more so is every one—even spirits, even demons, even ministering angels—of service to that King who is the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.

Likewise R. Berechiah taught: In the same passage occurs the verse *And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone, made ready before being brought thither* (1 Kings 6:7). Note that it is not written "The house which they were building" but *The house when it was in building*, as if to say that the house built itself.

In *The house . . . was built of stone, made ready before being brought thither*, the words *brought thither* imply that each stone brought itself thither, moving up by itself and laying itself in its position in the wall. "And," said R. Abbahu, "do not marvel at this, for after Daniel was cast into the lions' den, it is written *A stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den* (Dan. 6:18). But are there stones in Babylon?"³⁸ What the verse im-

plies, however, is that the stone rose up out of the Land of Israel, brought itself to the mouth of the den, and laid itself upon it."

R. Huna said in the name of R. Joseph: The verse implies that in the moment Daniel was cast into the den an angel came down, assumed the likeness of a lion made out of stone, and sat down at the mouth of the den. Hence Daniel said: *My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me* (*ibid.* 6:23).

In any event, if a stone brought itself to the mouth of a den and laid itself upon it for a mortal's sake, how much more and still more would a stone do for the sake of the Holy One, blessed be He!

11. *Who is this King of glory?* (Ps. 24:8). R. Simon said: "Who is the one King who sets a portion of His own glory upon them that fear Him? *The Lord is the one king who for ever sets glory upon [His] hosts.*" "Thus," said R. Simon, "The verse *The people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again* (Num. 12:15), proves that the pillar of cloud waited for Miriam." R. Lulyani said in the name of R. Isaac: The verse *Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice* (Ex. 19:19) implies that God answered Moses with the voice of Moses himself.

R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Simon: The verse *Joseph was brought down to Egypt* (Gen. 39:1) is followed by *The Lord was with Joseph* (*ibid.* 39:2). R. Yudan said in the name of R. Aibu: Out of the latter verse comes my proof that the Lord was with Joseph in a time of prosperity. Whence the proof that He was with him in a time of trouble? From the verse *The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand, because the Lord was with him* (*ibid.* 39:23).

When the camp set forward, a covering of sealskin³⁹ was spread over all the vessels in the Tabernacle. But of the Ark of Testimony, it is written *And shall spread over it a cloth all of blue* (Num. 4:6). Why such a covering? So that the Ark of the Testimony would be set apart. Hence it is said *That the King of glory may enter* (Ps. 24:9).

12. Another comment on *Who is this King of glory?* R. Hezekiah said: Why is blue different from all other colors? Because blue has the appearance of the sea; the sea, the appearance of grass; grass, the appearance of heaven; heaven, the appearance of a rainbow; a rainbow, the appearance of a cloud on a rainy day; a cloud on a rainy day, the appearance of the throne of glory; and the throne of glory, the appearance of the glory of the Lord, for it is said *As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord* (Ezek. 1:28). Now the Lord gave to them that fear Him a portion of His own glory, gave them the blue, for it is said *Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they may make them fringes in the borders of their garments . . . and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a cord of blue* (Num. 15:38). Hence *Who is this King of glory* means "Who is this King who gives a portion of His own glory to them that fear Him?"

PSALM TWENTY-FIVE

1. [*A Psalm*] of David. *Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul* (Ps. 25:1). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *In the same day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and he lifteth his soul unto him* (Deut. 24:15). The Holy One, blessed be He, asked David: "David, why dost thou lift up thy soul unto Me?" David replied: Because upon Thine earth I am a hireling before Thee: *A servant that eagerly longeth for the shadow, and . . . a hireling that looketh for the reward of his work* (Job 7:2). And it is written of a hireling in the Law of Moses *In the same day thou shalt give him his hire*. And so *Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul*. For in the world's use the hireling who completes his work for a householder asks the householder for the wage of his work, and the householder gives it to him. And shall it not be so with the Holy One, blessed be He? Shall not the words *neither shall the sun go down upon [a man's hire]* apply also to the Holy One, blessed be He? Now if it is said of a hireling who asks the wage which the householder owes him, *He lifteth his soul unto him*, how much more ought this be said of us whose lives depend on Thee!

In another comment, the verse is read *Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my life*. These words were spoken by the generation which during [Hadrian's] persecution gave even their lives in pledge to hallow the Name, saying: *When Thou dost lend Thy neighbor any manner of loan, Thou shalt not enter his house to fetch his pledge . . . and if he be poor . . . thou shalt surely restore to him the pledge when the sun goeth down* (Deut. 24:10-12).

2. Another comment: The words *Unto Thee O Lord do I lift up my soul* are to be considered in the light of the verse *Into Thy hand I commit my spirit* (Ps. 31:6). As matters go in the world, a man with whom things are left for safekeeping may confuse one man's things with a second man's things, and the second man's with the first man's, for some things are not easily told apart. But with the Holy One, blessed be He, there is no such con-

fusion, for *Thou, Lord, art God of truth* (Ps. 31:6). Thus, is it conceivable that a man should rise in the morning and seek his spirit and not find it? Or that he find his spirit in another's possession, or another's spirit in his possession? Hence it is said *Thou restorest [what is left with Thee for safekeeping] for Thou, Lord, art God of truth.*

R. Alexandri said: A mortal in whose possession new things are left for safekeeping and with whom the things remain, returns them worn and used. Not so the Holy One, blessed be He: Things worn and used are left with Him for safekeeping, and He returns them new. You can see for yourself that this is true. For the worker labors the whole day, and his spirit within him becomes weary and worn, so that he is tired when he goes to sleep. But his spirit is at peace, for it is in the safekeeping of the Holy One, blessed be He, and at dawn it returns, a new creation, to his body, as it is said [*spirits*] *are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness* (Lam. 3:23).

R. Simeon said in the name of R. Simon: Because Thou renewest our spirits each dawn, we believe, nay, we are certain, that Thou wilt restore our spirits to us at the Resurrection.

R. Alexandri said: Because in our exile Thou renewest our spirits each dawn, we are certain that Thy faithfulness must be so great as to deliver us.

3. Another comment: *Unto Thee, O Lord!—how my soul is burdened!*¹ When the Holy Temple stood, a man who committed a sin might bring an offering which made expiation for him. But now that we have no offerings, behold, on a fast day how our souls are burdened!—reckon the affliction in our souls as a perfect offering, for we have nought else but Thy mercies to hold on to. Hence it is said *Unto Thee, O Lord! how my soul is burdened!*

R. Judah said: In truth, the Holy One, blessed be He, waived many of the Temple rites of atonement, for it is said *Let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon* (Isa. 55:7).

4. Another comment on *Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my*

soul: When Solomon spoke of *Cold waters to a yearning soul* (Prov. 25:25) he meant that David yearned for Torah and that his soul longed to be in the house of study. Thus David said, *Lord, I love the habitation of Thy house* (Ps. 26:8); he also said, *My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord* (Ps. 84:3); he also said, *A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand* (*ibid.* 84:11). And he asked: *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place?* (Ps. 24:3). The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: Knowest thou not? *He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart* (Ps. 24:4)—he who has these two things.

Thereupon David rejoiced, saying: These I have: clean hands, for it is said *David executed justice and righteousness unto all his people* (2 Sam. 8:15); and a pure heart, for it is said *The Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart* (1 Sam. 13:14). Hence Solomon said: *Cold waters to a yearning soul*. And David said further: *I have sworn, and I will perform it, to keep Thy righteous ordinances* (Ps. 119:106), and thereby he would obtain two rewards: one reward for the sworn oath, and one reward for obedience to the ordinance.²

5. *My God, I have put my trust in Thee* (*bḵ*) (Ps. 25:2). R. Isaac said: *In Thee* means "in Thy Law," for the numerical value of the letters in *bḵ* (*in Thee*) is twenty-two, the number of letters in the [Hebrew] alphabet.³

Another comment on *My God, I have put my trust in Thee*: It happened that there lived in Caesarea a great man who had fame throughout the region.⁴ One night as the guards of the region made their rounds, they came upon a stranger whom they arrested. The stranger said to them: "Do not strike me. I am so-and-so's retainer." When they heard this they let go of him, but kept him under guard until morning. In the morning, they brought the stranger before the great man and said: "Last night we came upon this retainer of thine." The great man asked: "My son, dost thou know me?" The stranger replied: "No." The great man asked: "How, then, art thou my retainer?" and the stranger replied: "I appeal to thee! I am not thy re-

tainer; but I put my trust in thee. Had I not said: 'I am so-and-so's retainer,' they would have struck me." Thereupon the great man said: "Since he put his trust in me, let go of him."⁵ Even so, David said: *My God, I have put my trust in Thee: let me not be ashamed. And because I put my trust in Thee, let not mine enemies triumph over me* (Ps. 25:2). And not only me, but *Let none that wait on Thee be ashamed; they shall be ashamed that deal treacherously without cause* (Ps. 25:3).

According to R. Phinehas, David spoke thus to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, when I stand up before Thee in prayer, let not my prayer be rejected, for the eyes of Israel are turned to me, and my eyes are turned to Thee, so that if Thou hearest my prayer, it will be as if Thou didst also hear their prayer.

Similarly, you find that during a fast, when the whole congregation is fasting, only he who conducts the service goes down to read the prayers before the Ark, for the eyes of the congregation are turned to him and his eyes are turned to the Holy One, blessed be He, so that God also hears their prayer. Hence David prayed: *Let none that wait on Thee be ashamed; they shall be ashamed who act deceitfully with respect to their emptiness*,⁶—that is, men who fast without repentance shall be ashamed.

6. *Show me Thy ways, O Lord.* R. Berechiah, in the name of R. Johanan, told a parable of a physician who had a disciple to whom he taught all kinds of remedies, except the remedy for such-and-such a wound. The disciple said to his master: "Thou didst reveal to me all kinds of remedies in the world, except the remedy for such-and-such a wound. I beg thee, reveal it to me." Even so, when Moses said to the Holy One, blessed be He, *Show me now Thy ways* (Ex. 33:13), He showed them to Moses, as is said *He made known His ways unto Moses* (Ps. 103:7). But when Moses said: *Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory* (Ex. 33:18), that is to say, "Show me the rule whereby Thou guidest the world," God replied: "My rules thou canst not fathom!"

R. Ze'era taught in the name of Resh Lakish that Moses said

to the Holy One, blessed be He: When I told Thee that the children of Israel *are almost ready to stone me* (Ex. 17:4), Thou didst reconcile me with them, and thereupon Thou didst stipulate with me: "When I am angry with My children, do thou also reconcile Me with them." Then what does Scripture tell us? When the Lord excommunicated the children of Israel because of the molten calf, *Moses took up the Tent [of Meeting] and pitched it without the camp afar off* (Ex. 33:7), for he reasoned thus: When a man is excommunicated by the Master, he is excommunicated by the disciple. (Of the end of this verse, *Every one that sought the Lord went out unto the Tent of Meeting without the camp* [*ibid.*], R. Judah said: It is not written here "everyone that sought Moses," but *everyone that sought the Lord*, in order to teach us that whenever a man pays his respects to an elder, it is as if he were paying his respects to the Presence). Then the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: "Two faces seething with anger! Get thee back!" Moses went back into the camp, for *The Lord spoke unto Moses concerning Face and face* (Ex. 33:11).⁷ One might not have understood exactly what this part of the verse means, but since the verse continues with *and he returned into the camp*, the entire verse clearly teaches that God freed Moses from his vow, so as to permit him to take the Tent of Meeting back into the camp of Israel.

R. Abba said: It was then that Moses found the courage to ask of the Holy One, blessed be He: Show me the rule whereby Thou guidest the nations of the earth.

7. *Guide me in Thy truth, and teach me; for Thou art the God of my salvation; upon Thee I wait in prayer all the day* (Ps. 25:5). But is it likely that a man would be praying all the day? Because this world is as the day for the nations of the earth, but is as the night for Israel, therefore, it is said *Upon Thee do I wait in prayer all the day*; that is, "I pray all during the day of the wicked Esau, until the eve of that day when there shall be light for Israel."

8. *Remember, O Lord, Thy tender mercies, and Thy loving-kindnesses; for they have been ever of old* (Ps. 25:6). R. Joshua

ben Levi said: These words refer to those loving-kindnesses which Thou didst begin with Adam. Thou didst say to him: *In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die* (Gen. 2:17), but hadst Thou not afterwards given Adam one day of Thine, a day which is a thousand years, as is said *A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday* (Ps. 90:4), how could Adam have united with his wife and begotten children? Hence it is said *Thy tender mercies and Thy loving-kindnesses have been ever of old*, that is, "ever since the days of Adam."

9. *My transgressions, [like] the sins of my youth, remember not* (Ps. 25:7).⁸ According to R. Yudan, David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, may my sins and transgressions be considered like the sins of my youth before Thee, and so have no substance whatever.⁹

According to Thy mercy, remember Thou me for Thy goodness' sake, O Lord (Ps. 25:7b). R. Eleazar told a parable of a king who prepared a great banquet and charged his steward: "Invite me merchants; do not invite me artisans." Thereupon his steward said: "My lord king, so abundant is thy banquet that the merchants will not be able to eat it all, unless the artisans are part of the company." Even so, David said: "*According to Thy mercy remember Thou me, for Thy goodness' sake, O Lord,*"¹⁰ as is said *The Lord is good to all* (Ps. 145:9).

R. Jose bar Hanina told a parable of a king who prepared a banquet and invited the guests. The fourth hour passed, and the guests did not come. The fifth and sixth hours passed, and still the guests did not come. By evening the guests began to arrive. The king said to them: "I am beholden to you. Had you not come, I would have had to throw the whole banquet to my dogs." Even so, the Holy One, blessed be He, says to the righteous: I consider this a great favor on your part, for I created My world because of you; and were it not for you, all the goodness which I have prepared for the future, of which it is said *Oh how abundant is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee* (Ps. 31:20), to whom could I give it?

10. *Good and upright is the Lord; therefore doth He instruct*

sinner in the way (Ps. 25:8) is to say, that God instructs sinners in the way that they may do His will.

Another comment: *Good and upright is the Lord; therefore doth He instruct sinners in the way. The meek will He guide in judgment* (Ps. 25:8-9). R. Phinehas taught: Why is the Lord called good? Because He is upright! Why is the Lord called upright? Because He is good! And both words show that in giving cities of refuge to men who slay unwittingly, ¹¹ the Lord points a way for sinners to repent.

R. Abin said: At every mile along the way there was a tower, and on each tower there was a figure whose hand pointed toward a city of refuge.

Thus, you find in the story of Pharaoh that as God smote him with hail, He said: *Send therefore now and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field* (Ex. 9:19).¹²

11. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth* (Ps. 25:10). Lest one think that the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth for all men, the verse ends by saying, *unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies*.

Another comment on *All the paths of the Lord*. When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: "Go and tell the children of Israel *Ye shall walk after the Lord your God*" (Deut. 13:5), they replied: "Moses, our master, who can walk after the Lord? Is it not written *The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm* (Nahum 1:3)? and is it not said *Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known* (Ps. 77:20)?" Thereupon Moses said to the children of Israel: I shall tell you the paths of the Lord. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth*: By *mercy* is meant deeds of loving-kindness, and by *truth* is meant the Law of the Lord. For to whom shall the paths of the Lord be given? *Unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies*.

R. Simlai said: We find that the Holy One, blessed be He, adorns maidens and seeks out husbands for them; that He visits the sick and buries the dead. And the proof that the Lord God adorns maidens and seeks out husbands for them? The verse

And with the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man, He plaited the hair (banah) of the woman,¹³ and brought her unto the man (Gen. 2:22). The word *banah* suggests that the Holy One, blessed be He, plaited Eve's hair, and brought her [thus adorned] to Adam, for in cities by the sea a woman's plaited hair is called *binyata*. And the proof that the Lord visits the sick? The verse *And the Lord appeared unto him¹⁴ by the terebinths of Mamre* (Gen. 18:1). And the proof that the Lord buries the dead? The verse *So Moses . . . died . . . and He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab* (Deut. 34:5a, 6a).

12. *What man is he that feareth the Lord?* (Ps. 25:12). This man is Abraham, to whom God said: "Now I know that thou art a God-fearing man" (Gen. 22:12). *Him will He instruct in the way that he should choose*; again this man is Abraham, to whom God said: "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1). *His soul shall dwell at ease* (Ps. 25:13) alludes to Abraham, to whom God said: "But thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace" (Gen. 15:15). *And his seed shall inherit the land* alludes to Abraham, to whom God said: "Unto thy seed have I given this land" (Gen. 15:18).

A different comment: *What man is he that feareth the Lord?* This man is Joseph, who said: "For I fear God" (Gen. 42:18). *Him will He instruct in the way that he should choose*; again, this man is Joseph, who chose not to sin with Potiphar's wife.¹⁵ *His soul shall dwell at ease* (Ps. 25:13) alludes to Joseph in his grave. *And his seed shall inherit the land* alludes to Joseph, of whose children's children it is said "And the children of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead, and took it" (Num. 32:39).

A still different comment: *What man is he?* This man is Levi, described as a "holy one" (Deut. 33:8). *That feareth the Lord* alludes to Levi, of whom God said: "My covenant was with him . . . for the fear, wherewith he feared Me, and was afraid before My name" (Mal. 2:5). *And his soul shall dwell at ease* (Ps. 25:13) alludes to Levi in his grave. *And his seed shall inherit the land* alludes to Phinehas, of whom God said: "Behold, I give unto him

My covenant . . . and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood" (Num. 25:13).

13. *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant* (Ps. 25:14). In the beginning, the secret of the Lord was with those who fear God; then He shared it with the righteous, as it is said *His secret is with the righteous* (Prov. 3:32); and then He shared it with the Prophets, as it is said *Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets* (Amos 3:7).

R. Simon said: Not to heavenly beings His secret, but only to earthly beings His secret.

Once R. Jose the son of the Damascene went to Lod¹⁸ to pay his respects to R. Eliezer. R. Eliezer asked R. Jose: "What new thing happened today in the house of study?" R. Jose replied: "The Sages voted and decided that those Jews owning fields in Ammon and Moab be required to set aside, from crops raised in the seventh year, another tithe for the poor."¹⁷ Thereupon R. Eliezer said to R. Jose: "Jose, stretch out thy hands, and lose thy sight."¹⁸ R. Jose stretched out his hands and lost his sight.

But then R. Eliezer wept and said: *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him*, and told R. Jose: "Go back to the house of study and say to them: Have no fear as to the rightness of your decision; I hold a tradition from Rabban¹⁹ Johanan ben Zakkai who heard his master say, and whose master heard his master say, and who in the name of Moses at Sinai heard say that this is the law: Jews owning fields in Ammon and Moab are required to set aside, out of crops raised in the seventh year, another tithe for the poor."

When R. Eliezer had calmed himself, he prayed: "May it be the will of our Father in heaven that the eyes of Jose see again." And his eyes saw again.²⁰

14. *Turn Thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am alone and poor* (Ps. 25:16). How could David have spoken of himself as alone and poor? As for his being alone, is it not written *And Jesse begot his first-born Eliab, and Abinadab the*

second, and Shimma the third, Nathanael the fourth, Raddai the fifth, Ozem the sixth, David the seventh (1 Chron. 2:13-15)? And as for his being poor, did not David say: *Now, behold, in my trouble have I prepared for the house of the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver, etc.* (1 Chron. 22:14)? However, this is what David really meant when he prayed to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Because I was named king over Thy children, their eyes are turned to me, and so, as over against them, I am alone. And all of them need me, but I am poor in contrast to Thee, so mine eyes turn to Thee because they are Thy children." Hence he said: *Turn Thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am alone and poor.*

Consider mine enemies, for they are many; and they bear a tyrannous hate against me (Ps. 25:19). When Esau hated Jacob, it was because Jacob had taken his birthright from him, and so there was reason for Esau's hatred. But as for the barbarians, the Goths,²¹ and other nations, what have I ever done to them that they should bear a tyrannous hate against me? Hence David said: *Consider mine enemies, for they are many; and they bear a tyrannous hate against me.*

O keep my soul, and deliver me (Ps. 25:20). If Thou dost not keep my soul, no one else has the power to keep it, for it was said to me *The Lord is thy keeper . . . The Lord shall keep thee from all evil; He shall keep thy soul* (Ps. 121:5a, 7).

Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on Thee. Of this verse, the Sages said: When a man prays and receives no answer, let him pray again, and wait again on the Holy One, blessed be He, because He will not shame those who wait on Him; as Scripture says, *Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thy heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord* (Ps. 27:14).

PSALM TWENTY-SIX

1. *A Psalm of David. Judge me, O Lord* (Ps. 26:1). But did not David also say, *Enter not into judgment with Thy servant* (Ps. 143:2)? The two verses mean that David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, judge me when Thou judgest the wicked. But enter not into judgment of me when Thou judgest the righteous.¹

Or they mean that David said: Judge me, O Lord, when Thou art proceeding in judgment of me; but once having judged me, do not again enter into judgment of me.

2. Another comment. Consider what Scripture says elsewhere: *Whoso loveth correction, loveth knowledge; but he that hateth reproof is brutish* (Prov. 12:1). Four are mentioned in Scripture as having been smitten: one, upon being smitten, rebelled; one, upon being smitten, laughed; one, upon being smitten, sought his friend; and one asked: "Why is the lash held back? Strike me again!"

The first one who was smitten, rebelled; this was Job. When he was smitten, he rebelled, saying: *I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God: Do not condemn me; show me wherefore Thou contendest with me. Is it good unto Thee that Thou shouldest oppress?* (Job 10:1c-3). Wherefore am I smitten? What have I done unto Thee? Tell me wherein I sinned. *How many are mine iniquities and sins? Make me to know my transgression and my sin* (Job 13:23). I know that Thine is the power, and that Thou dost this to me *not for any injustice in my hands . . . O earth, cover not thou my blood, and let my cry have no resting-place* (Job 16:17-18). Thus spoke the one who, upon being smitten, rebelled.

The second one who was smitten, laughed; this was Abraham, of whom it is said *When Abraham fell upon his face, he laughed* (Gen. 17:17).² The Lord and Abraham³—with whom may they be compared? [With a man and his son]. The man beating his son swore that he would continue to beat him, saying: "My son, I have sworn that I would continue beating thee." The son replied: "Thine is the power!" The father continued beating

his son, thinking that his son would say: "I have had enough." As the son was smitten more and more, however, the father finally said: "Enough of beating him!" Even so, it is said *The Lord appeared unto Abram, and said unto him: I am God: "Shaddai!"*—that is, "It is enough!"⁴ (Gen. 17:1): I am He who said to My world: "It is enough!" I am also He who said of thy trial: "It is enough!"

The third one who, upon being smitten, sought his friend, was Hezekiah, of whom it is said *Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord* (Isa. 38:2).

And the fourth asked: "Why is the lash held back? Strike me again!" This was David, who said: *Judge me, O Lord*. As Solomon said: *Whoso loveth correction, loveth knowledge* (Prov. 12:1). And as David said: *Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law* (Ps. 94:12).

3. *Examine me, O Lord, and prove me* (Ps. 26:2). David said: Prove me, O Lord, as Thou didst prove Abraham, of whom the verse *God did prove Abraham* (Gen. 22:1) shows that Abraham stood up to his proving. Prove me as Thou didst prove Isaac, who being proved on the altar stood up to it. And I, am I without merit?

Try my reins and my heart (Ps. 26:2). David said: Try me as Thou didst Joseph. Him Thou didst try with Potiphar's wife and found him valiant, for it is said *The word of the Lord tried him* (Ps. 105:19).

But while God was proving David, he said: I have no strength to endure. I beg Thee, be lenient with me: *Thou hast proved my heart, Thou hast come to me in the night; Thou hast tried me, and findest [little strength]* (Ps. 17:3).⁵

From this we learn that a man should never pit himself against men greater than he, and should never say: I vouch for my heart. For if David, who had so many virtues that he could say, *Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes; and I have walked in Thy truth. I have not sat with men of falsehood; neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the assembly of evil-doers, and will not sit with the wicked. I will wash my hands in in-*

nocency (Ps. 26:4-6a), if finally even David turned to God and pleaded *Enter not into judgment with Thy servant* (Ps. 143:2), how much more and more ought other men so plead!

And so, too, Solomon said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe! When a king hires diligent workmen, and they do their work well, and he gives them their pay, should the king be praised? When is he to be praised? When he hires slothful workers, but gives them their pay in full. And Solomon went on to say: Our fathers worked diligently and received good pay. What kindness of Thine was in this, that they worked and were paid? Slothful workers, we! Yet give us good pay, and that would be Thy great kindness! Hence Solomon said: *The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers* (I Kings 8:57).

4. *I [David] have hated the assembly of evil-doers* (Ps. 26:5). What assembly of evil-doers? The one of which it is said *The people gathered themselves unto Aaron* (Ex. 32:1) at the making of the molten calf. And also the one of which it is said *Korah assembled all the congregation against them* (Num. 16:19).

And what assembly do I love? The one of which it is written *Moses assembled all the congregation of the children of Israel, and said unto them: "These are the words which the Lord hath commanded"* (Ex. 35:1); also the one of which it is said *Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes . . . to bring up the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord* (I Kings 8:1).

And I will not sit with the wicked (Ps. 26:5)—with Korah and his company whom Moses meant when he said: *Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men* (Num. 16:26).

5. *I will wash my hands in innocency; so will I compass Thine altar, O Lord* (Ps. 26:6). This verse is to be read in the light of what is taught in a Mishnah: "On each [of the first seven days of Sukkot] men circled the altar once, reciting *We beseech Thee, O Lord, save now* (Ps. 118:25)." ⁶ And with what did they circle the altar? With branches of palm-trees, boughs of myrtle, and willows of the brook in their right hand, and with fruit of the

citron in their left, as it is said *And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God* (Lev. 23:40).

*I will wash my hands in innocency*⁷ implies that the festive wreath must be got through purchase, not through robbery, for in a Mishnah we are taught: "A festive wreath that is got by robbery or is withered is unfit for circling the altar with";⁸ for a festive wreath must be innocent of violence or robbery, lest the advocate turn accuser.

R. Levi said: A man who uses a festive wreath got by robbery—to whom may he be likened? To a highwayman who sat at a crossroads, robbing all those who came and went. And once even as a royal legate was passing on his way to levy the tax of a certain province, the highwayman, springing up against him, got the better of him and robbed him, taking all he had with him. After a time the highwayman was captured and cast into prison. When the king's legate heard this, he went to the highwayman and said to him: "Up and give me all that thou didst rob and take away from me, and I shall plead for thee!" The highwayman answered: "Of all that I seized upon and took away from thee I have naught left, except this rug which belongs to thee." The legate said to him: "Give it to me, and I shall plead for thee." And as the highwayman gave it to him, the legate said: "Tomorrow, thou wilt be taken out to judgment, and when the king says to thee, 'Is there any man that will plead for thee?' I shall make the plea."

The next day, the highwayman was taken out to judgment. The king asked him: "Hast thou a man to plead for thee?" and the highwayman replied: "Such and such a legate." The king then sent for the legate and asked: "Knowest thou anything good of this man?" The legate answered: "I do indeed! On the day that thou didst send me to levy the tax of a certain province, this man, springing out upon me, got the better of me, and robbed me, taking away all that I had with me. This very rug is his witness."

Then all said: "Woe to the man whose advocate turns accuser." Even so, when a man takes a festive wreath that is got by robbery, it cries out before the Holy One, blessed be He: "I was got by robbery! I was got by violence!" Of such a man the ministering angels say, "Woe to that man whose advocate turns accuser."

Hence David said: *I will wash my hands in innocency; so will I compass Thine altar, O Lord*, with a festive wreath got through purchase, not robbery.

6. In the verse *That I may make the voice of thanksgiving to be heard* (Ps. 26:7), *thanksgiving* refers to the festal thank-offering.

The end of the verse, *And tell of all Thy wondrous works*, refers, according to R. Abin, to the recitation of the *Hallel*⁹ Psalms which tell of God's wondrous works in days gone by, in present times, in the days of the Messiah, in the times of Gog and Magog,¹⁰ and in the time-to-come. Thus the Psalm *When Israel went out of Egypt* (Ps. 114:1) tells of God's wondrous works in days gone by; the Psalm *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory* (Ps. 115:1) tells of God's wondrous works in present times; the Psalm *I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications* (Ps. 116:1) tells of God's wondrous works in the days of the Messiah; the Psalm which contains the verse *All nations compassed me about, yea, they compassed me about; but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them* (Ps. 118:10)¹¹ tells of God's wondrous works in the times of Gog and Magog; in the same Psalm, the verse *Thou art my God, and I will praise Thee; Thou art my God, I will exalt Thee* (Ps. 118:28) tells of God's wondrous works in the time-to-come; finally, in the same Psalm, the verse *O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures for ever* (Ps. 118:29) tells of God's wondrous works in the life of the world-to-come.

7. *Gather not my soul with sinners* (Ps. 26:9) with men condemned to be stoned, or with men condemned to be burned. *Nor my life with men of blood*—with men condemned to be slain by the sword, or with men condemned to be strangled.

Another interpretation: "Bury me not with sinners like the Egyptians." Thus also Jacob said to Joseph: *Bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt* (Gen. 47:29).

R. Johanan taught: In two places in Scripture we find the righteous entreating the Holy One, blessed be He, that their souls perish not with sinners. Thus Daniel *would desire mercies of the God of heaven . . . that Daniel and his companions should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon* (Dan. 2:18). David also said: *Gather not my soul with sinners*.

In his comment on *And it came to pass about ten days after the Lord smote Nabal with the plague, that he died* (1 Sam. 25:38), R. Halafta asked in the name of R. Aibu: But does not the plague kill a man within three days? Have we not learned that death after one day's illness is death by the anger of the Lord; death after two days' illness is precipitous death; death after three days' illness is death by plague? ¹² And, likewise, did not R. Halafta ben Saul teach that death after one day's illness, or two, or three days' illness is premature death; ¹³ death after four or five days' illness is abrupt death; death after six days' illness is death ordained in Scripture; death after seven days' illness is natural death; ¹⁴ and death after an illness beyond seven days is a death of affliction?

But how can it be said that death after three days' illness is death by plague, since it is written *And it came to pass about ten days after the Lord smote Nabal with the plague, that he died?*

[Thereupon R. Halafta explained that] during the seven days of mourning for the righteous Samuel,¹⁵ the Holy One, blessed be He, held off Nabal's death, in order that the mourning for Samuel should not be confused with the mourning for Nabal; and since Nabal lived three days beyond the seven, it may properly be said that Nabal's death was death by plague.

R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Samuel:¹⁶ The verse is not to be read "And it came to pass ten days after the Lord afflicted Nabal, etc." but *And it came to pass that the Lord afflicted Nabal as men are afflicted during the ten days* [of

penitence]. For during the ten days between New Year's Day and the Day of Atonement the Holy One, blessed be He, held off Nabal's death, so that he might repent, but he did not repent.

[Consider the verse *Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with men of blood* (Ps. 26:9)] in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Bands of the Moabites . . . burying a man . . . cast the man in the sepulcher of Elisha; and when the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet* (2 Kings 13:20-21). It is taught that the man did stand up on his feet, but he never got home again, for he died and was buried in another sepulcher: Such was the strength of Elisha's prayer, *Gather not my soul with sinners*.

And who was the man? He was the child of the Shunammite, of whom it is said *When the child was grown . . . he went out to his father . . . and he said: "My head, my head." . . . and then died* (2 Kings 4:18-20), [but was brought back to life by Elisha]. Accordingly, when he died a second time, they cast him into the sepulcher of Elisha, that he might again be revived; and in truth he was revived, and stood upon his feet, and forthwith died again. The third time that he died, they buried him in another sepulcher. And why did he finally die? Because he was a sinner.

As against him, the son of the widow of Zarephath,¹⁷ that is to say, Jonah the son of Amittai, was a completely righteous man. He was tried when the fish swallowed him and was tried again in the depths of the sea, but he did not die: *The Lord spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land* (Jonah 2:11), so that Jonah, while still alive, entered into his glory, into the Garden of Eden.

It came to pass after the seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth (Gen. 7:10).¹⁸ R. Hoshaia said: This verse proves that during the seven days of mourning for the righteous Methuselah, the Holy One, blessed be He, held off His judgment of the generation of the flood that they might repent, but they did not repent. Hence Methuselah prayed: *Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with men of blood,*

that is, with the unrepentant men who were to perish in the flood. The phrase *In whose hands is craftiness* (Ps. 26:10)¹⁹ refers, according to R. Phinehas the Priest bar Ḥama, to dice-players who reckon with the left hand, but add up²⁰ with the right, and thus rob and cheat one another. *But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity* (Ps. 26:11).

Redeem me, and be merciful unto me (*ibid.*): Redeem me from the judgment of the grave, and be merciful to me in the time-to-come.

My foot will stand in an even place (Ps. 26:12) in the time-to-come. *In the congregations will I bless the Lord* with the cup of deliverances.²¹

PSALM TWENTY-SEVEN

1. *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear* (Ps. 27:1). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame* (Isa. 10:17). In the world's use, when a man carries about the light of a lamp inside his house, can he say, "Such-and-such a man who is my friend is free to use the light of the lamp, but such-and-such a man who is my foe is not free to use the light of the lamp?"¹ But the Holy One, blessed be He, can limit the use of His light. Since He created the light, in the age-to-come the wicked will not be able to see by His light, as is said *The light of the righteous rejoiceth; but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out* (Prov. 13:9).

Scripture says elsewhere: *And God said: "Let there be light." And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness* (Gen. 1:3-4). As to the meaning of the latter words, there is a difference of opinion. R. Judah bar R. Simon maintained that God divided the light for His own use, just like a king who, upon seeing a good portion, says: "This portion shall be mine!" Even so, when the Holy One, blessed be He, created His universe and created the great light, He said: Except for Me, no creature shall be free to make use of this light. And thus Scripture says *The light dwelleth with Him* (Dan. 2:22). R. Abin the Levite said that the Holy One, blessed be He, took the light, and covered Himself with it as though it were a garment, and illumined His universe with it. Hence it is said *He covereth Himself with light as with a garment* (Ps. 104:2). But the Rabbis maintained that God set aside the light for the righteous in the age-to-come, like a king who has a good portion and says: "This portion shall be for my son!" Thus Scripture says, *Light is sown for the righteous* (Ps. 97:11).

David asked the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, when will the light come?" God replied: "When the time of redemption comes and Jerusalem is rebuilt, I shall make the light come, saying to Israel *Arise, shine, for thy light is*

come (Isa. 60:1). But as for [heathen] nations of the earth, for them the light shall be made into darkness, as is said *And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame; and it shall burn and devour his šit and his šamir in one day* (Isa. 10:17).² Who are referred to in the phrase *his šit and his šamir*?² Those officials of the nations who maintained themselves in luxury.

David said to God: Show us light from that light, as is said *The Lord is God, and let Him show us light* (Ps. 118:27). God replied: As thou livest, I shall make the light come to Israel and make a darkness come to [heathen] nations of the earth, as Scripture says, *Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee* (Isa. 60:1-2). One may marvel at this, but the Holy One, blessed be He, has already given the world an instance of such a thing: *And there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days; but all the children of Israel had light* (Ex. 10:22-23).

What does one find Scripture saying of the time when the Egyptians were pursuing the children of Israel? *And the pillar of cloud came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel, and there was the cloud and the darkness, yet gave it light* (Ex. 14:20). But if the pillar of cloud was there, how could darkness be there? Or if darkness was there, how could the pillar of cloud be there? R. Hoshai explained that the pillar of cloud had two faces, a face of light for the children of Israel and a face of darkness for the Egyptians.³

And so David said: I shall sing a Psalm concerning God's light, as is said *A Psalm of David. The Lord is my light and my salvation.*

2. Another comment on *The Lord is my light and my salvation*. These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path* (Ps. 119:105). With whom may the wicked be compared? With a

man who was walking in the middle of night in pitch darkness, so that when he came to a stone, he stumbled over it, and when he came to a pit, he fell into it. To such a man apply the words *The way of the wicked is in darkness; they know not at what they stumble* (Prov. 4:19). And with whom may the righteous be compared? With a man who was walking in the way, but who had a lighted lamp in his hand, so that when he came to a stone, he took heed of it and did not stumble, and when he came to a pit, he took heed of it and did not fall into it.

Even so, David said: When I was about to profane the Sabbath, the Torah gave light to me, for it says: *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy* (Ex. 20:8). When I was about to commit adultery, the Torah gave light to me, for it says: *Both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death* (Lev. 20:10). Hence David declared, *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path* (Ps. 119:105).

Another comment on *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*. If lamp, why light? If light, why lamp? But David meant this: "When I begin studying words of Torah, though I barely begin with them, still they give forth light. But as I go deeper into Torah, then many gates [of light] open to me." Hence David speaks of a lamp which broadens into light.

A different comment on *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*. When did David speak this verse? When he was going into the valley of Rephaim, and yet would not go up into battle against the Philistines until he had inquired of the Urim and Thummim.

You find that when Samuel went to anoint David, the ministering angels, in the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He, making accusations against David, said: "Master of the universe, wherefore art Thou taking away the kingship from Saul and giving it to David?" God answered: I shall tell you wherein Saul and David differ: Saul went to inquire of the Urim and Thummim, but as soon as he saw the Philistines preparing to attack him, he said to the priest "Withdraw thy hand," not waiting for the priest to finish the inquiry, as is said *It came to pass,*

while Saul talked unto the priest, that the tumult that was in the camp of the Philistines went on and increased; and Saul said unto the priest: "Withdraw thy hand" (1 Sam. 14:19). But David, even when he saw the Philistines in the valley of Rephaim preparing to attack him, began at once to inquire of the Urim and Thummim, as is said *And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. And when David inquired of the Lord, He said: "Thou shalt not go up; make a circuit behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry-trees"* (2 Sam. 5:22-3). By this, God meant: "Until thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees, thou shalt not as much as stretch out a hand against the Philistines, even if they come near thee." *But let it be when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees*—not the sound of a going behind the Philistines—that then thou shalt determine [to go up]. (The words *thou shalt determine* usually denote decision as in the phrase "seeing his days are determined" [Job 14:5]). *For then will the Lord be going out before thee to smite the host of the Philistines* (2 Sam. 5:24). And why did God say to David that the sign of His going out to help him was to be the sound of a going, not behind the Philistines, but in the tops of the mulberry-trees? R. Berechiah said: [In order to intimate that God Himself, as it were, would be going out from among the prickly tops of the mulberry-trees, for] there is a kind of mulberry-tree completely covered with thorns, so that whenever a man touches it, he cries out in sudden pain.⁴ Thus the verse means to teach you indirectly that whenever the children of Israel are in distress, it is as if the Holy One, blessed be He, is also in distress, as it is said *In all their affliction He was afflicted* (Isa. 63:9). Likewise we are told *And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a thorn-bush* (Ex. 3:2). Here, again, why out of a thorn-bush, and not out of another kind of a tree? Because, as it is said, *I am with him in trouble* (Ps. 91:15).⁵

When the Philistines came up, and the hosts of Israel saw them, for the Philistines were not far away from them, not even

as much as four cubits away, the hosts of Israel asked David: "Why do we stand still?" David answered them: "Because I have already been commanded by the Lord not to stretch out even a hand against the Philistines until we see the tops of the mulberry-trees swaying. Should we stretch out a hand against them, we shall die forthwith. If we do not stretch out a hand against them, they may slay us forthwith, but it is better that we die the death of the righteous than the death of the wicked. Let us then, you and I, lift up our eyes to the Holy One, blessed be He." But at this instant the tops of all the mulberry-trees began swaying, and forthwith the hosts of Israel attacked the Philistines, as is said *And David did so, as the Lord commanded him, and smote the Philistines* (2 Sam. 5:25).

Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, was able to say to the ministering angels: "Mark the difference between David and Saul!" And what brought about David's deliverance? It was the word of the Holy One, blessed be He, which David fulfilled and which gave him light. Hence David said: *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet.*

3. Another comment on *The Lord is my light and my salvation*. R. Eleazar interpreted the entire Psalm as referring to the children of Israel at the Red Sea. Thus *The Lord was my light* at the Red Sea, for it is said "The cloud . . . gave light by night there" (Ex. 14:20). *And my salvation* at the Red Sea, for it is said "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day" (Ex. 14:30). *Whom shall I fear?* At the Red Sea, Moses said unto the people: "Fear ye not" (Ex. 14:13). *The Lord is the strength of my life:* At the Red Sea, Israel sang "The Lord is my strength and song" (Ex. 15:2). *Of whom shall I be afraid?*—"Fear and dread shall fall upon them" (Ex. 15:16) at the Red Sea. *When the wicked . . . came upon me* (Ps. 27:2): "Pharaoh came near" (Ex. 14:10a). *To eat up my flesh:* Pharaoh said, "I will pursue, I will overtake . . . my lust shall be satisfied upon them" (Ex. 15:9).

R. Samuel bar Nahmani taught: A wicked man does not leave this world until he has pronounced sentence upon himself. Hence it is written *I will pursue, I will overtake*. It is not written here

"We will pursue, we will overtake," but *I will pursue, I will overtake*, really signifying "I will be pursued, I will be overtaken." It is not written here "We will divide the spoil," but *I will divide the spoil*, really signifying "I will be divided as spoil."⁶

Mine adversaries and my foes, they stumbled and fell (Ps. 27:2d), for it is said "But as for Pharaoh and his host, He overthrew them in the Red Sea" (Ps. 136:15).

The people of Israel said: From now on, *though a host of Egyptians should again encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war, with Amalek, should rise against me, yet will I put my trust in Him* (Ps. 27:3), in the Holy One, blessed be He.

4. The Rabbis interpreted the entire Psalm as referring to the New Year's Day and to the Day of Atonement. *The Lord is my light* on New Year's Day; since this is the day of judgment, it is said "He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day" (Ps. 37:6). *The Lord is . . . my salvation* on the Day of Atonement when He saves us and forgives us all our sins. He is my salvation *When the wicked come upon me* (Ps. 27:2): When the guardian angels of the [hostile] nations of the earth come upon me *to eat up my flesh*. For they come into the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He, to attack the children of Israel, saying, "The other nations of the earth worshipped idols, and the children of Israel also worshipped idols."⁷

Even mine adversaries and my foes. You will find that the numerical value of the letters in *hštn*, [Satan], "the Adversary," is three hundred and sixty-four,⁸ which is one short of the number of days in the year. Thus the Adversary is given the authority to make accusations against the children of Israel on all the days of the year, except on the Day of Atonement when the Holy One, blessed be He, says to him: "Thou hast no authority to touch them. Nevertheless, go forth and see wherein they busy themselves." Then the Adversary going forth, finds all of them at fasting and prayer, dressed in white garments and cloaked like the ministering angels, and forthwith goes back in shame and

confusion. The Holy One, blessed be He, asks: "What hast thou found out about My children?" And he answers: "Verily, they are like the ministering angels, and I am unable to touch them." Thereupon, the Holy One, blessed be He, chains⁹ the Adversary and declares to the children of Israel: "I have forgiven you."

The people of Israel say: From now on, *though a host*—that is, the guardian angels of the nations of the earth—*should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise up against me, yet will I put my trust in this* (Ps. 27:3)—in the Torah which is called "This," as in the verse "This is the Torah" (Lev. 7:37).

R. Levi said: The word *This* refers to the body of ordinances [concerning the Day of Atonement] which Thou didst inscribe for me in Thy Torah, beginning with the verse, *With this shall Aaron come into the holy place* (Lev. 16:3).

5. *One thing have I asked of the Lord . . . that I may sit*¹⁰ *in the house of the Lord* (Ps. 27:4). R. Abba bar Kahana said: These words mean that David asked kingship of the Lord. You will find that David asked one thing of the Lord, but that Solomon asked two things, for he said: *Two things have I asked of Thee . . . Remove far from me falsehood and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me; lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say: "Who is the Lord?" Or lest I be poor, and steal, and seize upon (tafašti) the name of my God* (Prov. 30:7-9). What is the literal meaning of *tafašti*? Like *apheton*, the Greek for "loose," *tafašti* means "I might deal loosely with the name of God [by seizing upon it to swear falsely]."

Which sin¹¹ is more grievous: the first or the second? The second is more grievous. How do we know this? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, overlooks sins of idolatry, unchastity, and bloodshed committed by a man in an hour of stress, but God does not overlook the profanation of His name, as is said *Thus saith the Lord God: Go ye, serve every one his idols . . . but My holy name shall ye no more profane* (Ezek. 20:39).

Another comment on *One thing have I asked of the Lord*.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to David: "In the beginning, thou saidst *One thing have I asked of the Lord . . . that I may dwell in the house of the Lord*. Then thou didst return and say, *To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple*" (Ps. 27:4). David replied: "Master of the universe, shall not the servant be like his master? In the beginning, didst Thou not come to us with but one requirement, as is said *And now Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God* (Deut. 10:12). And after that, didst Thou not discover to us many commandments, as is said *Take diligent heed . . . to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and to cleave unto Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul* (Josh. 22:5)? It is therefore quite proper that the servant be like his master!"

6. The verse *For in the day of trouble He will hide me in His pavilion* (Ps. 27:5) alludes to the day of the trouble with Bath-sheba.

And now shall my head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me; and I will offer in His Tabernacle sacrifices with trumpet-sound (Ps. 27:6). R. Jacob interpreted this verse as alluding to Joshua: *Then Joshua built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal . . . and they offered thereon burnt-offerings unto the Lord, and sacrificed peace-offerings* (Josh. 8:30-31).

R. Jose ben R. Hanina said: A high place may be used for a sacrifice by no one except a prophet.¹² And the proof? Scripture says, *Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt-offerings in every place that thou seest* (Deut. 12:13), but at a time that sacrifices on high places were already banned, Elijah offered sacrifices every day on Mount Carmel. R. Simlai explained that the word of God commanded Elijah to do so, for in saying *I have done all these things at Thy word* (1 Kings 18:36), Elijah implied "At Thy word have I done this thing also."

And R. Johanan brought proof from the passage: *The same night . . . the Lord said unto [Gideon]: "Take thy father's bullock, and the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the*

Asherah that is by it; and build an altar upon the top of this stronghold, in the orderly manner, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt-offering with the wood of the Asherah which thou shalt cut down" (Judg. 6:25-26).¹³ R. Abba bar Kahana commented that in the offering of Gideon's bullocks seven sins were committed: (1) wood of an Asherah was used; (2) hewn stones were used; (3) one bullock was set aside for idolatry; (4) the other bullock had, in fact, been worshipped already; (5) the sacrifice was offered at night, (6) by one who was not a priest, (7) and on a high-place, this being expressly forbidden. Nevertheless, because of the need of the hour, the offering was received.

Proof concerning Gideon the son of Joash, yes—but what of Samuel? Scripture says: *Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto the Lord* (1 Sam. 7:9). R. Abba bar Kahana commented: Three sins were committed in Samuel's burnt-offering: (1) it is written *He shall flay the burnt-offering* (Lev. 1:6), but Samuel's lamb was offered unflayed;¹⁴ (2) it was too young¹⁵ to be brought for a burnt-offering, for Scripture says: *It shall be seven days under the dam; but from the eighth day and thenceforth it may be accepted for an offering* (Lev. 22:27), and Samuel's offering was not eight days old;¹⁶ (3) Samuel was a Levite, [and not a priest].

7. *I had fainted, unless (lule)* ¹⁷ *I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord* (Ps. 27:13). It is taught in the name of R. Jose: Why is *lule* marked with diacritical dots? Because David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, I know that in the world-to-come Thou wilt give good reward to the righteous, but I do not know whether I am or am not among them."¹⁸

Another discussion of *I had fainted unless (lule) I had believed*. Zabdi ben Levi said: Wherever the word *lule* is used, it refers to the merit of the fathers.¹⁹ To this statement, an objection was raised: Why did Judah say to Jacob: *Except (lule) we had lingered, surely now we had returned this second time* (Gen. 43:10)?²⁰ He who objected was answered: This verse implies that except for the merit of the fathers not one of us would

have come out of Egypt. Except for the merit of the fathers we would not have come up thence in peace.

R. Joḥanan said: *Lule* everywhere refers to the merit of the Holy One, blessed be He, as is said *Except (lule) the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant* (Isa. 1:9).

R. Levi said: It refers to the merit of the Torah, and to the merit of faith: to the merit of Torah, as it is said *Unless (lule) Thy law had been my delight I should then have perished in mine affliction* (Ps. 119:92); and to the merit of faith, as it is said *I had fainted, unless (lule) I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord*.²¹

Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He will strengthen thy heart; wait, I say, on the Lord (Ps. 27:14). R. Ḥiyya bar Abba said: When you pray and pray again, know that your prayer is heard, and that there will come a time when God will do what you ask. And the proof? *Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He will strengthen thy heart; wait, I say, on the Lord*.

PSALM TWENTY-EIGHT

1. *A Psalm of David. Unto Thee, O Lord, do I call* (Ps. 28:1). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse "*The Lord is my portion*" saith my soul (Lam. 3:24). The people of Israel say: We have no portion except in the Holy One, blessed be He, to whom we say, "*The Lord is my portion.*" And the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: I have no portion except the people of Israel, as Moses said, *The portion of the Lord is His people* (Deut. 32:9). Accordingly, when the people of Israel call to God, He hears them, as is said *Unto Thee, O Lord, do I call; my Rock, be not Thou deaf unto me* (Ps. 28:1).

2. Another comment on *Unto Thee, O Lord, do I call . . . Draw me not away with the wicked* (Ps. 28:3). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *O Lord our God, other lords beside Thee wished to have dominion over us* (*bē'alunu*) (Isa. 26:13). What is the literal meaning of *bē'alunu*? "Crushed as with a pestle," as in "Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle (*ba'ēli*) among groats" (Prov. 27:22). But R. Judah taught in the name of R. Simai: *Bē'alunu* is derived from *ba'al* ("husband"): Thus, like a husband who draws his wife to sexual union, so would they draw us to union with their idols.

The end of the verse *Even without Thee we make mention of Thy name alone* (Isa. 26:13) means that the children of Israel said: Even at a time when Thou didst not confer Thy name upon us and didst not perform miracles for us, we hallowed Thy name: thus when the wicked Nebuchadnezzar ordered us to worship his idols and to bow before his image, we were willing to die¹ rather than disavow Thee. And the proof? The verse *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said: "O king Nebuchadnezzar . . . If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, He will deliver us from the burning fiery furnace . . . But if not, be it known unto thee . . . that we will not serve thy gods"* (Dan. 3:16-18). Since they called him *king*, why also *Nebuchadnezzar*? And if they called him *Nebuchadnezzar*, why also *king*? This, however, is what they meant by calling him both: As regards the levies, the polls, and the income taxes which

thou commandest us to pay, we shall call thee king; but as regards the gods, which thou commandest us to serve, thou and a dog are alike to us: *we will not serve unto thy gods*. Whereupon, Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, as is said *Then was Nebuchadnezzar filled with fury (ibid. 3:19)*. R. Johanan said: At once Nebuchadnezzar commanded that if the furnace had been heated with one bundle of firewood, it should now be heated with seven bundles. The Rabbis said: At once Nebuchadnezzar commanded that if the furnace had been heated with seven bundles, it should now be heated with forty-nine bundles, as is said *He spoke, and commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was wont to be heated (ibid.)*.

Thereupon, to hallow the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah threw themselves into the fiery furnace.

From what verse did Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah infer that they were to throw away their lives for the hallowing of the Name? They drew the inference from the verse concerning the frogs in Egypt. What is written of the frogs? *The river shall bring forth frogs abundantly which shall go up and come into . . . thine ovens, and into thy dough (Ex. 7:28)*: Now when is dough placed near an oven? When the oven is hot. Accordingly this verse proves that frogs came and threw themselves into ovens in order to hallow the name of the Holy One, blessed be He. And how did the Holy One, blessed be He, reward the frogs? All other frogs in Egypt died, as is said *The frogs died out of the houses, out of the courts, and out of the fields (Ex. 8:9)*, but the frogs which went into the ovens to fulfill the decree of the Holy One, blessed be He, did not die, because they were willing to be burnt. And so the frogs sprang up alive out of the ovens and went back into the river, for it is said *They alone shall remain in the river (ibid. 8:7)*.

Theudas of Rome taught that the inference of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah was this: Since frogs, which do not have the merit of the fathers, were saved because they offered their lives for the hallowing of the Name, how much more are we

obliged to offer our lives for the hallowing of the Name?—we, the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who have been given the precept of hallowing the Name, and whom God will reward in full.

Palton of Rome taught: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah drew the inference from a verse in Deuteronomy, which says, *But if from thence thou wilt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul* (Deut. 4:29).

The Rabbis taught: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah drew the inference from a verse in Jeremiah, which says *And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart* (Jer. 29:13).

[In another interpretation the verse is read:] *But by Thee alone do we make mention of Thy name* (Isa. 26:13). What is meant by the words *by Thee alone*? They mean “in Thy presence”—that is, we bless Thee and mention Thy name to Thee alone, and not to any other God.

3. Another comment: *Unto Thee, O Lord, do I call, etc. . . . Draw me not away with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity* (Ps. 28:1-3). Solomon said: *Better it is to be of a lowly spirit with the humble, than to divide the spoil with the proud* (Prov. 16:19). Blessed is the man who takes his portion with the humble! Woe unto him who takes his portion with the wicked! For the wicked take what is theirs, and then go out of the world, as is said *And yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be . . . But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace* (Ps. 37:10-11). Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, declared: The wicked have but a single hour. They eat what is theirs in this world; then they pass away and go down into Gehenna—they, their retainers, and anyone who had anything to do with them. Of the like of them, Scripture says, *But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself; his seed is spoiled, and his brethren and his neighbors, and he is not* (Jer. 49:10). Hence David said: I shall not eat of their meal, so that I shall not go

down into the pit with them, as it is said *A Psalm of David. Unto Thee, O Lord, do I call; my Rock, be not Thou deaf unto me; lest, if Thou be silent unto me, I become like them that go down into the pit* (Ps. 28:1).

4. *Draw me not away with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity; who speak peace with their neighbors, but evil is in their hearts* (Ps. 28:3). R. Abba bar Ze'era said: Even in the shortcomings of the tribes you discover their worth, for it is said of them *They hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him* (Gen. 37:4)—that is, what was in their hearts was also in their mouths. Of others, however, as of Absalom, it is said *Absalom spoke unto Amnon neither good nor bad* (2 Sam. 13:22); that is, what was in Absalom's heart was not in his mouth.

5. *Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands* (Ps. 28:5). According to Hezekiah, *works of the Lord* alludes to calculations of the courses of the stars. According to R. Joshua, it alludes to homiletical interpretations of Scripture. According to the Rabbis, it alludes to the Shema,² which is preceded by the prayer beginning "Who formest light," and concluding, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Creator of the luminaries."³

Operation of His hands alludes to the new moons, of which it is said *God made . . . the lesser light to rule the night* (Gen. 1:16), and of which it is also written *He operates the moon for seasons* (Ps. 104:19). The words *They regard not* allude to unbelievers⁴ who calculate neither the new moons⁵ nor the courses of the stars.

He will break them down and not build them up (Ps. 28:5): that is to say, *He will break them down* in this world; and *not build them up* in the world-to-come.

6. *The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped* (Ps. 28:7). R. Simon told a parable of a king who had a single pearl. When his son came and said to him: "Give it to me," the king answered: "It is not thine." But when the son wearied him with begging, the king gave it to his son. Just so, Israel singing a song at the Red Sea to the Holy

One, blessed be He, and saying *May strength be mine, and the Lord's the song* (Ex. 15:2), entreated Him to give them the Torah. Thereupon, God said to them: "It is not yours. It belongs to those above." But when they wearied him with begging, He gave it to them, as is said *The Lord gave strength unto His people* (Ps. 29:7).

According to R. Johanan, Israel then said: Let us repay God with the songs of praise which He gave us; as Scripture says, *Therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him* (Ps. 28:7).

PSALM TWENTY-NINE

1. *A Psalm of David. Lay it upon the Lord, O ye bēne 'elim*¹ (Ps. 29:1). This verse is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Therefore will I save My flock, and they shall no more be a prey* (Ezek. 34:22). "What more am I to do for them?" asked God. "Let My servant David feed them," as is said *And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even My servant David* (*ibid.* 34:23). David answered, "Thou art the deliverer; be Thou also the shepherd; *Save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance; feed them also, and carry them for ever* (Ps. 28:9)." The Holy One, blessed be He, asked: "Do I hold them back from salvation that thou sayest unto Me *Save Thy people*? I do not hold them back. They hold themselves back." Then David said: "Lay it upon the Lord, O ye *bēne 'elim*." Now what can David have meant by the words *bēne 'elim* except "O ye sons (*bēne*), who act as if ye were dumb (*'illem*) and deaf! Ye who have the right to talk back to the Holy One, blessed be He, not only do ye not talk back to Him, but in order to hallow His name ye endure the yoke of [hostile] nations!" So also Isaiah said: *Who is blind, but My servant? or deaf as My messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is wholehearted, and blind as the Lord's servant?* (Isa. 47:19). The same thought is implied in the verse *Abraham called the name of that place Adonai-jireh* (Gen. 22:14). For what can Abraham have meant by *Adonai-jireh*, except "O Lord (*'Adonai*), note (*reh*) that I have the right to talk back to Thee. In days gone by Thou didst say to me *It is through Isaac that thy name shall be carried on* (Gen. 21:12); yet now Thou sayest unto me *Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest*" (Gen. 22:2). (Abraham had asked God: "Which of my sons?" And God had answered: "Thine only son!" Abraham had said to God: "This one is an only son to his mother, and that one is an only son to his mother!" And God had answered: "Thy son . . . whom thou lovest." Then Abraham had said: "I love both of them.") When Thou saidst *Take now . . . Isaac*, should I not have talked back to Thee, recalling Thy words *My*

covenant will I establish with Isaac (Gen. 17:21), and should I not have said: What of the covenant? But since I had the right to talk back to Thee but did not talk back to Thee, therefore when my children fall into the hands of sin, on their behalf recall this hour. Hence it is said *Lay it upon the Lord, O ye sons who act as if ye are dumb* (*bēne 'elim*).

Another reading of *bēne 'elim* is "O ye sons of the mighty," as in the verse *The mighty ('ele) of the land he took away* (Ezek. 17:13).

Another reading of *bēne 'elim* is "O ye children of those who were ready to be sacrificed like rams ('elim)!" Abraham said: "I am ready to sacrifice," and Isaac replied: "And I am ready to be sacrificed."

2. *Ascribe unto the Lord (YHWH) the glory due unto His name* (Ps. 29:2)—that is, whenever I breathe His Ineffable Name (YHWH), ye are to *Ascribe unto the Lord the glory due unto His name*. As Moses said, *When I proclaim the name of the Lord, ascribe ye greatness unto our God* (Deut. 32:3)—that is, "Offer prayers to God." Moses upon being asked, "Whence do we know how many prayers we are to offer?" answered: "Mark how many times the Ineffable Name occurs in this Psalm." Told, "Eighteen times," Moses answered: "You must offer Eighteen Benedictions." Hence it is said *The glory due unto His name*, and hence also the preceding verse conjoins *glory and strength*.² Asked "Whence do we know where to begin?" Moses answered, "Mark the beginning of the Psalm: *Ascribe unto the Lord, O ye sons of the mighty*"—that is, "sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." So you must say in the first benediction: "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."³ And as in the second occurrence of the Ineffable Name it is said *Ascribe unto the Lord glory and strength*, so you must ascribe unto Him glory and strength with "Blessed art Thou . . . who quickenest the dead." And as in the third occurrence of the Ineffable Name it is said *Ascribe unto the Lord the glory due unto His name*, so you must bless Him with "Blessed art Thou . . . the holy God." Next, *Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness* (v. 2b)—

that is, worship the Lord who gives knowledge to the holy, for "The knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10)—calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . gracious giver of knowledge." Next, *The voice of the Lord is upon the waters* (v. 3)—that is, upon repentance, which is likened to water in the verse "In repentance, they poured out their hearts before the Lord like water"⁴ (1 Sam. 7:6)—calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . who delightest in repentance." Next, *The Lord is upon the many waters* (v. 3c)—that is, "Thou art a God . . . that pardoneth iniquity. . . . Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18a, 19)—calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . who art gracious and dost abundantly pardon." Next, *The voice of the Lord is powerful* (v. 4a)—that is, "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm" (Ex. 6:6), for God is described as "Marching in the greatness of His strength" (Isa. 63:1) in the age-to-come—calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . the redeemer of Israel." Next, *The voice of the Lord is a glorious voice* (v. 4b)—that is, in healing the sick, He restores to them the glory of health—calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . who healest the sick of Thy people Israel." Next, *The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars* (v. 5a) calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . who blessest the years." The men who raise prices and give small measure,⁵ and the rich men who live in plenty and appear strong as cedars—such men the Lord breaks to bits when He blesses His world by bringing low prices to it, thereby breaking the staff of wickedness. Hence the verse calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . who blessest the years." Next, *The voice of the Lord breaketh in pieces the cedars of Lebanon* (v. 5b)—that is, the Lord breaks in pieces the wicked nations of the earth that stand high as cedars, "whose height is like the height of the cedars" (Amos 2:9), and He will gather the banished from the midst of the nations—calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . who gatherest the banished of Thy people Israel." Next, *The voice of the Lord heweth out flames of fire* (v. 7)—that is, the judgments hewn out of the Lord's word are like flames of

fire, for God says "Is not My word like as fire?" (Jer. 23:29), and also "By fire will the Lord execute judgment" (Isa. 66:16)—calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . who lovest righteousness and judgment." Next, *The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness* (v. 8a)—that is, as the wilderness is barren, so wicked men are barren, so barren in good deeds that the Holy One, blessed be He, shakes them to pieces—calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . who breakest the enemies and humblest the proud." Next, *The Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh* (v. 8b)—that is, the righteous are in an exile which resembles the wilderness of Kadesh where there was no water for the people, as Scripture relates "The people abode in Kadesh" (Num. 20:1) where "There was no water for the congregation" (Num. 20:2), and where water returned only because of the merit of Moses and Aaron—calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . the stay and trust of the righteous." Next, *The voice of the Lord bringeth forth hinds* (v. 9a): Deliverers like hinds shall be born to Israel, as is said "My beloved is like a roe or a young hart" (Song 2:9a); "He maketh my feet like hinds' feet" (2 Sam. 22:34); and "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings" (Isa. 52:7). *The voice of the Lord . . . strippeth the forests bare* (v. 9b): The Lord will strip the [hostile] nations of the earth who are like forests of their might, for it is said "The Lord of hosts . . . will cut down the thickets of the forest with iron" (Isa. 10:34). *And in His Temple doth every one speak of His glory* (v. 9c): Once the Messiah comes and punishes the wicked nations of the earth, the Temple will be rebuilt forthwith. Hence the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . God of David who buildest Jerusalem."

In another comment, the verse is read *The voice of the Lord shaketh terebinths* ('ayyalot) ⁶ (v. 9a): When the Holy One, blessed be He, gives voice, terebinths in the forest are shaken. ('Ayyalot, when vocalized 'elot, means trees such as the terebinth or the oak). What follows in the verse is read: *The voice of the Lord . . . maketh [the white] of the trees appear* (yeḥēsof) (v. 9b)—that is, "The Lord makes the leaves of the trees fall, then

dries the trees, and makes them shed their bark." Here *yehěšof* comes from the same stem as *maḥšof* in the verse "Jacob . . . made the white appear (*maḥšof*) which was in the rods" (Gen. 30:37).

Next, *The Lord sitteth above the water-flood* (v. 10a)—that is, when the Lord sat down [during the deluge] to judge the wicked, He hearkened to the prayers of those who came into Noah's ark, as is said "God remembered Noah, and every living thing . . . and the waters assuaged" (Gen. 8:1). Hence the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . who hearkenest unto prayer." Next, *The Lord remaineth a king for ever* (v. 10b)—that is, calmed by Noah's offering, the Lord had pity upon the earth, as is said "The Lord smelled the sweet savor; and . . . said . . . 'Not again will I curse the ground'" (Gen. 8:21)—calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . for Thee alone we worship in reverence."⁷

And next, *The Lord gives strength unto His people* (v. 11a)—that is, gives the goodly strength of Torah, of which God said: "I give you good doctrine; forsake ye not My law" (Prov. 4:2)—calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . whose name is All-good, and unto whom it is becoming to give thanks." And finally, *The Lord blesses His people with peace* (v. 11b) calls for the benediction "Blessed art Thou . . . who makest peace."⁸

Another comment: To correspond to the eighteen occurrences of the Ineffable Name in the account of the building of the Tabernacle as given in the section entitled *These are the accounts of the Tabernacle* (Ex. 38:21)—*As the Lord commanded, All that the Lord commanded*,⁹ etc., eighteen occurrences in all—to correspond to these, Eighteen Benedictions which a man is to recite every day were instituted. But not all of them are in praise of the Holy One, blessed be He: Only the first three and the last three are; the other twelve are concerned with the needs of man. And so on the Sabbath we recite not eighteen, but seven Benedictions,¹⁰ corresponding to the seven occurrences of the Ineffable Name in the Sabbath Psalm;¹¹ only on week-days does a man recite the Eighteen Benedictions.

Otherwise, were there a sick man in his house, the householder would be reminded of him at the reading of "Blessed art Thou . . . who healest the sick"¹² and would be distressed. But the Sabbath is given for delight, for hallowing, and for rest, and not for sorrow. Hence of the Sabbath it is written *On the day seven times do I praise Thee* (Ps. 119:164).

PSALM THIRTY

1. *A Psalm and song at the dedication of the house of David* (Ps. 30:1).¹ R. Ḥisda said: There is no difference of opinion that the sanctuary below is the counterpart of the sanctuary above, for in the verse *Thou, Lord, hast made it a place (mḵwn) for Thy dwelling*² (Ex. 15:17), you are to read not *mḵwn* "a place for," but *mḵuwwan* "a counterpart of."

Because the two are counterparts, said R. Aḥa, *dēḥir*³ in the verse *When I lift up my hands toward Thy holy oracle (dēḥir)* (Ps. 28:2), means literally "the place out of which revelations (*dibbēroṭ*) go forth to the world," as is said *Out of Zion shall go forth the law* (Micah 4:2).

R. Ḥinena said: Literally, *dēḥir* means the place out of which God's edicts (*dibbur*) go forth to the world, and mortals say in awe, *Awesome is God out of thy holy places* (Ps. 68:36).

2. Another comment on *A Psalm and song at the dedication of the house of David*. These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *Whatever act of coming to Me a man begins, I complete*⁴ (Job 41:13). If ever a man considered doing a commandment for My sake, did I not stand behind him? Who would perform a circumcision had I not first given him a son? Who would display fringes had I not first given him a mantle? Who would build a parapet about his roof⁵ had I not first given him a house? If ever a man thought in his heart to do a commandment and was constrained from doing it, did I not reckon him as having done it? Thus David had only to think of building the sanctuary, and it was called by his name, as it is said *A Psalm and song at the dedication of the house of David*.

3. Another comment on *A Psalm and song at the dedication of the house of David*. . . . *O Lord, Thou hast brought up my soul from the nether-world. . . . Sing unto the Lord, O ye His holy ones* (Ps. 30:1, 4-5a). The last verse in this passage is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Let the holy ones be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud upon their beds* (Ps. 149:5). R. Ḥiyya the Great taught: When the righteous leave this world, three companies of angels join them, one saying *He*

shall enter into peace, another *They shall rest in their beds*, and still another *Each one shall walk in his uprightness* (Isa. 57:2); and then these angels go ahead of the righteous, [leading them to the Garden of Eden].

R. Judah, in the name of R. Simon, citing R. Josiah, said: If one dare speak thus of the Holy One, blessed be He, He Himself says to the righteous: "May thy coming be in peace." And the proof? From what is said of the wicked, *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked* (Isa. 57:21): If God says to the wicked *There is no peace*, then how much more likely is He to say to the righteous "Come in peace!" Indeed the Holy One, blessed be He, says of the righteous: "Let him come in peace." Accordingly, in *Let the holy ones be joyful in glory* (Ps. 149:5), what sort of *glory* is meant? The glory that the Holy One Himself, blessed be He, receives the righteous, so that at the very moment of leaving this world they break forth in joyous praise of the Holy One, blessed be He.

R. Hiyya bar Jose taught: There is no difference between the righteous who are alive and the righteous who are dead except that the living have the power of speech. The dead, nevertheless, are able to sing praise to the Holy One, blessed be He, for He binds their souls in the bundle of life, as Abigail said: *The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life by the Lord thy God* (1 Sam. 25:29). And so *Let them sing aloud upon their beds* clearly denotes a song of praise, as in *The voice of singing at salvation is in the tents of the righteous* (Ps. 118:15).

R. Johanan said: Whenever an elder expounding from a teacher's chair says that "Thus such-and-such a master taught," the lips of the master move and give utterance in the grave, for it is said *The speech of thy mouth is like the best wine . . . moving the lips of those that are asleep* (Song 7:10). What is meant by the words *moving the lips of those that are asleep*? They mean that of themselves the lips of those in the grave give utterance, just as of itself a mass of grapes gives forth its juice. Hence it is said *Let them sing aloud upon their beds*.

David said this: *Let me dwell in Thy tent for ever* (Ps. 61:5).

Could the thought have come into David's mind that he would live for ever? If not, what is meant by *for ever*? According to R. Judah, it means that David prayed: "For ever may my Psalms be sung in houses of prayer and in houses of study." The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: Though thou wilt die, thy name shall never move from within My house, for Psalms beginning *Psalm of David* shall be sung in thy name at every sacrifice. Nay more: Because thou didst consider building a sanctuary, which Solomon thy son shall build, I shall write its dedication in thy name, as is said *A Psalm and song at the dedication of the house of David*—not "of Solomon," says Scripture, but *of David*.

4. Another comment on *A Psalm and song at the dedication of the house of David*. These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *Also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for Thou renderest to every man according to his work* (Ps. 62:13). R. Judah and R. Nehemiah took this verse to mean that the measure of God's punishment is barren and bears no evil fruit, but that the measure of God's goodness bears fruit, as is said *Sow to yourselves according to righteousness, then reap according to mercy* (Hos. 10:12). What does the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He makes a man pay but once for his iniquities, but He returns again and again to reward him for his good deeds.

The Rabbis taught: When He makes a man pay for his iniquities, God does not make him pay in full, as is said *Thou, our God, hast punished us less than our iniquities warrant, and hast left us a remnant such as this* (Ezra 9:13).

R. Eleazar and R. Jose bar R. Hanina differed. R. Eleazar said: When the pans of a scale balance exactly with the evil deeds on one side and the good deeds on the other, what does the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He tips the scale toward mercy, as is said *Toward Thee, O Lord, mercy* (Ps. 62:13). R. Jose bar R. Hanina said: What does the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He snatches a writ of debt out of the evil deeds, and instantly the scale inclines toward the good deeds, for it is said *Who is a God like unto Thee, who in lifting the iniquity passeth over transgression?* (Micah 7:18).⁶

R. Nehemiah taught: When a man considers committing a sin,

the Holy One, blessed be He, imputes no sin to him until he commits it; but when a man considers doing a good deed and finds himself unable to do it, the Holy One, blessed be He, writes it down even without the doing, as though he had done it, for it is said *The Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name* (Mal. 3:15). But a heathen—even if he merely considers doing a wickedness, though he has not done it, the Holy One, blessed be He, imputes the wickedness to him as if he had done it. Thus of Laban, it is said *An Aramean wrought destruction upon my father* (Deut. 26:5): but did Laban wreak destruction upon Jacob? No, but because Laban considered wreaking destruction upon Jacob, the Holy One, blessed be He, imputed it to him as if he had wrought the destruction. When a heathen considers doing a good deed, however, God does not write it down until he has done it. Thus of Darius, it is said *The king . . . labored till the going down of the sun to rescue him* (Dan. 6:15)—that is, although the king considered saving Daniel,⁷ nevertheless, it was not imputed a good deed to the king by the Holy One, blessed be He, until the king had accomplished it. But a Jew, when he considers committing a sin, the Holy One, blessed be He, imputes no sin to him until he commits it, for it is said *Woe unto them that consider iniquity, and also work evil upon their beds* (Micah 2:1).

R. Huna taught: In saying *When I had regarded iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not hear* (Ps. 66:18), David meant that whenever he considered doing a good deed, even though he had not been able to do it, the Holy One, blessed be He, imputed it to him, as if he had done it. You can see for yourself that this is true. David but considered starting the building of the sanctuary, and though he was unable to build it, its dedication was written in his name, for it is said *A Psalm and song at the dedication of the house of David*.

Hence whenever a man suffers for a cause, it is called by his name. We find that this was true of Moses. He suffered grief for the Law, as it is said *And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread nor drink water*

(Ex. 34:28), and the Law came to be called by his name, as is said *Remember ye the Law of Moses My servant* (Mal. 3:22). It was true of David. He suffered grief for the sanctuary, having sat for its sake in the dust of the earth, as is said *Surely I will not come into the tent of my house . . . I will not give sleep to mine eyes . . . until I find out a place for the Lord* (Ps. 132:3-5); and the sanctuary was called by his name, as is said *A Psalm and song at the dedication of the house of David*.

5. Another comment. Consider what Scripture says elsewhere: *Then when they that feared the Lord submitted (niqbēru) the one to the other,⁸ the Lord hearkened* (Mal. 3:16). R. Ḥiyya taught in the name of R. Abba: When Sages in seats of authority submit to one another's words—here *niqbēru* comes from the same stem as *yaqber* in the verse "He subdueth (*yaqber*) peoples under us" (Ps. 47:4)—the Holy One, blessed be He, gives heed to their words, as it is said *Then when they that feared the Lord submitted the one to the other, the Lord hearkened and heard*.

R. Jacob bar Zabda added in the name of R. Abbahu: Not only this, but the Holy One, blessed be He, corrects their errors for them.

R. Abba observed: Therefore the Sages say, "Thus saith the Master." With these words they also call upon the Holy One, blessed be He, who is the Master of the universe, who throws light on their errors for them,⁹ and corrects their errors. Hence it is said *When they that feared the Lord submitted the one to the other, the Lord hearkened and heard*.

6. Another comment: The Psalm beginning *A Psalm; a Song at the dedication of the house* [applies to Israel]. Thus *Psalm* alludes to the dedication of the sanctuary in the time of Solomon. *Song* alludes to the building of the second sanctuary in the time of Ezra. *I will extol Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast brought me up (dillitani)* (Ps. 30:2) out of exile in Babylon—the word *dillitani* being read as in the verse "An Egyptian brought up (*dalah*) . . . water for us" (Ex. 2:19). [*Thou*] *hast not made my foes to rejoice over me* (Ps. 30:2b) in Media and Persia. *O Lord my God, I cried unto Thee* in my exile in Greece; *and Thou didst heal me*

(*ibid.* v. 3) through the Hasmonean and his sons. *O Lord . . . Thou hast restored me to life from among them that go down to the pit* (v. 4)—restored me despite the many decrees imposed upon me to bring me down into the pit of Gehenna. *Sing praise unto the Lord, O ye saints of His* (v. 5a)—that is, ye sons of Mattathias [the Hasmonean]. *For His anger is but for an instant* (v. 6a): The knowledge of the Holy One, blessed be He, is nothing else than instantaneous.¹⁰ And *in His favor is life* (*ibid.*)—life for ever and ever and ever. *Weeping may tarry for the night* alludes to Mordecai at the time Zeresh said to Haman, "Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and in the morning speak thou unto the king that Mordecai be hanged thereon" (Esther 5:14), and all Israel spent the night in weeping and wailing. *But joy cometh in the morning* (Ps. v. 6b) alludes to the verse "So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai" (Esther 7:10), and also to the verse "The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor" (*ibid.* 8:16).

As for me, I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved (Ps. 30:7). The congregation of Israel said: When I lived in my prosperity in the Land of Israel, I was wont to say, "I shall never be moved." *Lord, by Thy favor Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong* (v. 8). But as soon as I sinned, Thou didst at once remove Thy presence: *Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled* (*ibid.*).

I cried unto Thee, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication (v. 9) out of exile, when I said: *What profit is there in my blood? Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me* (v. 10-11). And Thou hast sent Thy good word: *Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing* (v. 12), as when at first "There was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes" (Esther 4:3), but finally there came "A day of gladness and feasting, and a good day" (Esther 9:19).

All this happened *To the end that glory may sing praise to Thee* (v. 12a), for Thou didst give a part of Thy glory to Israel.

PSALM THIRTY-ONE

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David. In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed* (Ps. 31:1-2). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *Who among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God* (Isa. 50:10). Upon coming into houses of prayer and houses of study, the children of Israel say to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Deliver us!" and He replies: "Are there any righteous men among you? Are there any God-fearing men among you?" Thereupon they say: In days gone by, in the days of our fathers, in the days of Moses and Joshua, in the days of Samuel and Saul, and of David and Solomon, in those days there were righteous men. But now, as we go on from generation to generation, it grows darker for us, as it is said *Man walketh in darkness, and hath no light* (*ibid.*). The Holy One, blessed be He, replies: "Trust in My name, and I shall be a stay unto you," as is said *Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God* (*ibid.*). Wherefore? Because when a man trusts in Me, I deliver him. You can see for yourself that this is true. Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah trusted in My name, and because they trusted in My name I delivered them, so that even wicked Nebuchadnezzar said: *Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who delivered His servants that trusted in Him* (Dan. 3:28). And Daniel also—him I delivered only because he trusted in My name, as is said *Then . . . the king . . . commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den* (Dan. 6:24). Wherefore? *Because he had trusted in his God* (*ibid.*).

Hence David said: Since it is true that whoever trusts in Thee is delivered, I, too, will put my trust in Thee, as is said *In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust.*

2. Another comment on *In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed; deliver me in Thy righteousness.* These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *O Israel, that art saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; ye shall not*

be ashamed nor confounded (Isa. 45:17). The children of Israel say to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe! O, the shame and confusion of all the years we have been enslaved! Do Thou save us, and we shall never know shame. Wherefore not? Because Thy salvation is an everlasting salvation. (The proof that God's salvation is everlasting is that Scripture does not say "lasting" but *everlasting*). The Holy One, blessed be He, replies: I am He who redeemed you in days gone by; and I am He who will be your Redeemer in days to come, as it is said *Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed thee* (Isa. 43:1): Here Scripture does not say, "I shall redeem Thee," but *I have redeemed thee*—that is, "I have spoken the word, and the deed is done."

The Holy One, blessed be He, also says: I am He who will be your Redeemer, for I am He who promised that even as I redeemed you before, so I shall redeem you again, for it is said *The Lord hath ransomed Jacob, and He also will redeem him* (Jer. 31:11): Here Scripture does not say "He redeemed him," but *He will redeem him*. The children of Israel answer the Holy One, blessed be He: "Didst Thou not long ago redeem us by the hands of Moses, and by the hands of Joshua, and by the hands of the judges and the kings? Yet we are now again in slavery and in shame, as though we had never been redeemed." And the Holy One, blessed be He, replies: "Because your redemption was through creatures of flesh and blood, and because your leaders were men, here one day and in the grave the next, your redemption was but redemption for an hour. But in the time-to-come, I Myself shall redeem you; I who live and endure for ever shall redeem you with a redemption that will last for ever, as is said *O Israel, that art saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation. Therefore, Ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end* (Isa. 45:17)."

Then the Holy One, blessed be He, will say further: In days gone by you could live in shame and in confusion because you were young, but now that you are grown old, there is no strength

in you to bear the shame of exile. Hence it is said *Fear not, for thou shalt not remain ashamed . . . indeed thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth* (Isa. 54:4).

And David said: Master of the universe, when the time of redemption arrives, let us never again be ashamed, as is said *In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed*.

3. Another comment on *In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed*. These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *All mine enemies shall be ashamed and sore vexed; they shall return and be ashamed suddenly* (Ps. 6:11). R. Johanan taught: In the time-to-come the Holy One, blessed be He, will condemn the wicked and return them to Gehenna. Hence it is said *They shall be ashamed . . . they shall . . . be ashamed*.

R. Samuel bar Nahmani taught: In the time-to-come, the Holy One, blessed be He, will cause every people to come forward, and each one will call to its god who will not answer. Then each will see that in its god there is nothing that can answer, as it is written *Yea, though one cry unto him, he cannot answer, nor save him out of his trouble* (Isa. 46:7). Because there is nothing to gods like this one, as is said *They have mouths, but they speak not* (Ps. 115:5), the peoples will go to the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Holy Spirit will say to God: "Thou art their jug of olives! Their gods not having answered them, they now come to Thee."¹ Thereupon God will condemn them, and banish them from the world.

R. Johanan maintained: Do not say this will happen only in the time-to-come. The Holy One, blessed be He, banishes them in this world as well, for He banished the wicked from the world in the days of Sisera and in the days of Sennacherib.

R. Joshua ben Levi taught: Come and see how fierce is the power of shame mentioned twice in a single verse.² Moreover, the words God uses to shame the nations are the same words He uses to bless the righteous, as it is said *My people shall never be ashamed* (Joel 2:26).

R. Joshua ben Levi also taught: Had the entire Book of

Ezekiel not been written, except for the verse in which God says, *That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done* (Ezek. 16:63), it would have been enough.

When David perceived that shame is so fierce, he prayed again and again *In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed.*

4. Another comment. *In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed*; elsewhere this is what Scripture says, *Ashamed be all they that serve graven images . . . bow down to Him all ye gods* (Ps. 97:7). R. Yudan said in the name of R. Naḥman: Some day the Holy One, blessed be He, will give a little semblance of life to each idol so that it can come and bow down to the Holy One, blessed be He, as is said *Bow down to Him, all ye gods* (*ibid.*), and thus shame its worshippers.

R. Phinehas said: Some day the Holy One, blessed be He, will grant speech to the idol so that it can talk in the presence of its worshippers, and say to them: "Woe unto you that left Him who lives for ever, who is the *Maker of heaven and earth* (Gen. 14:19), and bowed down to that of which it is said *Idols . . . have mouths, but they speak not* (Ps. 115:5)."

R. Joḥanan said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself at Sinai, He put strength into the idols, and they bowed down to Him. R. Taḥalifa taught: In saying *All the gods bowed down to Him* (Ps. 97:7), Scripture supports R. Joḥanan. It does not say, "They shall bow down to Him," but *they bowed down to Him*—that is, the gods had already bowed down to Him in the past.

R. Judah and R. Nehemiah differed. One said: As an idol is made with several joints, so those who bow down to it shall fall apart at their several joints. That this will happen you can tell from the verse *And this shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all the peoples that have fought against Jerusalem; their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their sockets, and their*

tongue shall consume away in their mouth (Zech. 14:12). But the other said: ³ As an idol is melted down by fire, so those who bow down to it shall be consumed by fire.

5. R. Joshua ben Levi, R. Samuel bar Nahmani, and the Rabbis said: In the time-to-come, when the Holy One, blessed be He, sits in judgment upon the nations of the earth as well as upon Israel, He will find the people of Israel innocent, and the [hostile] nations of the earth will be put to shame. What will He do then? He will cause the evil Inclination to appear among them, and they will say: "We demand that God set aside the judgment imposed upon us!" What will the Holy One, blessed be He, then do? Again He will judge them and condemn them, and for a second time they will be put to shame. Had they been silent, they would have been put to shame but once. Hence the words *shall be ashamed* occur twice.⁴

R. Samuel bar Nahmani taught: Why do the words *shall be ashamed* occur twice? Because in the time-to-come each people will call to its god, one calling to the sun, another to the moon, and there being no life in these, neither will answer; and the peoples will be ashamed because their gods have not answered them, as is said *Ashamed be all they that serve graven images* (Ps. 97:7), and *Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed* (Isa. 24:23). Thereupon the peoples will come to the Holy One, blessed be He, and He will say to them: "You rooted your faith in idols, and thought Me a trivial thing. Now I shall set Israel's roots deep and shall consider you such trivial things that I shall not answer you. Wherefore? Because in the beginning you did not come to Me: Had you come to Me in the beginning, I would have answered you." The peoples will again be ashamed, as is said *They cried, but there was none to save them* (Ps. 18:42), that is, cried out to their images; *even unto the Lord, but He will not answer them* (*ibid.*), that is, cried out to the Holy One, blessed be He, who will not answer them.

Hence the words *shall be ashamed* occur twice.

6. R. Joshua ben Levi taught: Why do the words *shall be ashamed* occur twice? Because in the time-to-come, when the

Holy One, blessed be He, judges Israel, the righteous as well as the wicked, He will grant pardon to the righteous, that they may enter the Garden of Eden, but will send the wicked back to Gehenna. Then He will return and take the wicked out of Gehenna, and bring them into the Garden of Eden, and say to them: "Here is a place for the righteous, but here also are places still empty, so that you can not say: 'Even had we repented, there would have been no place open to us with the righteous in the Garden of Eden.'" Then He will take the righteous from the Garden of Eden and bring them into Gehenna, and say to them: "Here is a place for the wicked, but here also are places still empty, so that you can not say: 'Even had we been found guilty, there would have been no place open to us in Gehenna.' But as the wicked have inherited the places you might have had, as well as their own places in Gehenna—for Scripture says to the wicked, *Because your shame . . . was double . . . therefore in their land they shall possess double* (Isa. 61:7)—so have you inherited in the Garden of Eden your own places as well as the places they might have had."⁵ And because the wicked will be ashamed, David said: *O Lord, let me not be ashamed* (Ps. 31:18). Upon whom the shame? Upon the wicked! *Let the wicked be ashamed, let them be put to silence in the nether-world* (*ibid.*).⁶

Rab said: He who puts his faith in a battered idol⁷ shall not behold God's goodness, for it is said *O how abundant is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee* (Ps. 31:20).

R. Abdimi of Haifa said: Every righteous man will inherit three hundred and ten worlds, for it is said *That I may cause those that love Me to inherit yš (substance)* (Prov. 8:21), and the numerical value of *yš* is three hundred and ten.⁸

R. Isaac ben Teradyon said: The sword of the Holy One, blessed be He, smites sixteen ways,⁹ for in Scripture the sword is spoken to as follows: *Turn thyself backwards*,¹⁰ or *turn to the right*, or *set thyself forward*, or *turn to the left: whithersoever ('yh)*¹¹ *thine edge is ready* (Ezek. 21:21), and the numerical value of *'yh* is sixteen.¹² Now, if the measure of punishment, in

which God limits Himself, smites sixteen ways, how much greater is the measure of God's goodness, which is unlimited!

7. R. Yudan said in the name of R. Eleazar bar Abina that the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed the time of redemption to two men, to Jacob and Daniel: To Jacob, for Scripture relates *Jacob called unto his sons, and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the end of days"* (Gen. 49:1); at that moment, however, God hid the secret from Jacob, for [instead of revealing the future] Jacob said *Reuben, thou art my first-born* (Gen. 49:3). And God revealed it to Daniel, saying *Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the end of days; for there is yet a vision for the days* (Dan. 10:14). Yet when Daniel was about to reveal the secret, what was commanded him? *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the end* (Dan. 12:4), [and Daniel said instead: *I heard, but I understood not . . . the latter end of these things* (*ibid.* 12:8)].¹³

Another tradition: [The coming of the Messiah was revealed to Samuel also]. For when Samuel went to anoint David, God said: *Look not on his countenance* (1 Sam. 16:7). And when David came, God said to Samuel: *Arise, anoint him* (1 Sam. 16:12), as if to say, "Shalt thou sit and the Messiah stand?"¹⁴

R. Abba bar Kahana taught that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: "For My sake you kept the Torah and the commandments, and so for your sake I shall keep a part of that goodness laid up for the righteous in the time-to-come." Hence it is said *O how abundant is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee* (Ps. 31:20).

According to R. Abba bar Yudan, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: Ye according to your strength, and I according to My strength!¹⁵

R. Jonathan taught that there are four languages: the Roman is best for battle; the Greek best for song; the Persian best for lamentation; and the Hebrew best for prayer, for the words of Hebrew are alluded to in the verse *Thou layest them up in a pavilion away from the multitude*¹⁶ *of tongues* (Ps. 31:21).

8. *Blessed be the Lord, for He hath shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city* (Ps. 31:22)—that is, in wicked Rome. For in the words *I said in my haste, I am cut off* (*niğrazti*) *from before Thine eyes* (Ps. 31:23a), *niğrazti*, which comes from the same stem as *garzen* in “neither hammer nor axe (*garzen*)” (1 Kings 6:7), can only mean being cut down by an iron weapon.¹⁷

Another comment: *I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Thine eyes* in wicked Rome; *Thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto Thee* (*ibid.*) in Greece. *O love the Lord, all ye who worship Him* (Ps. 31:24a)—that is, ye righteous of Israel. *The Lord preserveth those who affirm the faith* (*ibid.*)—that is, those who are complete proselytes.

Another comment: *The Lord preserveth those who affirm the faith*—that is, preserves even those sinners in Israel who reluctantly yet regularly say Amen, and regularly say “Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who quickenest the dead.”

Another comment: *The Lord preserveth those who affirm the faith*—that is, preserves children of Israel who say, “Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who quickenest the dead,” although the quickening of the dead has not yet come to pass; who say, “Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the Redeemer of Israel,” although they have not yet been redeemed; and who say, “Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who rebuildest Jerusalem,”¹⁸ although Jerusalem has not yet been rebuilt. Of them the Holy One, blessed be He, declares: “Only for a little time were the children of Israel redeemed, and then again were they enslaved, but still they affirm their faith in Me, that I shall redeem them.” Hence *The Lord preserveth those who affirm the faith*.

9. In commenting on the passage *Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not* (Mal. 3:17-18), R. Aḥa bar Ada said that the words *between the righteous and the wicked* mean “between him who has faith and him who has no faith,” that he *that serveth God* is he who is willing to serve God’s need, and that he *that serveth Him not* is he who is not

willing to serve God's need. Thus a man should not make the words of Torah an edged tool for his own use, nor make them a crown to crown himself.

R. Samuel bar Naḥmani said: *Between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not* means "Between him who repeats his chapter one hundred and one times and him who repeats it only one hundred times."

The Lord . . . repayeth the others who would act proudly (Ps. 31:24c) refers to such of the disciples who study Torah not for the sake of heaven, but for the sake of doing themselves proud in this world, and to such others who expect a reward in this world for their study of Torah. But as for them who occupy themselves with Torah and hope for the reward therefor in the world-to-come, mark that the next verse reads *Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord* (Ps. 31:25). Who are meant by *All ye that hope in the Lord*? Those who are content to have their reward laid up in the world-to-come.

I hate them that regard lying vanities (Ps. 31:7) refers to those who give heed to the lying vanities of divination. The Garden of Eden says, "*I hate them that regard lying vanities. And whom do I love? Him who regards Thy precepts.*" And Gehenna says, "*I love them that regard lying vanities. And whom do I hate? Him who regards Thy precepts.*" For *The leech*¹⁹ *has two daughters [who say], Give, give* (Prov. 30:15): These two are the Garden of Eden and Gehenna; the Garden of Eden says, "Give me mine," and Gehenna says, "Give me mine." Hence it is said *Be of good courage, for He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord* (Ps. 31:25).

For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength faileth because of mine iniquity (Ps. 31:11). R. Tanḥum bar Ḥiyya said: Four things make a man's strength fail: sin, wayfaring, fasting, and the oppressor's rule. Of sin, it is written *My strength faileth because of my iniquity* (Ps. 31:11); of wayfaring, it is written *He weakeneth my strength in the way* (Ps. 102:24); of fasting, it is written *My knees are weak through*

fasting (Ps. 109:24); of the oppressor's rule, it is written *He hath made my strength to fail, the Lord hath delivered me into their hands, from whom I am not able to rise up* (Lam. 1:14).

R. Tanhuma said: Trouble also makes a man's strength fail, for it is written *By reason of the disquietness of my heart . . . my heart panteth, my strength faileth me* (Ps. 38:9b, 11a).

PSALM THIRTY-TWO

1. *Of David, Maschil. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is pardoned* (Ps. 32:1). The word *maschil* is to be considered in the light of the verse *The way of life is above to the wise (maschil)*¹ (Prov. 15:24). When a man looks up to heaven, what is said of him? *The way of life is above to the wise*, to men who look up to heaven. Thus also *To the Eternal God: of the sons of Korah, Maschil* (Ps. 44:1) means that when the sons of Korah looked up to heaven, they escaped. As Scripture says, *They looked above to Him, and were radiant; and their faces shall never be confounded* (Ps. 34:6). But their father who did not look up to heaven—and Dathan and Abiram also—they went down alive into the pit, as is said *So they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them* (Num. 16:33).

Thus, you find that when David looked up to heaven, he escaped, and could say *Thou, O God, bringest them down into the pit of destruction* (Ps. 55:24).

Thus also, after Nebuchadnezzar was driven from the midst of men, you find that he said: *I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me* (Dan. 4:31). If even the wicked who deserve extermination but look up to heaven, the Holy One, blessed be He, forthwith gives them pardon—how much more and more pardon, therefore, to Israel, children of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, if they look up to heaven! David said, “I shall look up to heaven”: *Of David, Maschil. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven* (Ps. 32:1). For he who looks up to heaven is *one whose sin is pardoned* (*ibid.*), as it is said “And David looked above (*maschil*), and the Lord was with him” (1 Sam. 18:14); and also it is said “When Saul saw that he looked above (*maschil*), he stood in awe of him” (*ibid.* 18:15).

And how does one come to be a man whose sin is pardoned? By telling his evil deeds² and acknowledging each to the Holy One, blessed be He. So David said: *I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid* (Ps. 32:5).

2. *Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile* (Ps. 32:2). R. Jose ben R. Judah said. When a man's repentance is so complete that his heart is torn within him, the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives him.

R. Eliezer ben Jacob said: The sins which a man confesses one year, he is forbidden to confess the next year; but if he repeats his sins, he must, of course, confess them again the next year. But if he does not repeat them, yet confesses them the next year, Scripture says of him *As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool repeateth his folly* (Prov. 26:11).

But the Rabbis said: The sins a man confesses one year, even though he does not repeat them, he should nonetheless confess again the next year, to fulfill the verse *I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me* (Ps. 51:5).

And what does R. Eliezer make of the words *my sin is ever before me*, which are cited by the Rabbis? They mean, he says, that a man should hold his sins ever before him, but that he need not keep speaking of them.

R. Phinehas said in the name of R. Abba bar Papa: When you say you have nothing new to confess, boasting that this year you have no sins, you disdain the command of your Maker *Stilled be the lying lips which to the Righteous One in pride and with disdain speak of old [sins]* (Ps. 31:19).³

R. Huna taught in the name of R. Abbahu that God said to Israel: For your sake, I wrote of Myself that I am one who forgets, if such a thing is conceivable, for I am *A God . . . that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by transgression* (Micah 7:18): I forget⁴ iniquity and transgression. Hence in saying *These may be forgotten* (Isa. 49:15), Scripture means sins may be forgotten, and in saying *Yet will I not forget thee* (*ibid.*) means that your good works will not be forgotten. Hence David said: *Blessed is he whose transgression is pardoned*.⁵

3. A further comment: *Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity* (Ps. 32:2)—provided, to be sure, that the man has done a good deed to offset the iniquity. *And in*

whose spirit there is no guile—that is, he must be a man whose prayer is not deceitful, a man whose study of Torah is not deceitful. *Because I kept silence my bones waste away* (Ps. 32:3): Because I stifled my study of Torah, therefore my bones waste away and I groan in the humiliation of exile all the day long, as it is said *In my groaning all the day long* (*ibid.*).

For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me (Ps. 32:4). R. Jose said in the name of R. Hiyya: *Thy hand* clearly refers to His smiting, as in the words "Behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle" (Ex. 9:3). As to the meaning of the second part of the verse, Rab and R. Jose differed. One said that it means: *He turned back to oppress me* (*lēšaddi*)⁶ *in the heat of the summer*. The other said that it means: *The juice of my fat* (*lēšaddi*) *was so turned as to make me resemble things which wither in the summer*, as, for instance, figs which dry up in the summer. In this reading *lēšaddi* has the same meaning as in the verse "A moist bit (*lēšad*) baked with oil" (Num. 11:8).

*Be thou not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding, kicking against the goad, or against the bridle, or against his trappings,*⁷ *kicking even when no one comes near unto thee* (Ps. 32:9). The horse, when curried or scraped, kicks; when patted, kicks; when being adorned with its trappings, kicks; when fed barley, kicks; even when no one is near it, it kicks. Be not like this horse, but take care to repay the kind with kindness, and to repay the evil with evil.

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked (Ps. 32:10) because the wicked does not put his trust in the Holy One, blessed be He. *But he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about* (*ibid.*). R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Abba: Even the wicked who trusts in the Lord, him mercy compasses about.

4. *Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and sing for joy, all ye that are upright in heart* (Ps. 32:11). R. Berechiah taught in the name of R. Yudan: Lest the righteous should say, "In this verse, we are separated from the company of the upright"; therefore "singing for joy" is meant for the righteous also,

for in the next Psalm it is said *Sing for joy in the Lord, O ye righteous* (Ps. 33:1).

R. Judah bar R. Simon taught that the Holy One, blessed be He, said: Within thy body are two hundred and forty-eight organs, and in the Torah are two hundred and forty-eight precepts. If thou keepest the Torah, I shall keep thy body, as it is said *He keepeth all his bones; [if] not one of these [precepts] is broken* (Ps. 34:21).

R. Eliezer bar Jacob taught in the name of R. Phinehas ben Jair that the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "I made the Inclination-to-evil. Watch that it bring thee not to sin. Should it bring thee to sin, take care to repent, and I shall relieve thee of thy sin, as is said *I have made, and I will lift up; I Myself will carry, and will deliver you* (Isa. 46:4) from the punishment of Gehenna." Hence it is said *Blessed is he whose transgression is lifted up, and whose sin is pardoned* (Ps. 32:1).

PSALM THIRTY-THREE

1. *Sing in the Lord, O ye righteous; the praise of the upright is beautiful* (Ps. 33:1a). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Thy lips, O My bride, drop honey* (Song 4:11). That is, the Holy One, blessed be He, says to Israel: "I love to hear thy voice. Withhold not thy voice from either song of grief or song of joy: Wherefore? Because *O My dove . . . thy voice is sweet* (Song 2:14)." When God is told: "Behold, Jacob is singing in grief," God says, "Because of whom? Is it not because of Me? Whether Jacob sings in grief or sings in joy, it is gladness for Me, as it is said *Thus saith the Lord: When Jacob sings out, it is gladness* (Jer. 31:7)."

Thus Scripture in saying *Thy lips, O My bride, drop honey* means the song of thy lips. And thy tongue? In the same verse God says: *Honey and milk are under thy tongue*. And the roof of thy mouth? God says: *The roof of thy mouth is like the best wine* (Song 7:10). And thy throat? It is written *Let the high praises of God be in their throat* (Ps. 149:6).

All men sing. The righteous sing, as is said *Sing in the Lord, O ye righteous*. The wicked sing, as is said *The song of the wicked is short* (Job 20:5). So we find that Pharaoh sang. When Moses and Aaron first came to him, he said: *Who is the Lord?* (Ex. 5:2). But after he received his due, he began to sing *The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked* (Ex. 9:27). For the wicked do not sing to Him until He brings plagues upon them. Not so the righteous. Note that it is not written here "Sing *TO* the Lord, O ye righteous" but *Sing IN the Lord, O ye righteous*—that is, no matter when the righteous see God, they sing.¹ Thus it is said *Israel saw the great work which the Lord did* (Ex. 14:31), whereat they began to sing, as is said *Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song*, etc. (Ex. 15:1). Thus also Scripture says, *And Moses and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting . . . and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people. And there came forth fire from before the Lord . . . and when all the people saw it, they sang out* (Lev. 9:23-24). Thus also, observe that of the time of Solomon it is written

And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord upon the house, they . . . worshipped, and praised the Lord, saying, For He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever (2 Chron. 7:3). Hence it is said Sing in the Lord, O ye righteous.

All sing before Him: the heaven and the earth, the sun and the moon, the stars and the angels, as is said *Praise ye the Lord from the heavens; praise Him in the heights. Praise ye Him, all His angels . . . praise ye Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all ye stars of light (Ps. 148:1, 2, 3).* And even though all sing before Him, it is the song of the righteous and the upright that is most beautiful to Him, as is said *Sing in the Lord, O ye righteous, the praise of the upright is beautiful.*

Praise the Lord with harp . . . sing unto Him a new song (Ps. 33:2-3), unto Him who did a new thing, for He left the heavens and made His presence to dwell on the earth, saying, *Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them (Ex. 25:8).*

PSALM THIRTY-FOUR

1. [*A Psalm*] of David; when he changed his demeanor before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed. I will bless the Lord at all times (Ps. 34:1-2a). The words *I will bless the Lord at all times* are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Everything He hath made beautiful in its time* (Eccles. 3:11).¹ R. Tanhuma said: The Holy One, blessed be He, created the world in its proper time, for the verse teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, already had created worlds and destroyed them because they had proved themselves unworthy of His creation.² And He said: "Those did not please Me, but this one pleases Me."

Another comment on *Everything He hath made beautiful in its time*. R. Simon said: Our father Abraham was worthy of being made in the beginning before Adam. But the Holy One, blessed be He, said: Should I, in the beginning, make Abraham, and should he become corrupt, there will be no one to come after him and restore order. Therefore, in the beginning I shall make Adam, and should Adam become corrupt, then Abraham will come to restore order.

Another comment. *Everything He hath made beautiful in its time* refers to the three righteous men who are the foundation of the world: Adam, Noah, and Abraham.

Another comment on *Everything He hath made beautiful in its time*. All that the Holy One, blessed be He, has made for food should be eaten in its proper time. Warm fruits should be eaten in the winter, and cold fruits should be eaten in the summer.³

Another comment on *Everything He hath made beautiful in its time*. All things which the Holy One, blessed be He, has made in His world He has made beautiful. David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: All that Thou hast made, Thou hast made beautiful, yet the most beautiful of all Thy works is wisdom. Thus, also, in saying, *How manifold are Thy works, O Lord! All those which Thou hast made in wisdom* (Ps. 104:24), David meant: Thou hast made all in wisdom, and hast made well, except

for madness. And David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, what profit is there for the world in madness? When a man goes about the market place and rends his garment, and children run after him and mock him, is this beautiful in Thine eyes?" The Holy One, blessed be He, answered: "Raisest thou a cry against madness? By thy life, thou shalt have need of it." (As Solomon said: *Whoso despiseth a thing shall be taken* [yĕhabel] *by it* [Prov. 13:13]. What does yĕhabel signify? That in his hour of need, a man will beg to be taken by the very thing he despises. Therefore yĕhabel here comes from the same stem as yahăbol in the verse "No man shall take [yahăbol] the nether or the upper millstone to pledge" [Deut. 24:6]). "Moreover," said the Holy One, blessed be He, "thou wilt grieve after and pray for madness before I give thee a touch of it." And David did not tarry, but went to Achish, as Scripture says, *And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath* (I Sam. 21:11).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "David, goest thou unto Achish? Yesterday thou didst kill Goliath, and today thou goest unto Achish with Goliath's sword in thy hand. Goliath's blood is not yet dry, Goliath's brother (some say, Goliath's brother-in-law) ⁴ is the king's body-guard, and yet thou goest unto Achish!"

When the Philistines saw David coming on foot, they said to Goliath's brother: "Behold, David who killed thy brother Goliath is come unto Achish!" And they said to Achish: "Let us kill him who killed our brother!" Thereupon Achish replied: Was it not in fair battle that David killed your brother? And had your brother Goliath killed David, would he not also have killed him in fair battle? And now is it not true that your brother stipulated to him, to this very man who slew your brother: *If he be able to fight with me, then will we be your servants* (I Sam. 17:9)? Then they said to Achish: "If so, get up off thy throne, for the kingship belongs to David!" They also said: *Is not this David the servant of Saul, the king of Israel?* (I Sam. 29:3). And so are we not to be the servants of Saul?" Thus they confounded Achish.

In that instant, David grew afraid, but he said: *What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee* (Ps. 56:4). And he began to beseech God and make supplication to Him, saying: "Master of the universe, in this hour of need answer me!" The Holy One, blessed be He, asked: "What dost thou require?" David said: "Give me a touch of that madness which Thou hast created." The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "Did I not say to thee *Whoso despiseth a thing shall be taken by it?* And now thou askest for madness!" Hence it is said [*A Psalm*] of David; *when he changed his demeanor before Abimelech*. (But was Abimelech the name of the king? Was not Achish his name? In this verse, however, Achish is called Abimelech because he was as righteous as Abimelech.)⁵

When David heard what the Philistines said, he was sore afraid and troubled and said: Am I then doomed to destruction? Of this it is said *And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath* (1 Sam. 21:13).

He made himself out to be a madman by changing his demeanor, as is said *And he changed his demeanor before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate* (1 Sam. 21:14). He wrote on the doors, saying: "Achish, king of Gath, owes me one hundred myriads, and his wife owes me fifty myriads." Now the daughter of Achish and her mother were both mad, and the two were screaming and carrying on in madness within, while David was screaming and playing at madness without. So Achish said to his servants: *Do I lack madmen that ye have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence?* (1 Sam. 21:16).

In that instant David rejoiced that madness had come to his aid, and in his rejoicing composed this acrostic Psalm, saying to the Holy One, blessed be He: How very good is madness! *I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth* (Ps. 34:1) both in time of reason and in time of madness.

Therefore, with good cause at the beginning of Genesis you find: *And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good* (Gen. 1:31).

2. *The Lord redeemeth the soul of His servants* (Ps. 34:23). R. Samuel bar Nahmani said: The Lord redeems the soul from the Inclination-to-evil, for in saying *If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink* (Prov. 25:21), Scripture means that the Inclination-to-evil is thine enemy. A man walking with a companion for a space becomes his friend; but the Inclination-to-evil is born with man and grows up with him, as it is said "The evil imagination in man's heart is [with him] from his youth" (Gen. 8:21)—and yet if it find occasion to overwhelm a man, whether the man be forty, or fifty, or sixty, it will overwhelm him.⁶ Have you a greater enemy than this?

Hence R. Samuel bar Nahmani concluded: If the Inclination-to-evil rises up within you, make it eat the bread of Torah, for it is said *As for him that wanteth understanding, [wisdom] saith to him: "Come, eat of my bread"* (Prov. 9:4b-5a). If the Inclination-to-evil is thirsty, make it drink the water of Torah, for it is said *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye for water* (Isa. 55:1). Why? Because *Thou wilt thus heap coals of fire upon his head* (Prov. 25:22). And what is meant by *The Lord yēšallem thee* (*ibid.*)? It means that the Lord will make the Inclination-to-evil be at peace with thee.⁷ Then *All my bones shall say: Lord: who is like unto Thee, who deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him* (Ps. 35:10)—that is, according to R. Aḥa, the Lord delivers the Inclination-to-good from the Inclination-to-evil. He delivers *the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him* (*ibid.*). Is there a mightier despoiling than that in which the Inclination-to-evil causes a righteous man to commit iniquity, of which it is said *When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity . . . he shall die* (Ezek. 3:20)?

R. Isaac bar Menahem taught: Every good man has a world to himself, and will have a Garden of Eden for himself, as is said *They are abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou makest them drink from the river of Thine Edens* (Ps. 36:9).⁸

PSALM THIRTY-FIVE

1. [*A Psalm*] of David. *Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me* (Ps. 35:1). David's prayer for himself is to be considered in the light of the verse *Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine; thus saith . . . thy God that pleadeth the cause of His people* (Isa. 51:21). Had Israel been asked: "If not drunk with wine, then with what?" Israel might have replied: "Not with much wine, but with affliction. For they rose up against me, and I had no one except Thee to fight for me."

Scripture says further, *For He that maketh inquisition for blood, remembereth them* (Ps. 9:13). The congregation of Israel prayed to the Holy One, blessed be He: If Thou risest not up for me, I have no one to rise up for me. And again Israel said: *O Lord, Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul . . . Thou hast seen my wrong; judge Thou my cause. Thou hast seen all their vengeance . . . Thou hast heard their taunt, O Lord. The lips of those that rise up against me* (Lam. 3:60-62). Therefore Thou didst rise up for me. Again in another Psalm, speaking for Israel, David prayed *Give us help from trouble* (Ps. 60:13; 108:13). And in this Psalm, praying for himself, David said: *Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me* (Ps. 35:1). Could a mortal servant venture to say such a thing to his master as "Plead my cause, O lord, with mine enemies, and go forth to fight beside me?" But the Holy One, blessed be He, said to David: "David, occupy thyself with Torah, and I shall fight thy wars!" even as He had promised Moses: *Wherefore it is said in the Book, the wars of the Lord* (Num. 21:14), by which He meant: "If you occupy yourselves with the Book, I shall fight beside you." Hence David could pray: *Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me.*

2. *Take hold of shield and buckler, and rise up to my help* (Ps. 35:2). The Holy One, blessed be He, asked David: "Do I need a shield or a buckler? Thine enemies are like chaff before the wind. When I let the wind blow upon them, they fly." As Isaiah

said, *The voice said: "Cry!" And he said: "What shall I cry?" "That all flesh is grass. . . . The wind of the Lord bloweth upon it"* (Isa. 40:6-7).

All the parts of my body say: "Lord, who is like unto Thee?" (Ps. 35:10). The Holy One, blessed be He, asked David: "David, what wilt thou do for Me?" And David answered: I shall praise Thee with all the parts of my body. With my head, when in prayer I bend my head and bow down. With the hair on my head, when I fulfill the ordinance *Ye shall not round the corners of your heads* (Lev. 19:27) and when I lay Tefillin on my head. With my neck, when I fulfill the precept of wearing fringes.¹ With my eyes, when I fulfill the precept *It shall be unto you for a fringe that ye may look upon it* (Num. 15:39). With my mouth, I speak Thy praise, as when *My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord* (Ps. 145:21). With my lips, also, I praise Thee as when *My lips utter praise* (Ps. 119:171). With my beard, when I obey the ordinance *Neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard* (Lev. 19:27); with my tongue, when *My tongue shall speak of Thy righteousness* (Ps. 35:28); with my face, when I fall down on my face during prayer, as is said *He fell down on his face to the earth* (Gen. 48:12); with my throat, as when *My throat is dried* (Ps. 69:4); with my heart, as when *Thy word have I laid up in my heart* (Ps. 118:11); with my breast, when in reading the Shema, I lay the fringes against the heart in keeping with the precept *These words which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart* (Deut. 6:6). With the back of my body and the front of my body, when I throw my praying shawl about me, two of its corners behind me, and two of its corners before me. With my right hand, when I write with it, or when I point out with it the sound reasoning in Torah. With my left hand, when I fasten the hand Tefillin to it, or when I hold my fringes in it at the reading of the Shema. With my nose, when I smell spices with it during the blessing said at the outgoing of Sabbath. With my ears, when I listen with them to the sound reasoning of Torah. With my nails, when I examine the light reflected in them while the *Habdalah* blessing is being spoken at

the end of the Sabbath. With my inmost parts, as is said *Thy Law is in my inmost parts* (Ps. 40:10); with all that is within me, as is said *All that is within me, bless His Holy Name* (Ps. 103:1); with my reins, as is said *Yea, in the night seasons my reins instruct me* (Ps. 16:7). With my male organ, at circumcision and at the uncovering of the corona; with my knees, at bending my knees in prayer; again with my knees, when I act as godfather for children whom I hold for circumcision on my knees. With my right foot, from which the shoe is loosed in the rite of *Hālišah*.² And with my left foot, the first one I move at the end of the Eighteen Benedictions when I take three steps backward to retire from God's presence. Hence David said: *All the parts of my body shall say: "Lord, who is like unto Thee."*³

PSALM THIRTY-SIX

1. *To the Lord of victories:*¹ [*A Psalm*] of David, the servant of the Lord (Ps. 36:1). The phrase *Lord of victories* is to be considered in the light of the verse *Happy art thou, O Israel, who is like unto thee? A people saved by the Lord* (Deut. 33:29). The Holy One, blessed be He, wages Israel's wars, but victory is ascribed to Israel. Thus Scripture says, *In all the signs and wonders . . . and in all the mighty hand, and in all the great terror, which Moses wrought* (Deut. 34:11-12): here it is not written "Which the Lord wrought," but *which Moses wrought*. The Holy One, blessed be He, empowered Moses to perform wonders, but the victory was ascribed to Moses. So, too, Deborah said: *Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam* (Judg. 5:12). But could it be said to him *Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive*, as if it were really his captivity? What could Deborah have meant by *Arise* except "Arise, but you will not do battle, for the battle is the Lord's," as is said *This is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thy hand* (Judg. 4:14), and also, *They fought from heaven* (Judg. 5:20). And yet when Barak was about to say: "The victory is the Lord's," Deborah said: *Lead thy captivity captive*.

So, too, when David went down to meet Goliath, he said to the Philistines: *That all this assembly may know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's* (1 Sam. 17:47). And in their rejoicing and in their going out to dance, when the women sang, saying *Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands* (ibid. 18:7), even then David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Thou wagest war and Thine is the victory," as is said *Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty* (1 Chron. 29:11). Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said to David: Thou ascribest the victory unto Me, but I shall ascribe the victory unto thee, saying *For the man of victories: for David the servant of the Lord* (Ps. 36:1).²

2. *The transgression of the wicked uttereth its oracle: There is no fear of God before his eyes* (Ps. 36:2). When David looked

at Goliath the Philistine and saw that he was a mighty man armed with all kinds of weapons, he said: "Who can prevail against such as he?" But when David saw him reviling and blaspheming, he said: "Now I shall prevail against him, for there is no fear of the Holy One, blessed be He, in him, as is said *The transgression of the wicked uttereth its oracle: There is no fear of God before his eyes.*"

From this you learn that the Holy One, blessed be He, punishes the wicked in the very hour when the fear of God is not upon them.

You find that the Holy One, blessed be He, also said to Israel: *Thine own wickedness shall punish thee . . . when My fear is not in thee* (Jer. 2:19). Hence David said: *The transgression of the wicked uttereth its oracle: There is no fear of God before his eyes.*

3. *For it flattereth him in his eyes, to find an iniquity that will be hated* (Ps. 36:3): The wicked glance about with their eyes and feel about with their hands and scheme in their hearts to find that special sin which the Holy One, blessed be He, hates that they might commit it. As Scripture says, *Every abomination to the Lord which He hateth, have they done* (Deut. 12:31).

Woe unto the wicked, all of whose being is evil and deceit; not even with one another do they deal truthfully. *The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit* (Ps. 36:4); the wicked walks in iniquity and devises iniquity, as the next verse says, *He deviseth iniquity upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good* (Ps. 36:5). What is meant by the words *he setteth himself in a way that is not good*? When there are two ways open to the wicked, one toward good, and one toward evil, they forsake the good way, and walk in the evil way. So Solomon described the wicked as *men . . . who forsake the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice to do evil* (Prov. 2:12). Hence it is written *he setteth himself in a way that is not good.*

4. *Thy loving-kindness, O Lord, is in the heavens; Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the skies* (Ps. 36:6). Is the loving-kindness

of the Lord in the heavens? Is it not on the earth, as is said *The earth is full of the loving-kindness of the Lord* (Ps. 33:5)? The deeds of the wicked, however, force the loving-kindness of the Lord back to the heavens. Hence it is said *Thy loving-kindness, O Lord, is in the heavens*.

5. *Thy righteousness is like the mighty mountains* (Ps. 36:7). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the wicked: I have stored up many rewards for the righteous, and he who repents can come and take them. I have many rewards for the righteous, for it is said *Thy righteousness is like the mighty mountains. Thy judgments are like the great deep*. Even as there can be no numbering of the mountains, so there can be no numbering of the rewards for the righteous. Like the deep which has no bounds, so the punishment for the wicked has no bounds. Like the mountains which are high and lofty, so the rewards for the righteous are high and lofty. And just as the waters of the deep are not all alike, some salty, some bitter, and some sweet, so the punishment for the wicked is not all alike.

R. Josiah the Great said: Read the verse not in this sense, but transpose its parts and read it "Like the mighty mountains over the great deep is Thy righteousness over Thy judgments"; that is, like the mountains which hold down the deep so that it does not come up and flood the earth, so righteous acts hold down the iniquities, lest all mortals perish on the day of judgment. Thus also Micah said: *He will again have compassion upon us; He will hold down our iniquities* (Micah 7:19).

6. *For with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light shall we see light* (Ps. 36:10). R. Johanan said: It happened that a man lighted a lamp which went out, and each time he lighted it, it went out, until at last the man said: "How long shall I keep tiring myself with this lamp? I will wait for the shining of the sun and go about in its light." Similarly, when the children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt, Moses rose up and redeemed them, but they were enslaved again in Babylon. Then Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah rose up and redeemed them, but they were enslaved again in Elam, in Media, and in Persia. Then Mordecai

and Esther rose up and redeemed them, but they were enslaved again in Greece. Then the Hasmonean and his sons rose up and redeemed them, but they were enslaved again in Edom the wicked. Thereupon the children of Israel said: We have grown weary of being enslaved and redeemed, only to be enslaved once again. Now let us pray not for redemption through flesh and blood, but through our redeemer, the Lord of hosts whose name is the Holy One of Israel. Now let us pray not that flesh and blood give us light, but that the Holy One, blessed be He, give us light, as is said *For with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light we shall see light*, and also *The Lord is God, and He will give us light* (Ps. 118:27).

According to R. Simeon ben Lakish, the Holy One, blessed be He, asked the children of Israel: "Do you desire to share in this world with the nations of the earth?" And they replied: "Master of the universe, *Incline not my heart to any evil thing* (Ps. 141:4). Wherein evil? Because the nations of the earth are schemers, as the verse goes on to say [*Incline not my heart*] . . . *to the making of schemes in wickedness with men who are skilled in iniquity* (ibid.). Indeed, we have no desire for the dainty portions³ which belong to the nations of the earth, as is said *Let me not eat of their dainties* (ibid.). But what do we desire? Thy precepts, as is said *For with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light we shall see light*, and again *Nations shall walk at Thy light* (Isa. 60:3)."

R. Osha'ya taught in the name of R. Phinehas: In the age-to-come, Jerusalem shall become a torch of light for all the nations, as is said *Nations shall walk at Thy light* (Isa. 60:3).⁴

R. Samuel bar Nahmani said: Because the children of Israel had need of light in this world, they used the light of the sun by day and the light of the moon by night; but in the world-to-come the children of Israel will not need the light of the sun nor of the moon, as is said *The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee* (Isa. 60:19). Who will give them light? The Holy One, blessed be He, of

whom the verse goes on to say, *The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light (ibid.)*.

R. Phinehas taught in the name of R. Reuben: A time will come when the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring Sinai, Tabor, and Carmel together and will establish Jerusalem upon their very tops, for it is said *The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains* (Isa. 2:2). Moreover, a time will come when the mountains will lead in the singing of Israel's songs, for it is said *Kenaniah shall be chief of the Levites, and shall be first in song* (I Chron. 15:22). The word *Kenaniah* is to be read "that which⁵ was established by the Lord," for the word comes from the same stem as *naḥon* (*established*), which occurs in the verse *The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established (naḥon)*.⁶

7. *O continue Thy loving-kindness unto them that know Thee* (Ps. 36:11). According to R. Isaac, David prayed: O continue not Thy loving-kindness to the nations of the earth that know Thee not.

R. Yannai said: If a man kindle a lamp for his companion, in the daytime when there is light, of what use is the lamp to him? But when can he make use of the lamp? When the man kindles it for him at night in the hours of darkness. Now the loving-kindness which Israel in the wilderness accumulated with God was held for them from that time on, that is, from the time of Moses on. And when was it paid out to them? In a time of darkness, in the time of Jeremiah, as is said *I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown* (Jer. 2:2). Hence it is said *O continue Thy loving-kindness unto them that know Thee*.

8. Another comment on *O continue Thy loving-kindness unto them that know Thee*. R. Isaac said: *One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh* (Eccles. 1:4): One nation comes and another nation goes; *But the land abideth for ever*, that is, the children of Israel, to whom it is said "Ye shall be

a delightful land" (Mal. 3:12), abide for ever. Again, the word *land* refers to Israel in the phrase *until the day of the captivity of the land* (Judg. 18:30). For how can one speak of a land's being led into captivity? Therefore, by *land* are meant the children of Israel.

R. Abba bar Kahana taught that two generations made use of the Ineffable Name: ⁷ the men of the Great Synagogue, and the generation under [Hadrian's] persecution.

It befell R. Joshua ben Levi that Elijah, ever remembered on good occasions, engaged in the study of Torah with him. They were engaged in studying the Mēkilta of R. Simeon ben Yoḥai.⁸ When R. Joshua ben Levi found himself slow to grasp a matter of law, Elijah said: "Dost thou wish to inquire of R. Simeon ben Yoḥai? Come, and I shall raise him up for thee." Whereupon they went, and Elijah summoned R. Simeon ben Yoḥai, who responded at once. Elijah said to R. Simeon: "R. Joshua ben Levi has come to inquire of thee about a certain law." But R. Simeon did not wish to speak to R. Joshua. Elijah then said: "R. Joshua ben Levi is worthy of seeing thee. He is a righteous man." But R. Simeon ben Yoḥai answered Elijah: "Were R. Joshua truly righteous, then the rainbow would not appear in the sky during his lifetime."⁹ Indeed, in the lifetime of R. Simeon ben Yoḥai the rainbow had not appeared in the sky.

Some say that they of the generation of Hezekiah and of the generation of Zedekiah also knew the Ineffable Name, for in *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands . . . and I Myself will fight against you* (Jer. 21:4-5), what *weapons of war* could He have meant except His Ineffable Name!

[Formerly], when Israel went forth to war, they had no need to fight battles, for their enemies fell before them. But after sins brought it about that the Temple was destroyed, the children of Israel fell at the hands of their enemies. ([As to what happened to the Ineffable Name], R. Aibu and the Rabbis differed. R. Aibu said: The angels scraped off the Name, which was on the weapons. The Rabbis said: It scraped Itself off.)¹⁰ After the

Temple was destroyed, when the children of Israel went forth to war, they would say, *There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thine anger . . . For mine iniquities are gone over my head* (Ps. 38:4).

PSALM THIRTY-SEVEN

1. [*A Psalm*] of David. *Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity* (Ps. 37:1). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *Let not thy heart envy sinners* (Prov. 23:17). Of whom should you be envious? Only of those who have the *fear of the Lord all the day* (*ibid.*).

Do not envy the lamp of the wicked. It is nothing at all. How much oil is in it? An eighth, at most a fourth, of a *log*?¹ But the lamp has no after-glow. When the oil is consumed, the lamp goes out at once, as it is said *The evil man will have no future, the lamp of the wicked shall be put out* (Prov. 24:20). Hence David said: *Neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.*² Rather be envious of that lamp which will never go out, and whose light will never fail. What lamp is that? The one spoken of in the words *The commandment is a lamp, and the Law is light* (Prov. 6:23).

Therefore, in saying *Be not the rival*³ of sinners (Prov. 23:17a), the Holy One, blessed be He, meant: "Be My rival!" If it were not for such rivalry, the world could not endure, for no man would take a woman to wife, nor build a house. If Abraham had not sought to rival God, he would not have become possessor of heaven and earth.⁴ When did Abraham seek to rival God? When he asked Melchizedek:⁵ "On account of what righteous act didst thou and thy kin come forth alive from the ark?"⁶ and Melchizedek answered: "Because of the alms which we gave in the ark." Abraham asked: "What occasion did you have for giving alms in the ark? Were there poor people there? Were not only Noah and his sons there? To whom did you give alms?" Melchizedek replied: "We gave alms to the cattle, to the beasts, and to the birds. We did not sleep because all night we were setting food before this one and before that one." Thereupon Abraham reflected: "Had they not given alms to the cattle, to the beasts, and to the birds, Noah and his sons would not have come forth alive from the ark; it was only because they gave alms that they came forth from it alive! Therefore, if I give

alms to the sons of men, how much greater the deed!" At once Abraham planted an 'šl⁷ in Beer-sheba, that is, he gave food, drink, and escort to all the sons of men.

And so when Solomon said, *Again, I considered all labor and all excelling in work, when it is merely man's rivalry with his neighbor, it is vanity and striving after wind* (Eccles. 4:4), he meant *Be not the rival of sinners.*

2. *For they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb* (Ps. 37:2). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to David: The wicked are nothing at all. Their hope is grass. Scripture says likewise, *When the wicked spring up as the grass* (Ps. 92:8)—that is, the wicked flourish like grass. In Job also, it is said *The hope of the godless man shall perish . . . he is green before the sun* (Job 8:13b, 16). Green for how long? As long as the summer sun⁸ does not come. When the summer sun comes, the grass withers, and is cut down like thorns. And whither go the thorns? Into the fire, for it is said *As thorns cut down shall they be burnt in the fire* (Isa. 33:12). Hence it is said *The workers of iniquity . . . shall soon be cut down like the grass.*

3. *Trust in the Lord, and do good* (Ps. 37:3). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to David: When thou seest that I do good to the wicked, let not thy heart grieve. But go on doing good—that is, turn to the Lord, as is said "Return unto the Lord. Say unto Him, forgive all iniquity; accept that which is good" (Hos. 14:3). If I do good to the wicked who vex Me and profit Me not, if I do good to them, then for thee who trustest in Me, who art diligent in the study of Torah, who dost justice and righteousness, as Scripture bears witness, *David executed justice and righteousness unto all his people* (2 Sam. 8:15)—for thee how much more and more shall I do if thou continuest to trust in Me. Hence it is said *Trust in the Lord, and do good.*

With whom may David be compared? With a laborer who worked all his days for the king. When the king did not give him his hire, the laborer was troubled and said: "Am I to go forth with nothing in my hands?" Then the king hired another laborer who worked for the king but one day, and the king laid

meat before him, gave him drink, and paid him his hire in full. The laborer who had worked all his days for the king said: "Such reward for this one who did no more than work but one day for the king? For me who have been working for the king all the days of my life, how much more and more my reward!" The other laborer went away, and now the one who had been working all his days for the king was glad in his heart. So David said, *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, from the time their corn and their wine increased* (Ps. 4:8). That is to say, when is there gladness in my heart? When I see what Thou hast done for the wicked: *their corn and their wine increased*.

R. Eleazar said: From the prosperity of the wicked in this world, you can tell the reward of the righteous in the world-to-come. If so much for the wicked, how much more and more for the righteous! Hence it is written *Thou hast put gladness in my heart from the time their corn and their wine increased*. Hence also *Oh how abundant is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee* (Ps. 31:20).

PSALM THIRTY-EIGHT

1. *A Psalm of David to bring [suffering to] remembrance. O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath; neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure* (Ps. 38:1-2). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *O Lord, chasten me only in measure; not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing* (Jer. 10:24). It is not written here "O Lord, chasten me in measure," but *O Lord, chasten me only in measure*—that is, "O Lord, chasten me only with moderate punishments." So, too, it is written *Chasten thy son, that there be hope* (Prov. 19:18), as if to say, Chasten him, but not unto death. Take care that in chastening thou dost not destroy him: *only set not thy heart on his destruction* (*ibid.*). Hence David said: *Rebuke me not in Thy wrath*. A rebuke is good—it is said *Whom the Lord loveth, He rebuketh* (Prov. 3:12)—but only when the rebuke is not given in wrath. Therefore David said: *O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath*. He also said: Chastisement is good—as Scripture says, *Blessed is the man, whom Thou chastenest, O Lord* (Ps. 94:12)—but we cannot long suffer it. Therefore David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, we have sinned, and Thou art angry, and so we are not saved, as it is said *Behold, Thou art wroth, for we have sinned: in them have we been of long time; and shall we be saved?* (Isa. 64:4). Subdue us little by little, as it is written *He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us as He subdues our iniquities* (Micah 7:19). Hence it is said *O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath; neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure*.

A weaver, when he is sure that the frame¹ stands fast, goes ahead with vigor, but when he is sure that the frame does not stand fast, does not strike with vigor: We are the web, and Thou art the weaver. We cannot endure Thy wrath or hot displeasure. As Scripture says, *Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak* (Ps. 6:3). For if Thou art upon me with hot displeasure or wrath, I shall die at once. And *What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit?* (Ps. 30:10).

He who is not skilled in giving lashes, after binding a man,

strikes him upon the head or between the eyes with a stick; but he who is skilled in giving lashes, after binding a man, strikes him upon the back, not upon the head or between the eyes; in order not to blind the man's eyes, he strikes him upon a part of the body where there is no danger. Thus Scripture says, *What are these wounds between thy hands? And he will answer: "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my Friend"* (Zech. 13:6). That is, if one be asked "What are these wounds between thy hands?" he will answer: "They are the result of being befriended by the Holy One, blessed be He."

2. *There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thine anger . . . For mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me* (Ps. 38:4a, 5). The children of Israel used to say, *Our iniquities are increased over our head* (Ezra 9:6). R. Isaac told a parable of a man with a burden on his head who was crossing a river, his feet sinking deep in the water. He was told: "Put the burden away from thee, and thou wilt be able to lift up thy feet." Likewise, the Holy One, blessed be He, asked Israel: Wherefore do you say, *For mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me* (Ps. 38:5)? *Let the wicked forsake his way* (Isa. 55:7): That is, "Put away your evil deeds, and I shall have mercy upon you"; as Scripture says, *Let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him* (ibid.).

R. Hinenai bar Papa said: *Many, O Lord my God, are the wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward* (Ps. 40:6)—many were all the wondrous works and thoughts which Thou didst conceive to make Abraham choose the yoke of the kingdoms for himself; the words *to us-ward* show that he did so for our sake, that we might endure in this world.²

R. Simeon bar Abba taught in the name of R. Johanan, that the Holy One, blessed be He, let Abraham see four things: Torah, the yoke of the kingdoms, Gehenna, and offerings. Of Torah, it is written *a torch of fire* (Gen. 15:17), and elsewhere "Is not My word like as fire?" (Jer. 23:29); *torch* means Torah, as in the

words "All the people perceived the thunderings and the torches" (Ex. 20:15). Of Gehenna it is written *behold a smoking furnace* (Gen. 15:17), by which is meant Gehenna, as in the words "Behold, the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace" (Mal. 3:10). Of offerings, it is said *Take Me a heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old* (Gen. 15:9). Of the yoke of the kingdoms, it is written *Lo, a dread, even a great darkness fell upon him* (*ibid.* 15:12).

PSALM THIRTY-NINE

1. *For the leader. For Jeduthun. A Psalm of David. I said: "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue"* (Ps. 39:1). David's meditation is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger* (Prov. 15:1). An evil tongue is more grievous than idolatry. In the wilderness, when the children of Israel sinned and made the golden calf, it was only after they had also sinned with their mouths that the decree of their punishment was sealed, as is said *The Lord heard the voice of your words, and was wroth* (Deut. 1:34), and as is also said *As I live, saith the Lord, surely as ye have spoken in Mine ears, so will I do to you* (Num. 14:28). Mark that the verse does not say, "Ye have wearied the Lord with your deeds" but says, *Ye have wearied the Lord with your words* (Mal. 2:17). Similarly, it is written *For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen; because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord* (Isa. 3:8). And again: *My heritage is become unto Me as a lion in the forest; she hath uttered her voice against Me; therefore have I hated her* (Jer. 12:8).

But does the Lord hate Israel, His heritage, because of her voice? Rather does He not love her because of her voice, as is said *Let me hear thy voice* (Song 2:14)? The fact is that He loves her because of her voice and He hates her because of her voice. Say then that *Death and life are in the power of the tongue* (Prov. 18:21).

2. *I said: "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue"* (Ps. 39:2). It happened once that a king of Persia was about to die. As he grew exceeding weak, his physicians said: "There can be no remedy for thee until they bring thee the milk of a lioness, which thou must drink until thou art healed." So the king sent his servants, who took much money with them, to Solomon, son of David. Thereupon Solomon sent and summoned Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, whom he asked: "How can we get the milk of a lioness?" Benaiah replied: "Give me ten

she-goats." Then Benaiah and the king's servants went to a lions' den, in which a lioness was giving suck to her whelps. The first day he stood afar, and threw one goat to her, which she devoured. The second day Benaiah came a little nearer and threw another goat. And thus he continued day by day. At the end of ten days, he was close to the lioness, so that as he played with her, he touched her dugs and took some of her milk and went on his way. Then the king's servants went back to Solomon; he dismissed them in peace, and they went on their way.

While they were midway in their journey, the physician [who was with the king's servants] had a dream in which he saw the parts of his body arguing with one another.

The feet were saying: "Among all the parts, there are none like us. Had we not walked, he would not have been able to fetch any of the milk."

The hands replied, saying: "There are none like us. Had we not touched the lioness, he would not now be carrying any of the milk."

The eyes said: "We are of greater worth than any of you. Had we not shown him the way, nothing at all would have been accomplished."

The heart spoke, saying: "I am of greater worth than any of you. Had I not given counsel,¹ you would not have succeeded at all in the errand."

But the tongue spoke up and said: "I am better than you. Had it not been for speech, what would you have done?"

Then all the parts replied, saying to the tongue: "Art thou not afraid to compare thyself with us, thou that art lodged in a place of obscurity and darkness—thou indeed in whom there is not a single bone such as there is in all the other parts?"

But the tongue declared: "This very day, you are going to acknowledge that I rule you."

As the physician woke up from his sleep, he kept the dream in his heart, and went on his way. He came to the king, and said: "Here is the milk of a bitch which we went to get for thee. Drink it."

Immediately the king became angry with the physician and ordered that he be hanged. As he went out to be hanged, all the parts began to tremble. The tongue said to them: "Did I not tell you this day, that there is nothing to you? If I save you now, will you admit that I rule you?"

They said: "Yes."

Then the tongue said to those who were about to hang the physician: "Bring me back to the king." They brought the physician back to the king, and he asked the king: "Why didst thou order to have me hanged?"

The king replied: "Because thou broughtest the milk of a bitch to me."

He asked the king: "What does that matter to thee? It will cure thee. Besides, a lioness can be called a bitch."

The king then took some of the milk, and drank, and was healed. And so since it was proved that the milk was the milk of a lioness, the physician was dismissed in peace.

Thereupon all the parts said to the tongue: "Now do we confess to thee that thou rulest all the parts." Of this it is written *Death and life are in the power of the tongue* (Prov. 18:21). And so David declared: *I said: "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue."*

3. Behold, what the tongue offers is better than all other offerings, as is said *I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. And it shall please the Lord better than that bull-calf or bullock that had horns and hoofs* (Ps. 69:31-32). If it was a bull-calf, how could it be a bullock? And if a bullock, how a bull-calf? The verse means, however, that what the tongue offers pleases the Lord even more than that bull-calf which Adam offered in place of a bullock for thanksgiving, saying *It is good to give thanks unto the Lord* (Ps. 92:2). Adam's offering took place on the Day of Atonement, and corresponded to the service of the high priest, of which it is said *Herewith shall Aaron come into the holy place; with a young bullock for a sin-offering* (Lev. 16:3).

By the words *that had horns and hoofs* is meant that the bull-

calf which Adam offered had horns before he had hoofs,² for the verse is to be read *that had horns and [then] hoofs*.

Over there³ it was taught: The bull-calf which Adam offered had one horn in his forehead, for what the verse really says is *a bull-calf . . . that had a horn (mkrn) and hoofs*. Note that *mkrn* as written calls for the pronunciation *mēkoran*, meaning "it had one horn."⁴

4. Another comment on *For the leader. For Jeduthun. Jeduthun* refers to the profession of judges and their judgments.⁵ Therefore the Psalm continues *I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue* so as not to pervert judgment; and another Psalm says, *Even though princes sit and talk against me, Thy servant doth meditate in Thy statutes* (Ps. 119:23).

I will keep a curb upon my mouth (Ps. 39:2). Is there such a thing as a curb for a man's mouth? The verse means, however, "I shall keep silence and not occupy myself with idle words, only with words of Torah." So, too, it is said *A wholesome tongue is a tree of life* (Ps. 15:4), *tree of life* meaning Torah.

From this you learn that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to the children of Israel that they should not busy themselves with idle words, nor be busy with evil tongues. So the Psalm says *I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue*. So, too, Scripture says, *These words . . . thou . . . shalt speak them* (Deut. 6:7)—that is, thou shalt speak words of Torah, not slander, nor idle words.

Likewise David asked: "Who wishes to have life in the world-to-come?" and they replied: "No man can have it." David replied: "But it can be had, and at a low price: When Scripture asks *Who is the man that desireth life?* (Ps. 34:13), the question means, 'who is he who wants life in the world-to-come?'" And they asked: "But how can one have such life?" David answered: "By *keeping thy tongue from evil* (Ps. 34:14)—that is, from slander, of which it is said *Stilled be the lying lips which speak against the righteous* (Ps. 31:19), lips which prevent thee from ever saying, *Oh how abundant is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee* (Ps. 31:20)."

PSALM FORTY

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David. I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry* (Ps. 40:1-2). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *And it shall be said in that day: "Lo, this is our God, for whom we waited, that He might save us"* (Isa. 25:9): It is not in the power of Israel to do anything but wait for the Holy One, blessed be He, to redeem them in reward for saying *I waited patiently for the Lord*, as it is written *The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him* (Lam. 3:25), and also *Return to the Stronghold, ye prisoners of hope* (Zech. 9:12). But perhaps you say, *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved* (Jer. 8:20); then *Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let thy heart take courage; yea, wait thou for the Lord* (Ps. 27:14). Note *wait for the Lord* and again *wait for the Lord*—keep on waiting and waiting. So, though you wait and still are not saved, *Be strong, and let thy heart take courage* (*ibid.*): wait and wait again. And if you say, "How long must we wait?" Long ago it was written *O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and for ever* (Ps. 131:3), and also *Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all ye that wait for the Lord* (Ps. 31:25). If you wait, you shall be saved, for it is said *They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me* (Isa. 49:23), and *They that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength* (Isa. 40:31); and also *Those that wait for the Lord, they shall inherit the land* (Ps. 37:9). Hence it is said *I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry*. Therefore God said: David who waited for Me, him I answered.

2. *He brought me up also out of the tumultuous pit, out of the miry clay* (Ps. 40:3). But did David ever go down into a pit or into mire? This is what David meant: I was already on the way that leads to Gehenna, which is called the tumultuous pit and the miry clay, but I prayed and waited for the reward of my worship, and won it, for the Holy One, blessed be He, did not suffer me to sink into Gehenna, as it is written *Thou wouldst*

not abandon my soul to the nether-world; neither wouldst Thou suffer Thy godly one to see the pit (Ps. 16:10). And it was not enough that He did not suffer me to go down into the pit; He also made me know in what way I ought to walk, as it is written *Thou madest me to know the path of life; in Thy presence is fullness of joy* (Ps. 16:11), that is, the Garden of Eden. Hence David said, *He brought me up also out of the tumultuous pit, out of the miry clay*. Nay more: He lifted me up to a high place, as it is written *He set my foot upon a rock, He established my goings* (Ps. 40:3); by *rock* is clearly meant a very high and lofty place, as it is said *He shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the fortresses of rocks* (Isa. 33:16). Hence David said: *He set my foot upon a rock*. And why such things for me? Because of my waiting, because I waited for God: He desires neither burnt-offerings, nor whole offerings, nor sacrifices—only waiting.

They asked David: "How do we know that God did such things for thee?" David replied: "You know from the song that I sing: *He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God*" (Ps. 40:4). They asked: "And were all thine other songs not new?" David replied: "Even as I was going down into the pit of destruction, He lifted me up, and I said: As now Thou hast lifted me up, so give back the Holy Spirit to me—the verse *Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and let a willing spirit uphold me* (Ps. 91:14), shows that the Holy Spirit had been taken away from him—and God said to me: I now give thee back thy spirit." Thus David explained *A new song*.

Many shall see and fear (Ps. 40:4): He who wishes to repent ought to look upon David, of whom it was written *Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples* (Isa. 55:4). Hence it is said *Many shall see and fear*; and thereupon *they shall trust in the Lord* (Ps. 40:4).

So, too, when *Israel saw the great work which the Lord did* (Ex. 14:31), thereupon *Moses and the children of Israel sang this song* (Ex. 15:1).

3. *Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust, and*

respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies (Ps. 40:5): A man should not say, "Because I have sinned, there is no mending me!" Let him rather put his trust in the Lord, and let him repent, and the Lord will receive him. Nor should a man say, "If I repent, I shall be left without pride." Rather let pride be hateful to him, and let him abase himself, and return in penitence.

Such as turn aside to lies are they who incline to schemes of deceit. So, too, Scripture says *I hate the works of them that turn aside* (Ps. 101:3).

4. *Many, O Lord my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward* (Ps. 40:6). R. Hanina bar Papa said: This verse refers to the wondrous works and thoughts Thou didst conceive to make Abraham choose the yoke of the kingdoms for himself, *to us-ward* implying that he did so for our sake, that we might endure in this world and also possess life in the world-to-come.¹

R. Yudan, and R. Idi, and R. Hama bar Hanina taught in the name of a certain elder what he had said in the name of R. Judah: ² Abraham did not know that he had to choose the yoke of the kingdoms for himself. Indeed, the Holy One, blessed be He, chose the yoke of the kingdoms for Abraham—left to himself, Abraham might have chosen Gehenna. Of this, David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: *Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads: we went through fire and through water; but Thou wilt bring us out into a place of cool air*³ (Ps. 66:12). By the words *Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads* David meant the yoke of the kingdoms lying upon us; by the words *fire and . . . water* he meant Gehenna, wherein the wicked are punished with fire and snow and ice. Thus by the words *Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads*, David was saying that it was as though *we went through the fire and water [of Gehenna]*. *But Thou wilt bring us out into a place of cool air* promises: "I will redeem thee: when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; because thou walkest thus, thou shalt not be burned in the fire, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. 43:2). By "When thou passest

through the waters" are meant troubles which overtake one another like waves; by "through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" are meant the kingdoms which are like the waters of the rivers; by "because thou walkest thus, thou shalt not be burned in the fire" is meant that thou wilt not suffer Gehenna; by "neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" is meant the flood of flame which will burn up the wicked in the age-to-come, as it is said *The day that cometh, shall burn them up* (Mal. 3:19).

R. Berechiah taught: Abraham sat still and was silent all of that day, and the Holy One, blessed be He, asked him: "How long wilt thou sit still and be silent? Bring thy melancholy to an end, and choose the yoke of kingdoms for thyself." The Holy One, blessed be He, thus brought him to a decision in the matter, as is said *In that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying* (Gen. 15:18). Hence Scripture says *Thy wonderful works . . . and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward*—that is, they are for the sake of us so that we be not enslaved in Gehenna.

They cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee (Ps. 40:5). What man can set in order a song to tell of Thy wondrous works? For *Though I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be told* (Ps. 40:6).

Sacrifice and meal-offering Thou hast no delight in; mine ears hast Thou opened; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast Thou not required (Ps. 40:7) is to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" (1 Sam. 15:22).

In the words *Mine ears hast Thou opened* (*ḥarīṭa*), the literal meaning of *ḥarīṭa* is clearly "dug out" as in the verse "If a man shall dig (*yikreh*) a pit" (Ex. 21:33).

Then said I: "Lo, I am come with the roll of a book which is prescribed for me . . . yea, Thy Law is in my inmost parts" (Ps. 40:8-10). *Book* and *Law* refer to what is said of a king: "When he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom . . . he shall write him a copy of this law in a book . . . and it shall be with him . . . that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all . . . these statutes to do them," etc. (Deut. 17:18-19).

PSALM FORTY-ONE

1. *Blessed is he that considereth the poor* (Ps. 41:1-2). These words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet not [all] people consider that same poor man* (Eccles. 9:14-15a). *The little city* is the human being; *few men within it* are the organs in his body; *there came a great king against it*—the Inclination-to-evil comes against it; and *built great bulwarks against it*—great traps against it; *the poor man and wise* is the Inclination-to-good; and *he by his wisdom delivered the city*, delivered it from the punishment of Gehenna. And why is the Inclination-to-good called a *poor man*? Because not all people heed it. Therefore David said: Because not all people heed the Inclination-to-good, blessed is that man who does heed it. Hence it is said *Blessed is he that considereth the poor*.

2. Another comment on *Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble*. These words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord* (Prov. 19:17).

R. Johanan said: He who visits a man in poor health removes one-sixtieth of his illness; and he who does not visit adds one-sixtieth to his illness.

R. Abin observed: If what R. Johanan says is true, let sixty persons come to visit a man who is in very poor health and so rid him of his illness!

According to R. Eleazar, the verse alludes to one who buries the corpse of a poor unknown person.¹

According to R. Abba, the verse alludes to him who sees to it that his Inclination-to-good has thorough knowledge of his Inclination-to-evil.²

According to R. Asi, the verse alludes to him who is considerate, and gives money to the poor.

According to the Rabbis, the verse alludes to him who helps another flee from persecution by the kingdoms.

What was R. Abba's reason for saying that the verse alludes to a man who sees to it that his Inclination-to-good has thorough knowledge of his Inclination-to-evil? Because the verse *Blessed is he that considereth the poor* shows that a man is able to deliver the Inclination-to-good from the Inclination-to-evil.

As for R. Asi's comment, it is explained by the next verse, *The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive*.

As for R. Johanan's comment, the next verse says, *The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of illness* (Ps. 41:4).

As for R. Eleazar's comment, the next verse says, *He shall be blessed upon the earth* (Ps. 41:3).³

As for the comment of the Rabbis, the next verse says, *And Thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies* (ibid.).

3. Another comment on *Blessed is he that considereth the poor*. R. Jonah said: *Blessed is he that considereth*, and then gives to the poor. For what can the words *he that considereth* mean except that he keeps the poor man in mind and finds a way of keeping him alive? How so? If the poor man was once rich and has come down in the world, the considerate man goes to him and says, "I hear that an inheritance is coming to thee out of a certain country," or, "A certain man owes thee such and such an amount. Now, if thou desirest, accept money from me, and when the inheritance comes to thy hand, or when the man pays the debt to thee, thou wilt repay me." So speaks the man who *considereth the poor*.

4. *The Lord will deliver him in the day of evil*: A man knows no day of real evil other than the day of his death, the day of the soul's going hence—on that day *the Lord will deliver* a man from the punishment of Gehenna.

Another comment: The *day of evil* is the day of great judgment, the day of which it is written *Behold, the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace* (Mal. 3:19). But what verse follows? *But unto you that fear My name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings* (ibid. 3:20). What is alluded to in the

words *sun of righteousness*, and *healing*? The righteousness which you wrought for the poor will stand up and shine for you on the day of great judgment, and give you healing.

So, too, Scripture says, *And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul* (Isa. 58:10). What can be meant by an *afflicted soul* except a human being whose poverty forces him to fast? For this is the way of man's nature: Though a man feed himself all the dainties in the world, if one day passes in which he does not eat, the soul is afflicted and wants to leave the body. But as soon as you satisfy the poor soul, forthwith it comes to, is at rest, and stays with the body. Hence Scripture reckons it as though you drew out your own soul and gave it to the hungry man.

5. *The Lord will strengthen him upon a bed of illness* (Ps. 41:4). Is the point of this verse that a bed is set aside especially for illness? What, exactly, is meant by a *bed of illness*? On the first day when a man is ailing, he is in need of prayer. Even so on the second day, and so, too, on the third day. But on the fourth day, it is said of him: "He is really ill." Then the Holy One, blessed be He, says, "Behold he is accounted ill in the eyes of all men"—I Myself shall now raise him." Hence it is said *The Lord will strengthen him upon a bed of illness*.

What is meant by *Thou turnest all as he lies in his sickness* (*ibid.*)? All the sins that a man committed while he stood firm upon his feet, the Holy One, blessed be He, remits for him during his illness. Hence, it is said *Thou turnest all as he lies in his sickness*.

David said: As for me, I do not ask for such remission.⁵ For I said: "O Lord, be merciful unto me; heal my soul; even though I have sinned against Thee" (Ps. 41:5).

Mine enemies speak evil of me: "When shall he die, and his name perish?" (Ps. 41:5-6). Did David have enemies? Is it not written *All Israel and Judah loved David* (2 Sam. 18:16)? And also: *David executed justice and righteousness unto all his people* (2 Sam. 8:15)? Since his people loved him, why did he say, *Mine enemies*? Who were David's enemies? They who

sought to do wrong and to defraud, and to whom he gave no rest,⁶ they were his enemies.

6. *And if one come to see me, he speaketh falsehood; his heart gathereth destruction into itself* (Ps. 41:7). When men like this come to visit me, they say with their mouths, "May the Holy One, blessed be He, have mercy on thee": they pray for me with their mouths, but they desire destruction for me in their hearts.

When he goeth abroad, he speaketh of it (ibid.): In my presence they that hate me pray for me, but when they go abroad, they all speak against me, and all of them whisper evil against me.

7. *A wicked matter is poured in him* (Ps. 41:9). They say of me: "David is clever. He knows what he is doing. To others, he pretends to be laid up and unable to rise, but in truth he can leave his bed." And so they say *A wicked matter is poured in him*. When I was asked, "Who said such a thing of thee? Surely it was a stranger?" I replied: *Indeed, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me* (Ps. 49:10): Even my disciples turned on me with kicks. How so? When they entered the house of study, they entered my presence gentle as kids; but when they left my presence, they became like goats goring with their horns. By *bread* David meant words of Torah, as in the verse *Wisdom . . . saith . . . Come eat of my bread* (Prov. 9:5).

David said: I do not take the things they do to heart, for I trust in Thee.

8. *But Thou, O Lord, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them* (Ps. 41:11). But is it not written *Say not thou: "I will requite evil"*; *wait for the Lord, and He will save thee* (Prov. 20:22)? But what David meant was: I will requite them good for evil, and let the Holy One, blessed be He, punish them.

By this I know that thou delightest in Me (Ps. 41:12). David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, requite them with evil because they are ingrates, for *when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth* (Ps. 35:13), that is, when they were sick, I put on sackcloth and made supplication for them.

But when I am sick, all the supplication they make for me is that I die."

The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "And who is to know what the sackcloth meant? Perhaps the supplication thou madest for them was that they die!"

David answered God: "If that be true, may all that I prayed for them come upon me, as is said *My prayer, may it return into mine own bosom* (Ps. 35:13)." And he went on to say: *But Thou, O Lord, be merciful unto me, and raise me up.* And the Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "Since thou hast spoken in this way, *By this I know that thou delightest in Me.*"

David said: *And as for me, Thou upholdest me because of mine integrity, and settest me before Thy face for ever* (Ps. 41:13), and then asked: In return, what shall be done for Thee? In return, what shall I give Thee? There is nothing I can do save bless Thee: *Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen!* (Ps. 41:14).

BOOK TWO

PSALMS FORTY-TWO AND FORTY-THREE

1. *For the leader; Maschil ('the wisdom') of the sons of Korah.* These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *To the wise (Maschil) the way of life is above* (Prov. 15:24), and so forth. See above the commentary on Psalm 32.

As the hart panteth after the water brooks (Ps. 42:2). What is meant by the words *As the hart panteth*? The verse does not say "As the hind," but *As the hart panteth*; furthermore, the noun is masculine, but the form of the verb is feminine. Thus the hind suffering pain in her labor, and panting to the Holy One, blessed be He, who answers her, stands for the sons of Korah calling in their trouble to the Holy One, blessed be He, who answered them. Hence it is said *As the hart panteth*.

What is meant by the words *after the water brooks*? The hind is the most God-fearing of animals, and so when the animals are thirsty, they gather near the hind, etc. See above.¹

In another comment the verse is read *As the hind panteth*: Even as the hind panteth for the Holy One, blessed be He, so did Esther say: *I am as a hind*,² *hasten to help me* (Ps. 22:20).

2. *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.* [Israel is asked:] "For what dost thou thirst?" She replies: I thirst neither for food nor for drink: I thirst to see Thy face, as is said *My heart said unto Thee: Thy face, Lord, will I seek* (Ps. 27:8). Hence it is said *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God* (Ps. 42:3).

3. *My tears have been my food* (Ps. 42:4). From this one learns that trouble so fills up a man that he does not want to eat. As Elkanah said to Hannah: *Why weepest thou, and why eatest thou not?* (1 Sam. 1:8). From this verse it follows that weeping fills one up. Hence *My tears have been my food*.

4. *These things I remember, and pour out my soul within me*

(Ps. 42:5): I recall what Thou didst to our fathers in the wilderness, because they said *These things be thy gods, O Israel* (Ex. 32:4), and recalling what Thou didst, my soul pours out within me.

Another comment. I recall what Moses said: "These things shall ye do unto the Lord in your set festivals" (Num. 29:39). *When I traversed the land in shade I struck them dumb for as long as the house of God [was standing]*⁸ (Ps. 42:5). What is meant by the words *in shade* (*sak*)? They mean that when we went up to the festivals to see Thy face, we traveled in litters that had shades, resembling a *sukkah*; and we came, we and our children, in such a great throng that the nations were struck dumb in our presence. *When I traversed the land in shade I struck them dumb for as long as the house of God [was standing]*—that is, as long as the Temple was standing, the nations were struck dumb in my presence. But now I am struck dumb in their presence. Hence the words, *I struck them dumb for as long as the house of God [was standing]*.

With the voice of joy and praise (*ibid.*). When I traversed the land, how did I traverse it? *With the voice of joy and praise*: with song, with cymbals, and with shouts of joy. Hence the phrase, *With the voice of joy*.

In the phrase *A multitude hoḡēg*⁴ (*ibid.*), what is meant by *hoḡēg*? It comes from Greek *agōgos*, and means aqueduct: Thus, like the water of an aqueduct which has no definite limit, there was no limit to the multitude of the children of Israel as they came up to the festivals. Hence it is said *A multitude overflowing* (*hoḡēg*).

5. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why moanest thou within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him for the salvation of His countenance* (Ps. 42:6). By this verse is meant: I shall not praise Him as I have before, for working miracles for our fathers: Now I shall praise Him again because He will save me again from the nations. Hence it is said *I shall yet praise Him*.

O my God, my soul is cast down within me. (Ps. 42:7). The

congregation of Israel said: "I am envious and cast down when I see the prosperity of the nations.⁵ Yea, I am angry. But Thou—of what concern is it to Thee? *Thou, O Lord, art enthroned for ever, Thy throne is from generation to generation* (Lam. 5:19); as Scripture says, *Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and gladness are in His place* (1 Chron. 16:27). Of what concern is it to Thee? But as for me—*my soul is cast down within me. Thereupon do I remember Thee from the land of Jordan* (Ps. 42:7): that is, I remember what Thou didst for me when I crossed the Jordan. Even when we provoked Thee at Shittim, Thou wroughtest miracles for us in bringing us across the Jordan, as it is said *And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and they removed from Shittim, and came to the Jordan* (Josh. 3:1). When I remember my troubles and Thy miracles, I think of other doubts of Thee in the past, as when it was said *The Lord is not able to bring this people into the land* (Num. 14:16), as if to ask, 'Where is the Spirit? and where is the Might?' And *It was said in the house of Jacob:*⁶ *Is the spirit of the Lord straitened?* (Micah 2:7). *Then I said: My infirmity is the changing of the right hand of the Most High* (Ps. 77:11)." What can be meant by the phrase *my infirmity*? That there is infirmity above? That the right hand of the Most High is changed? No, for the Holy One, blessed be He, says: *Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save* (Isa. 59:1). What is meant then? That your moral infirmities have caused a separation between you and Mel⁷ Hence it is said *Thereupon do I remember Thee from the land of Jordan*.

As for the conclusion of this verse—and *the Hermons, from the hill Mizar* (Ps. 42:7)—*Hermons* refers to Sinai from which all the nations were doomed⁸ because they did not accept the Torah; and *the hill Mizar* refers to the Holy Temple, of which it is said *Thy holy people have inherited Mizar*⁹ (Isa. 63:18).

Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterfalls (Ps. 42:8): The waters above say, "We are male"; and the waters below say, "We are female." And when the waters above descend, they say to those below: "You are the creatures of the Holy One, blessed

be He, and we are His messengers; receive us with friendly mien." Of this it is written *Let the skies pour down . . . Let the earth open, that they may bring forth salvation* (Isa. 45:8): *Let the earth open to the falling rain that they may bring forth salvation*: they are fertile, and they unite, and they generate salvation. Hence the verse concludes *And righteousness shall spring up [from their being] together (ibid.)*.

Thou dost not work miracles for us, as Thou didst work them for our fathers. What dost Thou do for us? *All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me* (Ps. 42:8). One might say, there is no merit in us. Behold, Thou didst command our fathers that they should kill the Passover lamb. When they killed the Passover lamb, they obeyed but a single commandment, and yet they went forth in the night out of Egypt. As Scripture says, *By day the Lord will command His loving-kindness, and in the night His song shall be with me* (Ps. 42:9).

¹⁰ *I will say unto God my Rock: "Why hast Thou forgotten me?"* (Ps. 42:10). They who were in Egypt obeyed but a single commandment and went forth that very night; but what of me? I obeyed all the commandments which I have been ordered to obey: I have been told, *Observe the month of Abib* (Deut. 16:1), and so I observe the festival during it and I keep the Passover during it; and I have been told, *Thou shalt keep the Feast of Weeks (ibid. 16:10), the Feast of Tabernacles (ibid. 16:13); And on the tenth day of this seventh month ye shall have a holy convocation* (Num. 29:7), and I observe them all.

Why the phrase *this seventh month*? Is there another seventh month? The *this*, however, means that this is the month of which Thou sayest year after year: "During the seventh month, the coming month of Tishri, I shall redeem thee."¹¹ But this Tishri has come and another Tishri as well, and yet Thou hast not redeemed me. Accordingly, *I say unto God my Rock: "Why hast Thou forgotten me?"* (Ps. 42:10).

¹² *Yet Thou art the God of my strength* (Ps. 43:1-2). Before Thou didst redeem them, our fathers in Egypt did not ascribe strength to Thee¹³ with such words as *The Lord is my strength and song* (Ex. 15:2). But I, I am not like them. Even though

Thou hast not yet redeemed me, I ascribe strength unto Thee. For I say, *Thou art the God of my strength*. Then *why hast Thou cast me off?*—I not only ascribe strength unto Thee, but I say, *O Lord, my Strength and my Stronghold* (Jer. 16:19). Then *Why go I mourning under the oppression of the enemy?* (Ps. 43:2). For from what¹⁴ didst Thou redeem our fathers in Egypt? Was it not from the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppressed them, of which God said: *Moreover, I have seen the oppression* (Ex. 3:9)? For me, too, life is nothing but oppression by an enemy. Then *Why must I go about by myself mourning under the oppression of the enemy?* Didst Thou not send redemption at the hand of two redeemers to that generation, as is said *He sent Moses His servant, and Aaron whom He had chosen* (Ps. 105:26)? Send two redeemers like them to this generation. *O send out Thy light and Thy truth; let them lead me* (Ps. 43:3), *Thy light* being the prophet Elijah of the house of Aaron, of which it is written "The seven lamps shall give light in front of the candlestick" (Num. 8:2); and *Thy truth* being the Messiah, son of David, as is written "The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; He will not turn from it: of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne" (Ps. 132:11). Likewise Scripture says, *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet* (Mal. 3:23) who is one redeemer, and speaks of the second redeemer in the verse *Behold My servant whom I uphold* (Isa. 42:1). Hence *O send out Thy light and Thy truth*.

Let them lead me. Let them bring me unto Thy holy mountain, and to Thy dwelling-places (Ps. 43:3): even as it is written elsewhere about the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt, *Thou wilt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance* (Ex. 15:17), so, in the age-to-come, they will go up Thy holy mountain and to Thy dwelling-places, as it is said *Then will I go unto the altar of God* (Ps. 43:4).

Wherewith shall I come into Thy house? *With burnt-offerings I will pay Thee my vows* (Ps. 66:13). And what am I to do? Give thanks unto Thee. Even so Asaph said: *So we Thy people and sheep of Thy pasture will give Thee thanks for ever; we will tell of Thy praise to all generations* (Ps. 79:13).

PSALM FORTY-FOUR

1. *For the leader; a Psalm of the sons of Korah. Maschil. O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in the times of old* (Ps. 44:1-2). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *He . . . led them by the right hand of Moses with His glorious arm . . . to make Himself an everlasting name* (Isa. 63:12). From this you learn that when the children of Israel went forth from Egypt, they could not offer any works of their hands whereby¹ they might be redeemed. And so, not because of the works of their fathers,² and not because of their own works, was the sea rent before them, but only that God might make Himself a name in the world. As the next verse says, *As the cattle that go down into the valley, the spirit of the Lord caused them to rest; so didst Thou lead Thy people, to make Thyself a glorious name* (*ibid.* 63:14). When the children of Israel were redeemed from Egypt, Moses said: Not because of your works are you redeemed, but only *That thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son* (Ex. 10:2), that is, only that thou mayest give the Holy One, blessed be He, the glory of having His children declare His praise among the nations. Hence it is said *O sing unto the Lord a new song . . . Declare His glory among the nations* (Ps. 96:1, 3). And what is His glory? That His children declare His glory among the nations. Therefore it is said *Declare His glory among the nations*; and so too the sons of Korah said: *O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us.*

But did not the sons of Korah themselves go out of Egypt, as is said *The sons of Korah: Assir, and Elkanah, and Abiasaph* (Ex. 6:24)? Then why did they say: *We have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us*? Because they prophesied concerning present generations, who say to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, Thou didst wonders for our fathers, wilt Thou not do them for us?

Thus the next verse *Thou didst a deed . . . in the days of old* (Ps. 44:2) means that the present generations say: "What a work didst Thou perform in bringing them forth out of Egypt and

dividing the sea for them! But Thou hast not done the like for us!" As Scripture says, *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us* (Ps. 115:1): Thou didst it for them, but not for us. What does it profit us what Thou didst for our fathers? When shall the profit be ours? When Thou wilt work a good sign for us, as is said *Work in my behalf a sign for good* (Ps. 86:17).

Thou didst a great work for former generations in the days of Abraham. And what was the great work? *The night itself contended against them*³ (Gen. 14:15). Thou didst a great work for Abraham's children also. Thou didst show favor unto them, but Thou showest no favor unto us; as Scripture says, *Lord, Thou hast been favorable unto Thy land . . . Show us Thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us Thy salvation* (Ps. 85:2, 8). For when the children of Israel went forth out of Egypt, they entered into the land, not by their own might, and got possession of it, not by their own strength, but because *Thou with Thy hand didst drive out the nations* (Ps. 44:3). Should you say it was by their own works⁴ which were good, note that Scripture says, *And I said unto their children in the wilderness: Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers*, etc. (Ezek. 20:18), and also says, *I said unto them: Cast ye away every man the detestable things of his eyes* (Ezek. 20:7). And lest you should say it was by their swords, note that Scripture says, *For they got not the land in possession by their own sword* (Ps. 44:4), and concludes *But by Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou wast favorable unto them* (*ibid.*), for God went before them by day. Thou wast favorable unto them, but Thou art not favorable unto us.

God said: "Indeed, I shall be favorable unto you also." And of this the sons of Korah were to say, *Lord, Thou hast been favorable unto Thy land; Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob* (Ps. 85:2).

2. *For our soul is bowed down to the dust* (Ps. 44:26). According to R. Isaac, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham: *I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth* (Gen. 13:16); and He continued, *Arise, walk through the land in the length of*

it, and in the breadth of it; for unto thee will I give it (ibid. 13:17); therefore Scripture, after saying *Our soul is bowed down to the dust*, continues with the words *Arise for our help, and redeem us for Thy mercy's sake*—that is, “If we have good works, redeem us, but if we do not have good works, redeem us for Thy name's sake,” as is said *redeem us for Thy mercy's sake* (Ps. 44:27).

R. Berechiah said: When the kingdom [of Israel] is so far fallen that it is become like dust, look, as from a watch tower, for deliverance.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: “Make your good works blossom like the lily, and I shall redeem you forthwith.” And what follows at once is *For Him who gives victory because of lilies (Shoshannim)* ⁶ (Ps. 45:1).

PSALM FORTY-FIVE

1. *For the leader; upon Shoshannim, the sons of Korah. Maschil. A song of loves* (Ps. 45:1). The word *Shoshannim* is to be considered in the light of the verse *My Beloved is gone down to His garden . . . to gather lilies (shoshannim)* (Song 6:2). When lilies in the garden are not recognized, whoever sees them says that they are thorns. Why? Because they grow among thorns. And what becomes of thorns? They go into the fire, as is said *As thorns cut down, shall they be burned in the fire* (Isa. 33:12); and also *If fire go forth, and catch in thorns* (Ex. 22:5); and again *And fire came forth from the Lord, and devoured the two hundred and fifty men that offered the incense* (Num. 16:35). But the sons of Korah, who were lilies, were gathered from among the thorns, that they might not be consumed with the thorns: the Holy One, blessed be He, came down swiftly and saved them.

A parable of a king who entered a city: when the men of the city came forth to crown the king with a crown of gold studded with precious stones and pearls, they were met and told: "The king requires nothing from you except a crown of lilies." Forthwith, the men of the city rejoiced. So it was with Korah¹ and his assembly. They said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, requires of you censers of gold," but the Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "What good are censers of gold to Me? *Mine is the silver, and mine the gold!* (Haggai 2:8). And so, too, the incense—*Incense is an abomination unto Me* (Isa. 1:13). But what do I require? Lilies!" Thereupon the sons of Korah said: "We are lilies." The Holy One, blessed be He, answered: "You will be victorious," as is said *For Him who gives victory*² *to the sons of Korah because they are Shoshannim* (Ps. 45:1).

2. *For the leader; a Psalm of the sons of Korah. Maschil, A song of loves* (Ps. 45:1). This Psalm is introduced by three words, "Leadership," "Maschil," and "Song," to stand for the three sons of Korah. Because they were three, they sang three songs.³ By *Of loves* (*yēḏidōt*) is meant that the Holy One, blessed be He,

said of the three sons of Korah: "The songs of each, of every one of them, is beloved of Me."

Whence do we know that Moses and Aaron and all the great ones assembled to hear the song of the sons of Korah? Because in the words *For the leader; upon Shoshannim, the sons of Korah. Maschil, a song for yědidoṭ* ("the beloved"), the word *yědidoṭ*, being plural, implies that those beloved of the Holy One, blessed be He, were there assembled. Hence *A song for the beloved*. The word *Maschil* ("he who is instructed") means that His beloved were instructed on how to chant before the Holy One, blessed be He, for it is said *When all thy children are instructed by the Lord, then the peace of thy children shall be great* (Isa. 54:13).

3. Another comment on *For the leader; upon Shoshannim* ("lilies"). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall blossom as the lily* (Hos. 14:6). This verse speaks of the time-to-come. For as the dew harms no creature, so the glory of the Presence shall fill the righteous in the time-to-come and they will not be harmed, as is said *In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore* (Ps. 16:11).

The children of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the universe, when wilt Thou redeem us?" and He answered: "When you have gone down to the very bottom of the pit, in that hour, I shall redeem you, as is said *The children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together . . . and shall rise up from the earth*" (Hos. 2:2). So, too, the sons of Korah said: We are at the very bottom of the pit, as it is said *For our soul is sunk deep in the dust* (Ps. 24:26); and what did they go on to say? *Arise for our help* (*ibid.* 24:27). The Holy One, blessed be He, answered: Your help shall be all your own. As the lily blossoms when its heart is turned upward, so will you when you repent before Me. Let your heart be directed upward like the lily, and in that hour I shall bring the deliverer: *I shall be as the dew unto Israel, when he blossoms as the lily*—that is,

when Israel blossoms as the lily. Hence it is said *For Him who gives victory because of lilies.*

4. The verse *My heart overfloweth with a goodly matter* (Ps. 45:2) is meant to teach you that even when men are unable to confess with their mouths, but their hearts are overflowing with repentance, the Holy One, blessed be He, receives them.

Note that when Scripture says, *And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a whole heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imagings of the thoughts* (1 Chron. 28:9),⁴ it does not say, "all the thoughts," but *all the imagings of the thoughts*. What is meant by *all the imagings of the thoughts*? That even before a man shapes a thought in his heart, the Holy One, blessed be He, understands it.

Indeed, the sons of Korah could not utter a song with their mouths before the Holy One, blessed be He. But when their hearts overflowed with repentance, forthwith God received them. And why could not the sons of Korah utter a song? Because the pit was open beneath them, and a fire burned about them. As Scripture says, *And the earth opened up her mouth . . . So they and all that appertained to them went down alive into the pit* (Num. 16:32-33); and again says, *A fire came forth from the Lord, and devoured the two hundred and fifty men* (ibid. 16:35); and also, *The earth . . . swallowed them up* (ibid. 16:32); and again, *A fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked* (Ps. 106:18). Thus, when the sons of Korah saw the pit open beneath them on one side, and the fire burning on the other side, in that instant, though they could not confess with their mouths, yet their hearts overflowed with repentance.

But were they not three? Why, then, does Scripture say, *My heart overfloweth*, as if there were only one? By this Scripture means to teach you that whatever one intended in his heart, the others also intended in their hearts, for the three of them were of like heart.

My heart overfloweth with a goodly matter; I utter my songs

to the King (Ps. 45:2). But if the heart overflow, what need for speech? And if speech be enough, why should the overflowing heart be mentioned? This is what the sons of Korah said, however: If our hearts overflow, it is the same as uttering our songs to the King, the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He. Hence they said: *I utter my songs to the king.*

Another explanation: *My heart overfloweth* with prophecy. For the sons of Korah prophesied the future. Thus, when Hannah said, *The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up* (1 Sam. 2:6), she was referring to the sons of Korah who went down until their feet touched the bottom of the pit, and after their feet had touched the bottom of the pit, they came up forthwith. Hence Hannah said: *He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.*

5. Another comment on *For the leader; upon Shoshannim* ("lilies") (Ps. 45:1) by way of a parable: A Roman lady who saw three men being taken out to be crucified, redeemed them forthwith. After some days she saw that they had been made ensigns and were carrying the royal standards. So it was with the sons of Korah who followed their father's ways; the earth swallowed Korah, but his sons, who repented, were made prophets, Shoshannim.

My heart overfloweth with a goodly matter. A parable of a man who, desiring to come up to the judge's bench, took a piece of blank paper and handed it to the judge. When the judge said to him, "But thou hast written nothing on this paper!" the man replied: "I had no time!" Just so, the sons of Korah had no time to speak with their lips; so they spoke with their hearts.

I utter my songs to the King (Ps. 45:2). A parable of a man who was going up to the judge's bench. His creditor spied him and said: "Give me what thou owest me"; and the man answered: "After I come down from the bench, I will give it to thee." Just so, the sons of Korah said: We had no time to utter a song to Thee. But now that we have time: *I utter my songs to the King.*

6. *Thou art fairer than the children of earth* (Ps. 45:3) alludes to the sons of Korah whose deeds were fairer than those of Korah and his assembly; therefore it is said *Grace is poured upon thy lips*, for the sons of Korah were thought worthy of uttering a song and also thought worthy of uttering prophecy.

Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty (Ps. 45:4) alludes to Moses who was thought worthy of Torah, which is likened to a sword. And *In thy majesty ride prosperously* (*ibid.* 45:5) also alludes to Moses, who went up to heaven riding on a cloud. By virtue of what? *By virtue of the truth and meekness and righteousness* which he had, as is said "Now the man Moses was very meek" (Num. 12:3). *Thine arrows are sharp* (Ps. 45:6) alludes to Moses who fought against Amalek, Sihon, and Og. And *thy throne given of God is for ever and ever* (*ibid.*) also alludes to Moses who is described as "The hand upon the throne of the Lord" (Ex. 17:16). And *Thou hast loved righteousness* (Ps. 45:8) alludes to Moses, of whom it is said "He executed the righteousness of the Lord" (Deut. 33:21).

The verse *Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness* (Ps. 45:8) alludes to Aaron. For in the next verse, *myrrh and aloes* (Ps. 45:9) alludes to the incense of spices; and *Cassia are all thy garments* alludes to the garments of priesthood.

Out of ivory palaces (*ibid.*) speaks of Solomon, of whom it is said "Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory" (1 Kings 10:18). The words *Minni⁵ have made thee glad* also allude to Solomon, whom distant kingdoms such as "Minni and Ashkenaz" (Jer. 51:27) made glad. The words *Kings' daughters are among thy visitors* (Ps. 45:10) allude to Solomon of whom it is said "All the earth sought the presence of Solomon" (1 Kings 10:24).

At thy right hand [Torah] stands as the paramour (Ps. 45:10). Because Torah is beloved by the children of Israel, while a paramour is beloved by the children of the earth, therefore the children of Israel were thought worthy of *the gold of Ophir*.

The verses beginning *Hearken, O daughter, and consider* (*ibid.* 45:11), to the end of the Psalm are spoken to the congregation of Israel.

7. *As [numerous as] thy fathers shall be thy children* (Ps. 45:17). R. Eleazar ben R. Jose the Galilean taught: There will come a time when every man in Israel will beget as many children as the number of Israel who went out of Egypt, for it is said *As [numerous as] thy fathers shall be thy children*. And how many were thy fathers when they went forth out of Egypt? Sixty myriads!

Of this, R. Abbahu said: Do not be astonished, for on a long day, the woodcock lays two eggs, and on a short day, it lays one egg. Of this it is written *For as the days of a tree shall be the days of My people* (Isa. 65:22).

PSALM FORTY-SIX

1. *For the leader; of the sons of Korah; upon Alamothe. A song* (Ps. 46:1). The word *Alamothe* ("hidden things") is to be considered in the light of the verse *Who doeth great things past finding out; yea, marvellous things that cannot be told* (Job 9:10). No man can tell the great things and marvellous works of the Holy One, blessed be He. And so, in *To Him who alone doeth great wonders* (Ps. 136:4), what can *alone* imply except that God alone knows what He does for thee? Even so the sons of Korah said *Upon Alamothe. A song*: The things we saw are hidden, and we did not understand what we saw.

In another comment, the phrase *Upon Alamothe* is read *Upon worlds*, and is taken to mean that the sons of Korah said: "We have seen two worlds: the world of the righteous and the world of the wicked." For their eyes had seen the punishment of those who trusted in their wealth and in their riches, of whom it is said *They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches* (Ps. 49:7): In the hour of punishment what can such men do? Their riches will not sustain them, as Scripture says, *Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them* (Zeph. 1:18).

Nor will it help a man to say: "My father was worthy: Behold, I shall be delivered because of him. My brother was righteous: He will be the cause of my rescue." Even Abraham could not deliver Ishmael, and Jacob could not deliver Esau, for Scripture says '*Oh, no man can by any means redeem*' (Ps. 49:8). And how is the word '*Oh*' to be interpreted? On the day that he sees his son or his brother punished in Gehenna, the righteous man exclaims: "Alas ('*Oh*!') How hard is this day!" for he cannot deliver him. Hence *Alas, no man can by any means redeem. For too costly is the redemption of their soul* (Ps. 49:9). The righteous ask the Holy One, blessed be He: "Why is it so costly?" and the Holy One, blessed be He, replies: "Have I not said 'Take your God while He is to be had cheaply?' I am He who said *Take thou no ransom* (Ex. 23:8), but I am also He who said: Give Me a ransom, and I shall take it from you, as is said *He taketh*

a ransom from the bosom of the wicked (Prov. 17:23).¹ Had the wicked² given it to Me during their life I would have taken it, but now I shall not take it." Hence it is said *For too costly is the redemption of their soul, and must be let alone for ever* (*ibid.*). The last words mean that the chance of redemption ceases when they die, ceases not for a day, nor for a year, but ceases for ever.

Even if a man should live for ever will he not see the pit? (Ps. 49:10). What was the place where the sons of Korah went? It was the nether-world. [Thus they came to know that the wicked] *like sheep are appointed for the nether-world and that death is their shepherd, and that the upright go down among them in the morning* (Ps. 49:15).³ What is meant by the phrase *in the morning* (*boker*)? That in the morning the righteous go down to visit (*bakker*) the wicked. The sons of Korah were asked: "What do the righteous do there?" and they answered: The righteous sing the song *God is our refuge and help* (Ps. 46:2), as if to say, God is a very present help to us in every trouble that comes upon us. For if a mortal king be petitioned: "Help me in my trouble," he will not know what to do until the man comes near him. Not so the Holy One, blessed be He. He is *A very present help in trouble*, for He is near to us at every trouble that comes upon us. As God says, *I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and bring him to honor* (Ps. 91:15).

2. *Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be shaken into the heart of the seas* (Ps. 46:3). The sons of Korah said: Fear not on the day when the Holy One, blessed be He, will shake the wicked out of the earth,⁴ as is said *To take hold of the ends of the earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of it* (Job 38:13), and also *For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth* (Isa. 65:17).

On that day where will the righteous stand? They will cleave to the throne of glory which is under the wings of the Presence, as is said *But ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day* (Deut. 4:4).

3. *The waters thereof roar and foam* (Ps. 46:4)—that is, on

the day of judgment the waters of the great deep will roar, and the wicked in God's wrath shall be whirled about as is meat in a pot. *The river of the city of God—its streams make glad* (Ps. 46:5), for it is said "Waters of life shall go forth from Jerusalem" (Zech. 14:8). *God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved* (Ps. 46:6). From these words we learn that the whole world will be shaken and changed, but Jerusalem will stand fast. *God shall help her, when the morning appeareth* (Ps. 46:6)—that is, when [Israel's] twilight will be made as the dawn. The verse *The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved, He uttered His voice, the earth melted* (Ps. 46:7) describes the judgment of the wicked.

The Lord of hosts is with us (*ibid.* 46:8). The sons of Korah said to the righteous: "Fear not. We saw all the miracles which He wrought for us," as is said *And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households* (Num. 16:32). "And where were we in that hour? Aloft in space," as is written *The sons of Korah died not* (Num. 26:11). According to R. Nehemiah, at the time the earth opened and the two hundred and fifty men were swallowed up, the Holy One, blessed be He, made it possible for the sons of Korah to stand like a mast: They stood as a sign, for it is said *What time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men, they became a sign* (*ibid.* 26:10).⁵ Thus the sons of Korah said: "Ye righteous, fear not the terror of the day of judgment, for ye will not be taken with the wicked, even as we were not taken with them." Hence it is said, *Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed* (Ps. 46:3), and also it is said *For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee* (Isa. 54:10).

PSALM FORTY-SEVEN

1. *For the leader; a Psalm of the sons of Korah. O clap your hands, all ye people* (Ps. 47:1-2). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *When the righteous are increased, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people sigh* (Prov. 29:2). When the wicked rule in the world, all men sigh and all are distressed, and no man walks about with his head up. As Solomon says: *When the wicked rise, men hide themselves; but when they perish, the righteous increase* (Prov. 28:28).

Grievous for the Holy One, blessed be He, is the day when He gives power to one man to rule over another to the other's hurt. Therefore Scripture says, *What time one man had power over another is to His hurt* (Eccles. 8:9), and also says, *Behold, it is harsh and bitter for the Lord, as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, when He causes the earth to lie under a hand* (Isa. 28:2). What can *under a hand* mean except under the hand of a man who has power over one like himself?

It is said *O, clap your hands*. Why? Because *The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, the sceptre of the rulers, that smote the peoples in wrath . . . The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet* (Isa. 14:5, 6, 7): as Scripture says, *All that hear the report of thee clap the hands over thee* (Nahum 3:19). For the Holy One, blessed be He, will do away with the dominion of mortals over you, as it is said *The Lord most high is terrible; He is a great king over all the earth* (Ps. 47:3).

2. *He shall subdue the peoples under us, and the nations under our feet* (Ps. 47:4). When? When *He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob*¹ (*ibid.* 47:5).

Another comment: When will God choose us and give us our inheritance? When *God will sit upon the throne of His holiness* (*ibid.* 47:9). As Scripture says, *I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen . . . in that day* (Haggai 2:22). And as Daniel says: *I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of*

days did sit (Dan. 7:9). When will God sit? When *saviors shall come up on Mount Zion . . . and the kingdom shall be the Lord's* (Ob. 1:21).

R. Judah bar Naḥman said in the name of R. Simeon ben Lakish: When the Holy One, blessed be He, rises up for judgment and sits on the throne of judgment, and the Shofar is blown, He turns the measure of justice again and again into the measure of mercy. [In wrath] He rises up for judgment. But as the sound of the Shofar rises up *in a blast, at the sound of the Shofar He becomes Lord [of mercy]*² (Ps. 47:6), and deals mercifully, for the term *Lord* connotes mercy, as in *The Lord, the Lord . . . merciful and gracious* (Ex. 34:6).

PSALM FORTY-EIGHT

1. *A song; a Psalm of the sons of Korah. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, His holy mountain* (Ps. 48:1-2). The ministering angels said: *From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My name shall be great among the nations* (Mal. 1:11); and the sons of Korah said: *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, His holy mountain*. Does this mean that our God is great only in His city? No—the sons of Korah really meant: “Great is the Lord because of what He has done in His city and in His sanctuary.” So, too, Scripture says, *The Lord is great in Zion; and He is high above all the peoples* (Ps. 99:2)—that is, If He has done such a thing to His city, how much more will He do to the peoples of the earth, for it is said, *Lo, I begin to bring evil on the city, upon which My name is called, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished; for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the Lord of hosts* (Jer. 25:29). And so the sons of Korah really meant: *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, because of the city of our God, because of His holy mountain*.

2. *Beautiful, declared beautiful, the joy of the whole earth—Mount Zion* (Ps. 48:3). Why is it said *Beautiful, declared beautiful*? By this phrase the sons of Korah meant: Beautiful, because all men declare it beautiful; beautiful, because there is none like it. Though Scripture declares of Tyre, *Thou, O Tyre, hast said: I am of perfect beauty* (Ezek. 27:3), the words indicate only that the city of Tyre said this of herself, not that others said this of her. The common saying is: One is not what one's mother says, but what one's neighbors say. Not so of Zion; all men admit her beauty: Even when she lay in ruins, it was said *Is not this the city which men call the perfection of beauty* (Lam. 2:15). Nay more, they call it *The joy of the whole earth* (*ibid.*). Hence the sons of Korah said: *Beautiful, declared beautiful, the joy of the whole earth—Mount Zion*.

Why was Mount Zion a joy? Because it made the whole earth joyful. Thus if a man committed a sin, and was troubled in his

heart so that his heart was bowed down in him—as Solomon said *Care in the heart of a man boweth it down. But a good thing maketh it glad* (Prov. 12:25)—he would go up to Jerusalem and there make an offering, so that his sin would be forgiven him, and his heart would rejoice, and he would go forth glad of heart from the city. Hence it is said *The joy of the whole earth—Mount Zion*.

You can see for yourself that this was true of his offering, for Mount Zion is described as being *on the sides of the north* (Ps. 48:3). But was Mount Zion in the north [of Jerusalem]? ¹ Was it not in the south? *On the sides of the north*, however, means that a man would stand and offer up his sin-offering on the north side of the altar, and it would be killed on the north side of the altar, as is said *He shall kill it on the side of the altar northward* (Lev. 1:11).

What does *great* connote in the phrase *The city of the great King* (Ps. 48:3)? The King is great because He has ordained such things for His own city. He has ordained such things for this world, but in the world-to-come *God Himself will be known in her palaces as a protection* (*ibid.* 48:4). What is meant by the phrase *in her palaces*? In her chambers. For as the guards in a city do, going about at night from door to door, so the Holy One, blessed be He, will do in the age-to-come, protecting each and every chamber. Hence it is said *God Himself will be known in her palaces*.

3. The verses *For, lo, the kings assembled themselves, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away* (Ps. 48:5-6) refer to the time when Jerusalem was destroyed. *They passed by together* (*ibid.*) means that the kings passed by together to destroy Jerusalem, for it is said "And many nations shall pass by this city" (Jer. 22:8). *And . . . they marvelled* means that they marvelled at its destruction, as is written "They shall say every man to his neighbor: Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this great city?" (Jer. 22:8). Hence it is said *They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away* (Ps. 48:6).

4. *Walk about Zion, and go round about her; number the towers thereof; mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following* (Ps. 48:13-14). R. Nahman said: *The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be* (Eccles. 1:9). Even as the Holy One, blessed be He, lifted up the children of Israel in clouds of glory, and wrapped them around and bore them up, as it is said *And I bore you on eagles' wings* (Ex. 19:4), so will He do again, and it will be said *Who are these that fly as a cloud?* (Isa. 60:8).

Number the towers thereof, etc. (Ps. 48:13). How many gardens will there be in Jerusalem? Eleven hundred and eighty-four. How many towers will there be in Jerusalem? Fourteen hundred and eighty-five. How many mansions will there be in Jerusalem? Fourteen hundred and ninety-six. How many fountains? Sixteen hundred and seventy-six. And whence will the waters of the fountains come up? From nine hundred aqueducts.

Again, R. Nahman said: *The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be* (Eccles. 1:9). Even as the children of Israel in the wilderness, sang a song, and the well sprang up for them, as is said *Then sang Israel this song: Spring up, O well—sing ye unto it* (Num. 21:17), so they will sing a song in the time-to-come, and the waters will spring up for them, as is said *As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there: all my springs are in thee* (Ps. 87:7).

How many pools will there be in Jerusalem? Thirteen hundred and sixty-nine.² And how many gates will there be? One hundred and forty-four—twelve for each tribe. Hence it is said *Walk about Zion, and go round about her; NUMBER the towers thereof*, etc.

5. *Mark ye well her hel:*³ mark ye her troops (*helot*) which will have come to her out of exile. Or, mark ye her dance (*hol*) which she will dance. Or, mark ye her song (*hil*), as in the verse "See, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to sing (*hul*) the songs" (Judg. 21:21).

*Passēgu*⁴ her palaces: "Build high the palaces of her inhabitants." Here *passēgu* comes from the same stem as *Pisgah* in the

verse *Get thee up into the top of Pisgah* (Deut. 3:27), a word rendered "height" in the Aramaic Targum.

What is meant by the words *For this God is our God* (Ps. 48:15)? R. Berechiah, R. Helbo, and R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Jose bar H̄anina: In the time-to-come the Holy One, blessed be He, will prepare a dance for the righteous, and the Holy One Himself, blessed be He, will dance with them, and the righteous shall point Him out with their fingers, for *It shall be said in that day: "Lo, THIS is our God"* (Isa. 25:9). Hence it is said *THIS God is our God*.

He will guide us through worlds (Ps. 48:15), that is to say, through two worlds. And all the peoples will hear of the miracles⁶ which the Holy One, blessed be He, works for Israel, as is said *Hear this, all ye peoples; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the earth* (Ps. 49:2).

PSALM FORTY-NINE

1. *For the leader; a Psalm of the sons of Korah. Hear this, all ye peoples* (Ps. 49:1). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun* (Eccles. 11:7). R. Isaac and R. Abba bar Kahana differed in their comments on this verse. R. Isaac said: "How sweet is the light of the world-to-come. Blessed is the man of good deeds, for he will see that light, as it is said *They that love Him are as the sun when he goeth forth in his might*" (Judg. 5:31). But R. Abba bar Kahana said: "How sweet are the words of Torah which is like light, as it is said *The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light*" (Prov. 6:23). Blessed is the man who sees the Halaḥah glistening like snow. And why blessed? Because there is no end of reward for the study of Torah. Again and again the Holy One, blessed be He, returns to reward the children of Israel because they labored diligently at Torah, giving them for their labor abundance in the world-to-come. In that time Israel will say to the nations of the earth: We merit this reward because we were diligent in the study of Torah. What did you use to say to us? "You labor in vain!" But now see how great is the reward given for study of Torah. See how many good things are done for us on its account, for in *Hear this, all ye peoples*, the word *this* clearly refers to Torah as in the verse *This is the Torah* (Deut. 4:44).

Give ear, all ye inhabitants of heled (Ps. 49:2): *heled* means "the world." And why is the world called *heled*? Because in the time-to-come the corrosion (*hāludah*) of the wicked will show on their faces.¹

2. *Both the sons of [a great] man, and the sons of [a righteous] man*² (Ps. 49:3). Who are meant by *the sons of [a great] man*? The sons of Abraham, of whom it is written "the great man among the Anakim" (Josh. 14:15). The word *both* is meant to include the sons of Ishmael and the sons of Keturah. *The sons of [a righteous] man* are the sons of Noah, of whom it is written

"Noah was a righteous man" (Gen. 6:9). Or the phrase refers to the seventy nations which will go down to Gehenna.³

The words at the end of the verse, *Rich and poor together* (Ps. 49:3), mean that he who is rich in Torah and he who is poor in Torah may alike go down to Gehenna. For "He who is rich in Torah" refers to such as Doeg and Ahithophel. Although they were heads of the Sanhedrin, yet because they kept not the Torah, they fell from their greatness and went down into Gehenna. "He who is poor in Torah" refers to any man who had in hand the opportunity to study, but did not.

Therefore the sons of Korah said: Since such is the requital for neglect of Torah, we shall be diligent in the study of Torah.

3. *My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart shall be understanding* (Ps. 49:4). Here *wisdom* and *understanding* have the same force as in the words "For this is your wisdom and your understanding" (Deut. 4:6).

I will incline mine ear to a parable (Ps. 49:5)—to the parables of Torah. *I will open my dark saying upon the harp* (*ibid.*): I will explain it in the songs the Levites sang during their watches in the Temple. *Wherefore shall I fear in the days of evil? Because the iniquity of my heels compasses me about* (Ps. 49:6). The congregation of Israel said: Why shall I be afraid on the days of evil, that is, on the day of judgment? Because of the iniquity of my heels which I directed into the ways of transgression that now compass me about.

They that trust in their wealth (Ps. 49:7) is to be interpreted as in the commentary on Psalm 46.⁴

Another comment: The words *They that trust in their wealth* allude to Korah and his assembly. *'Oh, it shall surely not redeem a man* (*ibid.* 8): What did their wealth avail them, for they could not redeem themselves with it? *'Oh!*—"Alas, for them who went down alive into the pit!—they and all that was theirs."

Their soul would have been made precious [by] redemption (Ps. 49:9): Had Korah and his assembly repented, their souls would have been precious in the eyes of the Holy One, blessed be He, and *He would have forborne* (*ibid.*) to punish them, and

they would have inherited *the world* (*ibid.*), that is, the world-to-come. *And he would also have caused them to live for ever* (*ibid.* 10): they would have had their share in the resurrection of the dead.

Hence, said the Sages, the murmurers in the wilderness⁵ as well as the assembly of Korah have no share in the world-to-come.

For he seeth that wise men die (*ibid.* 11): such men as Dathan and Abiram who were wise—to do evil.

Another comment: *For he seeth that wise men die . . . and leave their wealth to others*. Such “wise” men were the murmurers in the wilderness who left their wealth to Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, and to Joshua, the son of Nun, for it is said “Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, remained alive of those men” (Num. 14:38). What is meant by the words “remained alive of those men”? That Joshua and Caleb sustained themselves from the portions of those men who died, for they inherited what was to have been allotted to them.

Kirbam (*Their inward thought is that*) *their houses* (Ps. 49:12). Do not read *kirbam*, “their inward thought,” but *kibram*, “their grave,” for it is said of Korah and of his men “The earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the assembly” (Num. 16:33). These words prove that Korah and his assembly will not enter into the world-to-come. And why not? Because *By their titles they proclaimed themselves above mankind*⁶ (Ps. 49:12), for it is said of them “They were the lofty ones of the congregation, self-proclaimed above the assembly, men of name”⁷ (Num. 16:2). *But man . . . abideth not in honor* (Ps. 49:13) alludes to Korah, who during all the time he was honored as head of all the children of Levi, did not keep to the way of the Lord. Therefore, his honor did not abide with him. *He is like the beasts* (*ibid.*), who have no understanding, hence are like a company of wicked men. *This is the way of them* (Ps. 49:14), of wicked men who put their confidence and their trust in their wealth, and of whom, after they perish, the children of men say,

"Woe unto them, unto the wicked, for such and such a thing came upon them."

They who set death as though [Israel] were sheep will go down to the nether-world (Ps. 49:15):⁸ The nations of the earth who slaughtered Israel like sheep—to set death upon them was to hallow the Name—shall go down to the nether-world. *But in the morning the upright will have dominion over them and rule them:*⁹ When the twilight of Israel will have been made dawn, the upright shall rule the nations of the earth.¹⁰

*And their form shall outlast the nether-world, because of the habitation which is His*¹¹ (Ps. 49:15): Gehenna will wear away, but the wicked of the nations will not wear away. And why not? Because they laid their hands upon the Temple, His habitation.

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the nether-world (Ps. 49:16) because we, [the sons of Korah], were not in the counsel of Korah. *He shall receive me for ever* (*ibid.*) alludes to the words "They became a sign" (Num. 26:10), which prove that God made it possible for them to stay aloft in space.

Be not afraid when one is made rich (Ps. 49:17), as Korah was.

Though while he lived, he blessed his soul (Ps. 49:19). Though Aaron blessed Korah's soul, nevertheless when *It shall go to the generation of his fathers, [it and] they shall never see the light* (Ps. 49:20): meaning that Korah and his assembly will have no portion in the world-to-come. And why not? Because Korah, who lived in honor, had not understanding and so he perished.

PSALM FIFTY

1. *A Psalm of Asaph, God, God, the Lord, He hath spoken and He called the earth [into being]* (Ps. 50:1). The heretics asked R. Simlai: What is meant by the words *God, God, the Lord, He hath spoken?*¹ R. Simlai answered: Scripture does not say here "They have spoken," or "they called," but *He hath spoken*, and *He called*. Later, his disciples said to him: "Master, thou hast put them off with a broken reed of an answer. But what answer wilt thou give us?" He said to them: His three names are one, as a man may say: "Artisan, builder, and architect." And why did Scripture here mention three times the name of the Holy One, blessed be He? To teach that the Holy One, blessed be He, created His universe by three names that stand for the three goodly attributes of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge: by these the world was created, as is said *The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens. By His knowledge the depths were broken up* (Prov. 3:19-20).

The Tent of Meeting and the Tabernacle were also built to stand for these three attributes: as God said, *I have filled him [Bezalel] with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge* (Ex. 31:3).

So, too, the name of God is repeated three times in the verse *For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire, a jealous God* (Deut. 4:24). And again in the verse *The children of Gad said: God, God, the Lord, God, God, the Lord, He knoweth* (Josh. 22:22). Why does the phrase *God, God, the Lord* occur twice here? Once to stand for the three attributes by which the world was created; and once again to stand for the three attributes whereby the Torah was given, as is said *For I am the Lord, thy God, a jealous God* (Deut. 5:9).

Hence, it is said *God, God, the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth [into being]*.

You might think that the earth was called into being separately and the heaven separately. But no—the two were called into being together, as is said *Yea, My hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand hath spread out the heavens;*

when I call them [into being], they stand up together (Isa. 48:13).

God, God, the Lord . . . called the earth [into being] from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof (Ps. 50:1). When a mortal forms a figure, he either begins with its head and finishes with its foot, or begins with its foot and finishes with its head. Not so the Holy One, blessed be He. When God formed man, he formed him all at once: As Scripture says *He is One who forms all [at once]* (Jer. 10:16). Hence it is said *From the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof*.

And whence did God call the world into being? Out of Zion, for the verse *Out of Zion, the perfecting of beauty* (Ps. 50:2) refers to the perfecting of the beauty of the world. What is meant at the end of the verse by *shined forth*? It means that God gave light, for *God shined forth* clearly means His gift of light, as is said "God . . . caused the light of His cloud to shine forth" (Job 37:15). Whence the proof that this Psalm speaks of God's calling the world into being? Because the word *perfecting* is used in the Psalm, and it is said in the chapter on creation *The heaven and the earth were perfected and all the host of them* (Gen. 2:1).

And when God destroys the world, He will begin with Zion, as is said *I will make Jerusalem heaps* (Jer. 9:10), and thereafter, *The whole earth shall be desolate* (*ibid.* 4:27), and *The earth shall be desolate for them that dwell therein* (Micah 7:13). And when the Holy One, blessed be He, renews His world, He will renew it out of Zion, as is said *And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the first of the mountains* (Isa. 2:2).

2. *I do not reprove thee for thy sacrifices* (Ps. 50:8). R. Nahman taught in the name of R. Berechiah: If a man intends to do a righteous act, the Holy One, blessed be He, writes it down before Him [as if already done], for the verse goes on to say *thine up-soaring thoughts² are continuously before Me* (*ibid.*).

And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal . . . and a hundred sheep . . . For he had dominion over all the region (1 Kings

5:2-4a). R. Judah said: Solomon had a thousand wives, and all of them prepared banquets—every wife, every day—for each hoped that Solomon would dine with her. Solomon had *Besides, harts and gazelles and roebucks (ibid.)*.—Now wilt thou fetch up a burnt offering for Me [who have dominion over so much more than Solomon?] Hence *I do not reprove thee for thy sacrifices* (Ps. 50:8), [since they are all already Mine]. But for what do I reprove thee? For that *thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit* (Ps. 50:19).³

3. *When . . . thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit* (Ps. 50:19). When R. Jose ben Halafta was a boy and used to play with other boys, a man saw him and said to him: "Thy father should be told that [instead of studying thy lessons] thou playest with the boys." R. Jose answered: "As thou livest, what is it to thee? If thou tellest my father, he will strike me. Thus thou wilt accustom thy tongue to the speaking of slander." Hence *When . . . thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit . . . thou wilt slander thine own mother's son*.

He who offereth thanks glorifieth Me (Ps. 50:23). A thank-offering is dearer to God than all other offerings, for these are brought only because of transgressions. Thus in Job you find it said *Job . . . offered burnt-offerings . . . for Job said: "It may be that my sons have sinned"* (Job 1:5). But the thank-offering is brought freely. Thus Scripture says, *Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice* (1 Sam. 15:22), and also *Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; mine ears hast Thou opened* (Ps. 40:7). *Glorifieth Me* (Ps. 50:23)—glorifies Me in this world as well as in the world-to-come.⁴

To him that prepareth a way (Ps. 50:23)—to such as those who light lanterns in dark entrances—*I will show the deliverance of God (ibid.)*. After deliverance by a mortal enslavement can still follow, but after deliverance by the Holy One, blessed be He, there is no further enslavement. As Scripture says, *Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting deliverance; ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end* (Isa. 45:17).

PSALM FIFTY-ONE

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David; when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-sheba* (Ps. 51:1-2). These words are to be considered in the light of the verse *Death and life are in the power of the tongue* (Prov. 18:21)—that is, a man's tongue can bring him to dwell in the world-to-come. For what brought David into the world-to-come? The tongue in his mouth which said: "I have sinned," as is said *And David said unto Nathan: "I have sinned against the Lord"* (2 Sam. 12:13). David was in darkness, and the Holy One, blessed be He, kindled light for him, as David said: *Thou dost kindle my lamp* (Ps. 18:29).

Again, the verse *In the darkness shine a light because of upright deeds* (Ps. 112:4) means that David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: I beg Thee, look back upon the uprightness of this son of Israel—indeed the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Solomon: *If thou wilt walk in My ways . . . as thy father David did walk* (1 Kings 3:14)—and do not look back upon that hour when I stumbled before Thee. So, too, David said *Hide Thy face from my sin* (Ps. 51:11). As soon as Nathan said to David: *The Lord also hath put away thy sin* (2 Sam. 12:13), David thereat composed this Psalm *To Him who lets Himself be won over*,¹ *a Psalm of David; when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-sheba*.

2. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness* (Ps. 51:3). With whom may David be compared? With a man who had a wound on his hand and came to a physician. The physician said: "Thou canst not have treatment. The wound is large, but the money in thy hand is little." The man said: "I beg thee, take all the money that I have here, and as for the rest, let it come from thee. Have mercy upon me, have compassion upon me." So, too, David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness*. Thou art compassionate and *According to the multitude of Thy compassions blot out my transgressions* (*ibid.*); Thou hast already shown me much mercy. David also said: *Make passing great Thy*

mercies, O Thou that savest . . . them that take refuge in Thee (Ps. 17:7): healing comes from Thee. Because the wound is large, lay on a large poultice for me, as is said *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity* (Ps. 51:4).

Hence you learn that every man who commits a transgression is as unclean as though he had touched a dead body and must be purified with hyssop. So, too, David said: *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean* (Ps. 51:9). Did David actually fall into uncleanness? ² No, but into an iniquity whereby his soul was wounded unto death. Thus also in another Psalm, he said: *My heart is wounded unto death within me* (Ps. 109:22).

Hence you learn that every man who knows that he has sinned, and prays because of his sin, and is in fear because of it, and holds converse about it with the Holy One, blessed be He, him the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives. But of every man who sins and then tramples the sin under foot so as to get it out of his sight, of him the Holy One, blessed be He, demands requital. And the verse *Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil? Because the iniquity of my heels compasseth me about* (Ps. 49:6) refers to those who would with their heels trample their iniquity out of sight. But as the parable tells us, the scorpion who fells ³ the camel merely by stinging him in the heel says, "As thou livest, I shall come up to the crown of thy head." ⁴ Just so, every man who tries to get his iniquity out of his sight, him the Holy One, blessed be He, punishes; but every man who is afraid of it, him the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives. Hence, it is said *I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me* (Ps. 51:5).

3. *For Thee, Thee only, have I sinned . . . That Thou mayest be justified when Thou speakest* (Ps. 51:6). To whom may David be likened? To a man who broke a limb, and came to a physician. The physician marveled and said: "How great is thy break! I am much distressed on thy account." The man with the broken limb said: "Art thou distressed on my account? Was not my limb broken for thy sake, since the fee is to be thine?" Just so David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: *For Thee, Thee only, have I sinned*: Shouldst Thou receive me, then if Thou

sayest to transgressors "Wherefore have ye not repented?" all transgressors will submit to Thee, for all of them will behold me, and I shall surely bear witness that Thou receivest the penitent.

Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, said: *Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples* (Isa. 55:4). And God gave as a witness not only me, David, but all Israel, since it is said *Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, and My servant whom I have chosen* (Isa. 43:10).

PSALM FIFTY-TWO

1. *For the leader. Maschil of David; when Doeg came and told Saul: "David is come to the house of Ahimelech"*¹ (Ps. 52:1). These words are to be read in the light of the verse *Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt* (Eccles. 5:5).² R. Joshua ben Levi said: This verse speaks of men who pledge charity. *Suffer not thy mouth* to promise rashly that thou wilt give, and then, not give. *Neither say thou before the messenger:* that is, to the public messenger who comes and says to thee: "Give what thou didst pledge," say not, "*It was an error: I knew not what I said.*" *Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice,* with which thou didst proclaim that thou wouldst give, yet gavest not? *And destroy the work of thy hands:* the few former deeds of charity which were to thy credit, them thou dost destroy.

Another comment on *Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt*. R. Benjamin said: This verse refers to pretenders to learning. *Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice?* At the voice whereby thou moutheest thy pretensions to learning. *And destroy the work of thy hands:* that is, "Those few ideas of Torah at thy command—into them thou bringest confusion."

The Rabbis say: The words *Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt* are addressed to Miriam. As soon as she spoke against Moses, she became leprous, for it is said "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses" (Num. 12:1). And what happened to her? "And behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow" (*ibid.* 12:10). *Neither say thou before the messenger:* before Moses. *Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice,* the voice that Miriam let escape from her mouth against Moses the righteous. *And destroy the work of thy hands* (*ibid.*)—that is, destroy the merit of her timbrel-playing, of which it is said "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand" (Ex. 15:20).

A different comment: *Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt* (Eccles. 5:5) refers to slander, for with their mouths men make their flesh suffer guilt; because of what they let escape from their mouths, they are smitten with leprosy. *Neither say*

thou before the messenger (ibid. 5:5)—that is, [*Suffer not thy mouth to bring thee*] before the priest, who, it is said, “is a messenger of the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 2:7). For the leper must go to the priest, as is said “This shall be the law of the leper (*mēšora’*)”—that is, the *moš’ ra’*, “the man who utters slander”—“he shall be brought unto the priest” (Lev. 14:2). *Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice* refers to the voice which thou lettest escape from thy mouth when thou slanderest thy fellow. *And destroy the work of thy hands (ibid.)*: the little knowledge of Torah at thy command—that, thou destroyest. Who was such a slanderer? Doeg. When he slandered David, he became leprous, for it is said *God will likewise break thee for ever . . . and root thee out of the land of the living for ever* (Ps. 52:7). What else can *He will break thee* mean except that Doeg became leprous, just as it is said of a leprous house,³ *He shall break the house* (Lev. 14:45). And what caused his leprosy? The cause of it was that he slandered David, as is said *When Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said unto him: “David is come to the house of Ahimelech.”*

2. Another comment. The words *When Doeg the Edomite came*, etc., are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Death and life are in the power of the tongue* (Prov. 18:21)—everything depends on the tongue. If a man desires to speak with an evil tongue, he speaks; if a man desires to speak with a good tongue, he speaks. Say not: “Because power was given to my tongue, behold, I shall say what I want to!” For the Torah long ago admonished *Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile* (Ps. 34:14). To your loss, you may say. God forbid! To your profit, for the Holy Spirit proclaims: *Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles* (Prov. 21:23).

Another comment on *Death and life are in the power of the tongue* (Prov. 18:21). Consider how vicious slander is, for a man cannot let slander out of his mouth without denying the Root of the universe. And the proof? R. Jose taught: It is in the verse *Who have said: With our tongue will we prevail; our*

lips are our own: who is lord over us? (Ps. 12:5), where the words *Who is lord over us?* prove that the slanderer denies the Root of the universe.

The Holy One Himself, blessed be He, cries out, if one dare speak thus, concerning slanderers: *Who will rise up for Me against the evil-doers?* (Ps. 94:16)—that is to say, “Who can abide them, and who can stand them? Gehenna!” But Gehenna says: “I cannot stand them!” Then the Holy One, blessed be He, says to Gehenna: “Then I from above, and thou from below,” as Scripture says: *Upon thee, thou slanderous tongue, sharp arrows from the Mighty One [above] with coals of juniper [from below]* (Ps. 120:4).

The Holy One, blessed be He, also said to Israel: If your desire is to be saved from Gehenna, stay far away from slander, and you will gain life in the world-to-come, for it is said *Who is the man that desireth life* (Ps. 34:13), that is, “life in the world-to-come?” To gain it, *Keep thy tongue from evil* (*ibid.* 34:14).

Another comment on *Who is the man that desireth life?* Our Masters said: It happened that a peddler who went around in the villages of Sepphoris used to go crying his wares, saying, “Who’d like the elixir of life!” The daughter of R. Yannai heard him and said to her father: “A peddler is going around saying: ‘Who’d like the elixir of life?’” R. Yannai said to her: “Go and call him.” She went and called him to R. Yannai, who asked him: “What is this elixir of life which thou sellest?” The peddler answered: “Even thou knowest not what this elixir is?” R. Yannai replied: “Nevertheless, declare it to me.” The peddler said: “Bring me a scroll of the Psalms.” They brought it to him, and he unrolled it, and showed R. Yannai what David said, namely, *Who is the man that desireth life*, etc. *Keep thy tongue from evil*, etc. (Ps. 34:14). And what did R. Yannai do? He gave the peddler six coins.⁴ The disciples asked R. Yannai: “Our master, didst thou not know this verse?” And he answered: “Yes, but this man came and made me aware of its full meaning.”

Another comment on *Death and life are in the power of the tongue*. A mere basket of figs!—yet if a man ate of them and said no blessing: *Death . . . in the power of the tongue*. If he said a blessing: *life . . . in the power of the tongue*.

Another comment on *Death and life are in the power of the tongue*. Everything depends on the tongue, even death and life. A man who gains Torah, gains life, for Torah is called a tree of life, as is said *She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is everyone that holdeth her fast* (Prov. 3:18). It is Torah that is a healing for the tongue, as is said *The tree of life heals the tongue* (Prov. 15:4). But if a man is busy with an evil tongue, he forfeits his life.

Behold, how vicious is slander! It is more vicious than murder, unchastity, or idolatry. In Scripture each of these three transgressions is termed “great,” but slander is spoken of in the plural as “great things.” Thus Cain said of murder: *My punishment is more great than I can bear* (Gen. 4:13); Joseph exclaimed of unchastity: *How then can I do this great wickedness?* (*ibid.* 39:9); Moses said of idolatry: *Oh, this people have sinned a great sin* (Ex. 32:31). But it is written of slander, *The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaketh great things* (Ps. 12:4), to tell you that slander is more vicious than the other three transgressions.

Another comment on *Death and life are in the power of the tongue*. Slander is more vicious than murder. He who murders a man murders only one, but he who speaks slander murders three: him who speaks it, him who accepts it, and him of whom it is spoken. Whose history proves this? Doeg's. For he slandered Ahimelech before Saul, and the three of them, Saul, Ahimelech, and Doeg were slain: Ahimelech, as it is said *Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech* (1 Sam. 22:16); Saul, as it is said *So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord* (1 Chron. 10:13); and Doeg, who was banished from the world, as is said *God will likewise break thee for ever* (Ps. 52:7), that is, from the world-to-come. And what caused his banishment? Slander, as is said *When Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul*.

3. Another comment. The words *When Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul*, etc., are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Though his hatred cover itself with guile, his wickedness shall be openly showed before the assembly* (Prov. 26:26). R. Hiyya taught: Hypocrites must be shown up in order to prevent desecration of the Name. Thus it is said *But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness,⁵ he will be brought to commit an iniquity* (Ezek. 18:24). And why does the Holy One, blessed be he, open a way of iniquity to the hypocrite? In order to make his deeds plainly visible to men; otherwise, the punishment that befalls him on account of his guileful transgressions would cause men to raise a cry against the measure of God's justice. Hence, the Holy One, blessed be He, makes plainly visible the deeds of any man who beguiles his fellow with hypocrisy.

Come and learn this from what befell Doeg, who was chief of the Sanhedrin, as is said *Doeg the Edomite, the chiefest of the herdmen that belonged to Saul* (1 Sam. 21:8). Because of his habit of slander, however, even though he had knowledge of Torah, Scripture makes it plainly known that he was a slanderer. His deeds were made known to men, lest when God came to punish him, they might otherwise raise a cry against the measure of justice. Hence Scripture says, *Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul . . . "David is come to the house of Ahimelech."*

4. *Doeg the Edomite*. Why was he called the Edomite? Because people living in the city of Nob⁶ and beyond were known as Edomites, and so he was called after the name of [the area in which] his city [was located].

R. Samuel bar Nahmani maintained: Doeg called himself the Edomite because he was envious of David who was called *Edomite* ("ruddy"), as is said *Now he was ruddy ('admoni), and withal of beautiful eyes* (1 Sam. 16:12). And Doeg was not alone in his envy of David: all the children of Doeg's clan, the Ziphites, Nabal the Carmelite, and the men of Keilah,⁷ were envious of him.

R. Abba bar Kahana maintained: Doeg was called the *Edomite*

("bloody one") because he so turned matters as to have decreed⁸ the shedding of the blood (*dam*) of Nob, the city of the priests, as is said *Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and he slew on that day four score and five persons* (1 Sam. 22:18).

R. Naḥmani said: Doeg was called the Edomite because he decreed the shedding of the blood (*dam*) of David,⁹ for he said to Saul concerning David, *he deserveth to die* (1 Sam. 20:31), meaning thereby that David's blood was to be shed, and that David's wife could marry another man.¹⁰

Bar Ḳappara said: Doeg was called the Edomite because he forbade Saul to shed the blood (*dam*) of Agag.¹¹ For Doeg said: "It is written in the Torah *Ye shall not kill it and its young both in one day* (Lev. 22:28); yet thou art about to kill young and old, children and women, in one day." Therefore, Doeg was called the *Edomite*, because through Doeg's decree Saul was adjudged blood(*dam*)-guilty.

R. Isaac said: Doeg was called the *Edomite* because he used to redden (*ma'āḏim*) with shame the faces of all who argued the law with him. Whenever a man debated with him, Doeg, with his arguments, would reduce him to silence.

R. Ḥanina said: Doeg was called the *Edomite*, because like Edom which smirches the attainments of Israel, so Doeg smirched the attainments of David.

Our Masters said: Doeg was called the *Edomite*, because like Edom which seeks vengeance and bears a grudge in its heart, so Doeg sought vengeance and bore a grudge in his heart against David.

5. *Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul* (Ps. 52:1). "*And told Saul*": that is, "And embittered¹² Saul." What did he say to him? He said this: "Ahimelech has made David king while thou art still living: For though inquiry may not be made of the Urim and Thummim on behalf of any man except the king, or members of the court, or one upon whom the needs of many people depend, yet inquiry has been made of the Urim and Thummim on behalf of David!" When Doeg told him this, a spirit of bitter envy entered into Saul. Whence do we know this? Because Saul

said to Ahimelech: "*Thou hast given him bread, and a sword* (1 Sam. 22:13), and as if this were not enough for thee, *thou hast also inquired of God for him (ibid.)*. Therefore *thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech (ibid. 22:16)*." As soon as Ahimelech saw that the face of Saul was seething with anger at him, *Ahimelech answered the king, and said: "And who among all thy servants is so trusted as David, who is the king's son-in-law (ibid. 22:14): [Therefore, impute nothing to me] either because of the giving or because of the inquiring. Indeed, was this the first time that David called upon me? Have I only today begun to inquire of God for him? Be it far from me (ibid. 22:15)*. This was not the first time, for it is my custom to inquire on behalf of David. Therefore, *Let not the king impute anything unto his servant, nor to all the house of my father" (ibid.)*.

But Saul said to him: "Sol! All along thou didst inquire for David, and yet thou sayest thou art not deserving of death?"

As soon as Saul caused the sentence of death to be issued against Ahimelech, *The king said unto the guard that stood about him: "Turn, and slay the priests of the Lord" (ibid. 22:17)*. But the guards did not heed him. As Solomon said, *Whoso keepeth the commandment shall know no evil thing* (Eccles. 8:5)—it was Abner and Amasa who [acting as guards] would not permit themselves to touch the priests, as is said *But the servants of the king would not* (1 Sam. 22:17).

When Saul saw that the guards did not obey him, he said to Doeg: "Why standest thou still? Thou didst smite the priests of Nob with thy tongue. Rise now and smite them with the sword," as is said *The king said to Doeg: "Turn thou, and fall upon the priests" (ibid. 22:18)*. Immediately Doeg stood up and smote them, as is said *He slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod (ibid.)*.

Behold, what might there was in Doeg! No man in the whole world helped him; by himself he slew them. And not these priests alone, but also *Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword (ibid. 22:19)*.

Thereupon, David cried out and said: *Why boastest thou thy-*

self of evil, O mighty man? The mercy of God [endureth] continually (Ps. 52:3).

6. *Why boastest thou thyself of evil, O mighty man?* (Ps. 52:3)—that is, David said to Doeg: O that thou, a mighty man, a wealthy man, and chief of the Sanhedrin, shouldst occupy thyself with this evil thing, and speak with evil tongue!

Of evil, O mighty man? David asked Doeg: Is this really might? That a man seeing his fellow at the edge of a pit push him into the pit? Or that a man seeing his fellow on top of a roof push him off? Is this might? When can a man truly be called *mighty man*? When his fellow is about to fall into a pit, and he seizes his hand so that he does not fall in. Or when he sees his fellow fallen into a pit, and he lifts him up out of it. But thou sawest Saul angry at me, and so thou didst piss on me!

Of evil, O mighty man? Thinkest thou evil is what men practice? Nay, they practice *the mercy of God continually* (Ps. 52:3). David said to Doeg: "Thinkest thou that had Ahimelech not received me and not given me a piece of bread, there would have been no man in Israel who would have given it to me? Nay, the people of Israel are accustomed to practice mercy at all times in behalf of every man who comes."

Another comment on *The mercy of God continually*. David said to Doeg: Ought a man like thee who is continually occupied with the mercy of God, that is with study of Torah, of which it is said *The law of mercy*¹³ *is on her tongue* (Prov. 31:26), occupy himself with things so evil that thy knowledge of Torah becomes a mockery? *Of evil, O mighty man?*

Another comment on *The mercy of God continually*. Ought a man who, as it were, practices mercy towards God do¹⁴ a cruel thing? For he who occupies himself with Torah is considered as practicing mercy towards God. Yet thou occupiest thyself with slander, with an evil tongue. *Of evil, O mighty man?*

R. Jose ben Zimra taught: Come and see how vicious is an evil tongue! A man has two hundred and forty-eight parts: some erect; some prone; some capable of being either one or the other; the tongue, however, is imprisoned, with the cheeks and

the teeth surrounding it, and with many other restraints upon it. Yet no man can withstand it. If it were erect, think how much more vicious the tongue would be! ¹⁵

7. *Thou lovest evil more than good* (Ps. 52:5). David said to Doeg: "Thou desirest evil for Saul more than thou desirest thine own good. For had Saul not accepted slander from thee, he would not have been punished. There is a kind of man who tells lies to and flatters another because the other gives him food and drink. But thou, dost thou need anything at all? Behold, thou art wise in Torah, thou art mighty, thou art rich, thou art chief of the Sanhedrin. Why hast thou done this?"

Thus saith the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises mercy, justice, and righteousness (Jer. 9:22-23). Thus, as Scripture says, *David . . . executed justice and righteousness unto all his people* (1 Chron. 18:14), and again *And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him* (1 Sam. 18:14).

8. R. Simeon bar Abba said in the name of R. Johanan: The Holy One, blessed be He, let Abraham see Torah, Gehenna, offerings, and the yoke of the kingdoms. Whence do we know that God let Abraham see Torah? Because in the words *a flaming torch* (Gen. 15:17), *torch* clearly refers to Torah, of which it is said "All the people saw the thunderings, and the torches" (Ex. 20:15). And Gehenna? *A smoking furnace* (Gen. 15:17) refers to Gehenna, of which it is said "For, behold, the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace" (Mal. 3:19), and also "The Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem" ¹⁶ (Isa. 31:9). And offerings? Scripture speaks of *a heifer three years old* (Gen. 15:9). Whence do we know that God let Abraham see the yoke of the kingdoms? Because it is said *Lo, a dread, even a great darkness falling upon him* (*ibid.* 15:12), *dread* referring to Babylon, *darkness* to Greece, *great* to Media, and *falling upon him* to Edom.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham: "A time

will come when the Temple will be destroyed, and the offerings whereby atonement is made will cease. What is thy choice?—that thy children suffer the yoke of the kingdoms or the fire of Gehenna?”

R. Ḥanina bar Papa taught: Abraham chose the yoke of the kingdoms for himself, saying: It is better that my children suffer the yoke of the kingdoms; let them not suffer the fire of Gehenna.

To this the Holy One, blessed be He, referred in saying to the children of Israel: Abraham is your father, as is said *Look unto the rock whence ye were hewn* (Isa. 51:1); the *rock* is Abraham, for in the next verse it is said *Look unto Abraham your father* (*ibid.*, 51:2).¹⁷

PSALM FIFTY-THREE

1. *To the Eternal God; upon Mahalath. Maschil of David. Nabal hath said in his heart* (Ps. 53:1). The word *Mahalath* is to be read in the light of the verse *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a great good* (Prov. 18:22).¹ Endless is the good of a good woman. And even as the good of a good woman is endless, so the evil of an evil woman is endless, as is said *I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets* (Eccles. 7:26).

R. Samuel taught: Abigail did more good for David than all the sacrifices in the world. For had David done that deed which he thought to do upon Nabal, then, even if David had brought all the sacrifices in the world, they would not have atoned for him. But Abigail came to him and saved him. What she did for him is implied in *To the Eternal God; upon Mahalath*: even as sacrifices bring about forgiveness, Abigail brought about forgiveness [*mēhilah*] for David.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: A good woman comes to belong to a good man; an evil man dies in his evil,² as is said *It came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, so that he died* (1 Sam. 25:38).

What caused his death? His hand was niggardly in deeds of charity. Hence Abigail said to David: *Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this base fellow* (1 Sam. 25:25). What did she mean by *base fellow*? That Nabal had an evil eye, as is said "Beware that there be not a base thought in thy heart . . . and thine eye be evil" (Deut. 15:9). She also said: "My lord David, couldst thou not have learned what he is from his name? Churl (*Nahal*) is his name; he acts churlishly and speaks churlishly."

R. Simon taught: Nabal and Laban were alike, and the letters of their names are alike. Even as Laban was a deceiver, so Nabal was a deceiver. And since both were deceivers, Solomon said: "I speak of these two in saying³ *Deceit is in the heart of them that devise evil; but to the counselors of peace is joy*" (Prov. 12:20). And who are they that enjoy peace? The children of Israel upon whom peace was bestowed, as is said *The Lord will*

give strength unto His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace (Ps. 29:11).

Abigail said to David: "My lord king, if the following case were brought to thee, what wouldst thou do? A poor man goes to his master and says: 'Show mercy unto me. Give me a morsel of bread.' But the master feels no obligation toward him [and refuses his plea], so the poor man falls upon him and kills him. Now if such a case were brought to thee for judgment, what wouldst thou do? Thou wouldst feel as if gagged and wouldst be unable to utter thy judgment, for men would say 'Did not David do just such a thing to Nabal?'" When Scripture says, *Let this not be unto thee a gag* (1 Sam. 25:31), it means that Abigail said: "Do not put a gag in thy mouth. Do not say, 'Because I am king, no man can rebuke me.' Rebuke thyself in thy heart. *Let this not be unto thee a gag.* There is one gag in thy mouth already.⁴ Let that one be enough for thee."

What did Abigail mean by the words *Then remember thy handmaid* (*ibid.*)? She meant: "Do not forget me. I shall be in thy mind when such a case is brought before thee, and as thou judgest it, mayest thou say: 'Let her who so acted on my behalf that I did not incur the guilt of blood be remembered for blessing.'" David replied: "Not because of thee am I not guilty. The Holy One, blessed be He, sent thee to me, as is said *Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me* (1 Sam. 25:32). Even so, thou art worthy to be blessed, as is said *Blessed be thy discretion, and blessed be thou*" (*ibid.* 25:33).

David escaped from iniquity, but Nabal entered into it, for, as it is said, *Nabal hath said in his heart: "There is no God"* (Ps. 53:2). And what was in his heart? Deceit, as is said *Deceit is in the heart of them that devise evil* (Prov. 12:20). Nabal, with evil in his heart, claimed not to know David, as is said *Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse?* (1 Sam. 25:10). Nabal also claimed not to know the Holy One, blessed be he, as is said *Nabal hath said in his heart: "There is no God."* What can the words *in his heart* mean except evil thoughts? And the words immediately following, *dealt corruptly* (Ps. 53:2), what do they allude to?

To the corruption of the generation of the flood, of whom it is written *All flesh had corrupted their way* (Gen. 6:12). Like them, this Nabal committed acts of unchastity. These are alluded to in *dealt corruptly*. Therefore, Abigail said to David: *Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this base fellow* (1 Sam. 25:25). Why did she call him *base fellow*? Because he committed acts of unchastity. As Scripture says, *The sons of Eli were base men . . . they lay with the women that did service at the door of the Tent of Meeting* (1 Sam. 2:12, 22).

Another comment: What can *dealt corruptly* mean except that Nabal meditated idolatry in his heart? For here the verse says *dealt corruptly*, and elsewhere Scripture says *Lest ye deal corruptly, and make you a graven image* (Deut. 4:16). Hence Nabal is called a *base fellow*, in the sense in which Scripture uses this phrase in *Certain men, base fellows, are gone out . . . saying: Let us go and serve other gods* (Deut. 13:14).

2. *Every one of them is as dross* (Ps. 53:4). In the similarly worded Psalm, it is written *They are all gone aside* (Ps. 14:3)—that is, men who have gone aside from the road may yet return in repentance; in this Psalm, however, it is written that *every one of them is as dross*—that is, everyone of them is debased.

They are altogether become stinking (Ps. 53:4). They stink from without because they overflow with wickedness from within.

Another comment on *Every one of them is as dross, they are altogether ne'ēlahu*.⁵ They are the men of Sodom who became so debased as to bring upon themselves their burning like braziers. The word *ne'ēlahu* is taken as stemming from the word *'ah* as in the verse *The brazier ('ah) was burning before him* (Jer. 36:22). *There is none that doeth good, no, not the one* (Ps. 53:4): Abraham's name was not included among the men of Sodom; that Abraham is *the one* the verse refers to is shown by the words "Abraham was the one" (Ezek. 33:24). It was then Abraham said: *I have not sat with men of falsehood . . . I hate the gathering of evil-doers, and will not sit with the wicked* (Ps. 26:4-5). Thereupon *Abraham journeyed from thence* (Gen. 20:1). These

words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *And surely the mountain falling crumbleth away, and the rock is removed out of his place* (Job 14:18). *The mountain falling crumbleth away* refers to Sodom and its sister cities; *And the rock is removed out of his place* refers to Abraham, for he is the rock of whom it is said "Look unto the rock whence ye were hewn . . . Look unto Abraham your father" (Isa. 51:1-2). Thereupon *Abraham journeyed from thence* (Gen. 20:1), for the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Abraham, thou hast no business with the men of Sodom," of whom it is said *God looked forth from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any man of understanding, that did seek after God. Every one of them is unclean* (Ps. 53:3).

Another comment on *ne'ēlahu*. The word means that the men of Sodom became familiars⁶ in the secret mysteries of other gods. Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the ministering angels: "Go forth and see what the children of men are doing on earth," and the ministering angels answered: *There is none that doeth good* (*ibid.*).

The workers of iniquity who knew not, they who eat up My people as they eat bread (Ps. 53:5), [knew not that] *Israel is the Lord's hallowed portion . . . All that devour him shall be held guilty* (Jer. 2:3).

The iniquitous say: Even when a good thing comes, the Holy One, blessed be he, is not the one who called it forth. This is the meaning of [*the workers of iniquity*] . . . *call not upon God* (Ps. 53:5).

There were they in great fear (*ibid.* 53:6). The righteous were in fear, for they saw Ahithophel in Gehenna, and they said: If God deals so with such a righteous man, how much more strictly will he deal with us! When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave Ahithophel his punishment,⁷ He let the righteous see his deeds⁸ and they were relieved of fear. Hence it is said *No fear was* (*ibid.*). And why not? *Because God is with the righteous generation* (Ps. 14:5).

Another comment. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: I de-

clared that the children of Israel shall pay taxes to the kingdoms, even as the gentiles pay them. By *fear* I meant that you may impose the fear of excises upon them, but not that you may impose the fear of persecution upon them. Yet *no fear was*, for the children of Israel surrendered themselves to death, and those who remained were saved through the merit of those who were slain in the persecution, as is said *God is with the righteous generation*.

In the similarly worded Psalm, in the verse *Ye would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted, but the Lord is his refuge* (Ps. 14:6), what is meant by the words *the counsel of the afflicted*? R. Judah said: They mean that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the nations of the world: Ye built your houses of idolatry. But when I said to you: "Let Jerusalem be built" ye said Israel is to be *afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not to be comforted* (Isa. 54:11). Hence it is said *Ye would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted*. And in this Psalm it is said *Hast thou put them to shame because God hath rejected them?* (Ps. 53:6). That is, "Think ye that the Lord has rejected them?" But was it not said long ago *I will not reject them* (Lev. 26:44)?

Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God turneth back the captivity of His people, then shall Jacob rejoice, and Israel shall be glad (Ps. 53:7), but Esau and Ishmael shall be vexed.

PSALM FIFTY-FOUR

1. *For the leader; with string-music. Maschil of David; when the Ziphites came and said to Saul: "Doth not David hide himself with us?"* (Ps. 54:1). Elsewhere, this is what Scripture says: *If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked* (Prov. 29:12). R. Meir said in the name of R. Joseph: Such were the children of Israel. When the Ziphites beheld Saul incline his ear to listen to slander against David, they came and [betrayed him] to Saul, saying: *Doth not David hide himself with us?* (Ps. 54:2). Scripture tells us that *Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul* (Ps. 52:2), and tells also that Nabal asked mockingly *Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse?* (1 Sam. 25:10). Therefore, when the Ziphites observed that Saul accepted the others' slander, forthwith they also came, as it is written *The Ziphites came and said to Saul: Doth not David hide himself with us?* (Ps. 54:1-2).

2. *Save me, O God, by Thy name* (Ps. 54:3). David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, when a centenarius¹ persecutes a man, the man may complain against him to the prefect, and when the prefect persecutes him, the man may complain against him to the emperor. But when the emperor persecutes the prefect, to whom may the prefect complain? He has no one to complain to, except Thee.

Just so David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, Saul is king. To whom shall I complain against him? I can only complain to Thee. Thus David said: *Save me, O God, by Thy name, and judge me by Thy strength* (Ps. 54:3). What did he mean by the words *And judge me by Thy strength?* He meant, Judge me by Thy Torah in which Thou hast written, *Thou shalt not deliver unto his master a bondman that is escaped from his master unto thee* (Deut. 23:16). If Thou hast said even of a bondman who yesternight served idols that "When he comes to thee, thou shalt not deliver him unto his master," surely Thou wilt not deliver me into the hand of King Saul, for I am a prince, and the son of a prince, as is said *Nahshon begot Salmon; and Salmon begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed; and Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David* (Ruth 4:20-22). And so *Judge me by Thy*

strength, that is by the strength of Torah, which says, *Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, strength is mine* (Prov. 8:14).

3. *Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth* (Ps. 54:4). According to R. Hoshai, David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, Doeg came and slandered me, and Saul accepted the slander from him and listened to him. The Ziphites came, and Saul heeded them also. I shall not go to Saul, but to Thee. Hear me. Give ear unto me. *Hear my prayer, O God. For strangers have risen up against me . . . They have not set God before them. Selah* (Ps. 54:5). They have not set their minds on what is written in the Torah, "Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbor in secret" (Deut. 27:24). But what have they set their minds on? On what Saul said to them: *Blessed be ye of the Lord* (1 Sam. 23:21). But of what avail Saul's blessing, if they are accursed men? They have been long accursed, for Moses cursed them, saying "Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbor in secret." Hence it is said *They have not set God before them. Selah*.

Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is for me as the upholder of my soul (Ps. 54:6). They asked David: "Who told thee this?" According to R. Simeon ben Pazzi, David replied: When I was in the womb of my mother, Ethan the Ezrahite prophesied that God would say of me: *I have found David My servant; with My holy oil have I anointed him* (Ps. 89:21). Hence *The Lord is for me as the upholder of my soul*.

PSALM FIFTY-FIVE

1. *For the leader; with string-music. Maschil of David. Give ear, to my prayer, O God* (Ps. 55:1-2). These words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *He that walketh uprightly walketh securely* (Prov. 10:9).¹ *He that walketh uprightly* is David, of whom it is said "And as for me, Thou upholdest me because of mine uprightness" (Ps. 41:13). *But he that perverteth his ways shall be found out* (Prov. 10:9) refers to Ahithophel, and teaches you that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not make a man pay for his iniquities until He makes his deeds known to men, as is said *Though his hatred cover itself with guile, his wickedness shall be openly showed before the assembly* (Prov. 26:26).

R. Judah bar Isaac taught: David had no greater friend than Ahithophel, whom David made chief of his prosecutors, and who was his counselor in all affairs, as is said *Ahithophel was the king's counselor* (1 Chron. 27:33). When David heard that Ahithophel was with Absalom among the conspirators, *David said: "O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness"* (2 Sam. 15:31).

R. Nahman taught: David was not afraid of any man except Ahithophel. Hence David said: "*Give ear, O God, to my prayer; and hide not Thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and answer me* (Ps. 55:2-3)." Why did he say this? *Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked* (Ps. 55:4). The Holy One, blessed be He, asked David: "Hast thou not said, *Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear* (Ps. 27:3)?" David answered: "Master of the universe, give me such enemies of whom I can say *I have pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them; neither did I turn back till they were consumed* (Ps. 18:38)." And David went on to say to the Holy One, blessed be He: "This Ahithophel is not one of such enemies, for they are of the nations of the earth; he is my own kind." And David said further: "*For it was not an enemy that taunted me, then I could have borne it* (Ps. 55:13). Indeed, he was a great man, for I addressed him in this way: *But it was*

thou, a man according to my order, my guide, and my familiar friend (Ps. 55:14)." What is meant by the words *according to my order*? According to R. Joshua ben Levi, David meant: "Ahithophel was my orderer, that is to say, it was he who arranged laws in their proper order"; by the words *my guide*, David meant: "Ahithophel was my master who instructed me in Torah," for the next verse says, *We took sweet counsel together* (*ibid.* 55:15).

And walked unto the house of God in reḡeš (*ibid.*). What other context gives us the meaning of *reḡeš*? We are taught in a Mishnah that the daily offering was to be slaughtered by twelve priests, and the bullock by twenty-four priests; that four times daily all the priests were to assemble together in the court of the Temple, there to cast lots for the different services.² Why did so many take part? R. Joḥanan said: In order to gather the company (*rḡš*) into the court of the Temple. Thus the verse above is read: *We . . . walked unto the house of God in company.*

When David finished his prayer, as Scripture says, *It came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he was wont to worship God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him* (2 Sam. 15:32). Upon seeing the Archite, David said: Now there is no further irking³ of my wound. *And David said unto him: "If thou passest on with me, then thou wilt be a burden unto me; but if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom: I will be thy servant, O king . . . then wilt thou defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel"* (*ibid.* 15:33-34). David said also to Hushai: "The Holy One, blessed be He, sent thee to me. No man except thee can bring to naught the counsel of Ahithophel." (David was afraid of the counsel of Ahithophel because it was very great counsel. And why was it called great? Scripture says, *Now the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man inquired of the word of God* [2 Sam. 16:23]). Hence David said: "Master of the universe, unto Thee I must call," as is said *As for me, I call upon God, and the Lord will save me* (Ps. 55:17).

2. *Evening, and morning, and at noonday, will I pray* (Ps.

55:18). R. Samuel taught: From this verse we learn that a man is required to pray three times daily. And who instituted the three prayers? The Patriarchs instituted them: Abraham instituted the morning prayer, for it is said *Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord* (Gen. 19:27); here *stood* clearly alludes to "prayer," as in the verse "Then stood up Phinehas, and prayed"⁴ (Ps. 106:30). Isaac instituted the noonday prayer,⁵ for it is said *Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide* (Gen. 24:63); here *meditate* clearly alludes to prayer, as in the verse *A prayer of the afflicted, when he fainteth, and poureth out his meditation before the Lord* (Ps. 102:1). Jacob instituted the evening prayer, for it is said *Jacob . . . made intercession at the place, and tarried there all night* (Gen. 28:11); and *made intercession* clearly alludes to prayer, as in the verse *Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me* (Jer. 7:16).

David said: Since the Patriarchs instituted the three daily prayers, I, too, will meditate evening, morning, and at noonday.

3. *He hath delivered my soul in peace so that none came nigh me* (Ps. 55:19). R. Joshua ben Levi taught: What do the words *He hath delivered my soul in peace*, etc. mean? That a company of angels goes before a man, and these heavenly beings cry out, saying: "Make way for the likeness of the Lord!"

What need of a company of angels? R. Yudan explained in the name of R. Levi: In the wide space of the universe there is no place, even one so small that it holds no more than a fourth of a *kab* of seed, that is without nine *kab* of demons. And blindfolds are fastened over the eyes of each of these demons as over the eyes of millers' asses. Why? That the demons may not injure mortals. But when a man's sins bring it about, the blindfolds are removed from the demon's face, so that as he looks upon the man,⁶ he injures him. Hence the heavenly beings cry out before a man: "Make way, etc.," in order that the demons may not injure him. Accordingly, *He hath delivered my soul in peace*, and the words which follow, *so that none came nigh me* mean

that David said: "None of the demons came near me." And why not? Because *In multitudes they were with me (ibid.)*—the *multitudes* of angels who were charged to keep David, as is said *For He will give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways (Ps. 91:11)*.

4. Another comment on *He hath delivered my soul in peace so that none came nigh me (Ps. 55:19)*. What is meant by the words *so that none came nigh me*? They mean that David said: "I behold Daniel, who is to rise up out of my tribe, and how, though he be cast into a den of lions, they will not touch him." Thereupon David said: *He hath delivered my soul in peace so that none came nigh me*—that is, the lions would not come nigh Daniel. And who brought it about that Daniel was delivered? Those who *In multitudes . . . were with me (ibid.)*, by which it is meant that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah also put prayers together for Daniel. Hence David said: *God shall hear, and answer them (Ps. 55:20)*.

Another comment. The verse *In multitudes*, etc. alludes to Rachel. Thus the words *so that none came nigh me (Ps. 55:19)* mean that the design of Esau came not nigh Rachel, though the arrangements were that Jacob was to take Leah and that Esau was to take Rachel. And who brought it about that Rachel was delivered from him? Those who *In multitudes . . . were with me (ibid.)*, by which it is meant that Jacob and Leah also put prayers together for Rachel. Thus we read *And God remembered even the person of Rachel (Gen. 30:22)*: In this verse the word *Rachel* by itself implies that God remembered her because of her own merit, and the phrase *the person of Rachel* implies that He remembered her also because of the merit of the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs.

Another comment on *He hath delivered my soul in peace so that none came nigh me*: The counsel of Ahithophel did not come nigh me. Why not? Because *In multitudes they were with me (ibid.)*: the *multitudes* were the members of the Sanhedrin who put together prayers for me.

5. *Such as have no changes (Ps. 55:20)*. These words allude to

Ahithophel and his band in whose hearts the Inclination-to-evil underwent no change. And so the verse goes on to say of them *And [they] fear not God (ibid.)*. He hath put forth his hands against his peaceful ones (Ps. 55:21): Ahithophel and his band put forth their hands against men that were at peace with them. And so the verse goes on to say of Ahithophel *He hath broken his covenant*.

The words of his mouth were smoother than butter (Ps. 55:22): The words of Ahithophel were more slippery than butter. The verse concludes, *His words were softer than oil, for they were suave*:⁷ The words of Ahithophel were so persuasive that every one heeded him. Thus we read *Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom: "Let men now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night; and I will come upon him while he is weary and weak-handed, and will make him afraid; and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only . . ." And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel (2 Sam. 17:1, 2, 4)*. When David saw that every one was with Ahithophel, and that every one heeded him, he was afraid. Accordingly, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to David: "Be not afraid. Though every man is with Ahithophel, I am with thee."

6. *Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee (Ps. 55:23)*. A mortal has a patron and goes to him the first time, and the patron receives him; the second time, and he receives him; the third time, he does not personally welcome him; and the fourth time, he cannot spare a moment for him. But not so the Holy One, blessed be He: Every time you impose yourself upon Him, He receives you. Hence *Cast what befalls thee upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee*: "Cast thy burden upon Him, and He will carry it for thee."

But Thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the nethermost pit (Ps. 55:24), into Gehenna; *men of blood and deceit (ibid.)*, Ahithophel and his band, *shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in Thee (ibid.)*.

PSALM FIFTY-SIX

1. *For the One that triumphed,¹ upon Jonath-elem, rehokim. A Psalm of David; Michtam; when the Philistines took him in Gath* (Ps. 56:1). These words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *What god is there in heaven or on earth, that can do according to Thy works, and according to Thy mighty acts* (Deut. 3:24). Daniel also said: *He delivereth and rescueth, and He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth* (Dan. 6:28).

According to R. Phinehas, David said this: "God did more for me than for all others. And His triumph was greater than all other triumphs." What did God do for David? When David was waiting upon Achish, Achish's body-guard who was a brother of Goliath the Philistine, brought charges against David. But Achish said: "Thy brother stipulated with David: 'If he prevails against me, and smites me, etc.' And the stipulation was met, so that thou hast no case whatever against David." And Achish let David go, and did not have him executed.² Now was not that a great triumph? Therefore David said: *For the One that triumphed; upon Jonath-elem*. A speechless dove (*Jonath-elem*),³ David stood and could give no answer to the body-guard until the Holy One, blessed be He, put into the mouth of Achish the argument by which David was delivered from the brother of Goliath the Philistine. What is meant by *rehokim*? It means that David's mighty men were at that time far (*rēhok*) from him. And *Michtam*? Because of this incident, David became humble (*mach*) and upright (*tam*).

David said: "*Now therefore, I pray thee, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant, etc., etc., forasmuch as the Lord delivered thee into my hand today*" (1 Sam. 26:19, 23). In these words David was alluding to what Moses had taught: *If a thief be found breaking in, and be smitten so that he dieth, there shall be no blood-guiltiness for him* (Ex. 22:1), and thus was saying, "Thou, Saul, art with me in the cave, and thy life is forfeit according to Torah, and thy blood is forfeit." And David was also alluding to the words *Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood*

of thy neighbor (Lev. 19:16)—that is, if a man comes at thee to slay thee, and thou overcomest him, tarry not, and say not, "Shall I be guilty of his blood?" but taking no counsel of your heart, slay him then and there. As the proverb says: Slay him before he slays thee. And thus in saying, *And some bade me kill thee* (1 Sam. 24:11), David meant: According to the Torah, it is permitted me to slay thee.

But it spared thee (ibid.). By this David meant: The modesty in thee leads me to spare thee. For by the word *cover* (*hasek*) in *Saul went in to cover his feet (ibid. 24:4)* Scripture suggests that Saul in relieving himself had arranged his garments about him like a booth (*sukkah*).

David then said: *My father, see, yea, see (ibid. 24:12): See* what thou didst intend for me. *Yea, see* how I acted toward thee.

2. *Be merciful unto me, O God, for a man panteth after me* (Ps. 56:2). *Panteth after* plainly connotes "oppresses," for the verb in the verse *Hear this, O ye that pant after the needy* (Amos 8:4) is read "that oppress" in the Aramaic Targum. So, too, *pant* in *They that lie in wait for me pant* (Ps. 56:3), is read "oppress" in the Aramaic Targum, which says, "They that scorn me oppress me." Thus David was saying: If Saul had not oppressed me, I would not have had to flee to Achish. Though *Great ones fight against me, O Most High (ibid.)*, even so, *In the day that I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee (ibid. 56:4)*.

3. *In God—I will praise His word (ibid. 5)*: herein, *God* is referred to as He who metes out judgment. Nevertheless, David goes on to say: *In God do I trust, I will not be afraid; What can flesh do unto me? (ibid.)*.

They gather (yaḡuru) themselves together, they hide themselves (ibid. 7): herein the stem *gur* is taken as a form of the verb *'aḡar*, as in the words *gathereth ('aḡrah) her food in the harvest* (Prov. 6:8).

In God—I will praise His word—in the Lord—I will praise His word (Ps. 56:11). What is the difference in meaning between *In God* and *in the Lord*? R. Nehorai explained that where *God* ('Elohim) is used, Scripture is speaking of Him as meting out

justice, as in the verse *Thou shalt not revile God* (Ex. 22:27), or, as in the verse *The master of the house shall come near unto God* (Ex. 22:8) [in both verses *God* is understood to mean "judge"]; but where *Lord* (YHWH) is used, Scripture is speaking of Him as meting out mercy, as in the verse *The Lord, the Lord . . . merciful and gracious* (*ibid.* 34:6). Accordingly, David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "If Thou metest out judgment against me, I accept Thee by saying *In God—I will praise His word*; and if Thou metest out mercy to me, I accept Thee by saying *In the Lord—I will praise His word*."

4. *Thy vows are upon me, O God; I will render thank-offerings unto Thee* (Ps. 56:13). R. Phinehas taught in the name of R. Levi, and R. Johanan taught in the name of R. Menahem the Galilean,⁴ that in the time-to-come all prayers will cease except the prayer of thanksgiving, and this will never cease. And in the time-to-come all offerings will cease except the thank-offering, and this will never cease. Of this Scripture says, *So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God* (Neh. 12:40), the words *the two companies of them that give thanks* alluding to the prayer of thanksgiving and to the thank-offering.

For Thou hast delivered my soul from death (Ps. 56:14)—that is, I did not die at the hands of Saul. *Hast Thou not delivered my feet from stumbling?* (*ibid.*) so that I was not doomed through the counsel of Ahithophel, and so *that I may walk before God in the light of the living* (*ibid.*), in the Land of Israel. Or, by *the light of the living* is meant the great light in the Garden of Eden.

PSALM FIFTY-SEVEN

1. *For the leader; Al-tashheth. A Psalm of David; Michtam; when he fled from Saul, in the cave. Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me, for my soul taketh refuge in Thee* (Ps. 57:1-2). Why did David say twice, *Be merciful unto me*? "*Be merciful unto me* that I fall not into the hand of Saul, for if I fall into his hand he will not spare me"; and "*Be merciful unto me* that Saul fall not into my hand, so that the Inclination-to-evil entice me not and I kill Saul." Hence David said twice, *Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me . . . Yea, in the shadow of Thy wings will I take refuge, until these calamities be overpast* (*ibid.*), these calamities from Saul.

Another comment: *Be merciful unto me* that I stumble not into an act of transgression. *Be merciful unto me*, so that if, God forbid, I do sin, *In Thee shall my soul take refuge*, returning in penitence *until these calamities be overpast*: that is, until Thou hast brought me to expiate mine iniquities.

Another comment: *Be merciful unto me* [that is, unto Israel], so that iniquities will not cause the Temple to be destroyed. *Be merciful unto me* in exile. *In Thee shall my soul take refuge* among the kingdoms so that they will not consume me utterly. *Until these calamities be overpast*: when the calamities from the kingdoms are overpast, Thou wilt return me to Thy sanctuary where I shall pray and give thanks.

2. *I will cry unto God Most High; unto God that approves the cause I have in hand* (*ibid.* 57:3). R. Simon taught in the name of R. Joshua ben Levi: Concerning three things—tithes, greeting with God's name, and reading the Scroll of Esther—the Holy One, blessed be He, approved the decree of a court on earth. Our Masters say: Also, concerning Joshua's ban upon the spoil of Jericho, the Holy One, blessed be He, approved the ban. [For after Achan violated it] *The Lord said unto Joshua: "Get thee up; wherefore, now, art thou fallen upon thy face? Israel hath sinned; yea, they have even transgressed My covenant"* (Josh. 7:10-11). And the proof that God approved the decree concerning tithes? We are taught that the children of Israel were not

taken into captivity until they neglected the giving of tithes, of which Scripture ordained: *These are the statutes and the ordinances, which ye shall observe to do in the land which the Lord . . . hath given thee* (Deut. 12:1). And when the children of Israel returned to the land in the time of Ezra, they observed the tithes of their own accord. Whence the proof? From the verses R. Johanan quoted: *We made ordinances for us . . . that we should bring . . . our heave-offerings . . . and the tithes of our land unto the Levites* (Neh. 10:33a, 38). Proof, also, from the verse *In spite of all this we make a sure covenant* (Neh. 10:1). What is meant by the words *In spite of all this*? That the children of Israel said: Whether we go again into captivity or go not again into captivity, we shall observe the ordinance of tithes. And whence do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, approved the decree of the children of Israel concerning tithes? Because it is said *that He subscribed* (*ibid.*): Scripture does not say "they subscribed," but *He subscribed*. Hence it is said *I will cry unto God Most High; unto God that approves the cause I have in hand* (Ps. 57:3). Therefore, when the children of Israel again neglected the tithes,¹ Malachi said this: *Will a man rob God? . . . But ye say: "Wherein have we robbed Thee?" In tithes and heave-offerings* (Mal. 3:8). According to R. Samuel bar R. Isaac, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the children of Israel: It is the way of the world that what the master decrees for the disciple, the disciple does. But is the master expected to do what the disciple decrees for him? Nevertheless, you made a decree for Me with respect to tithes, and I approved it with you. But then you backslid, and you robbed Me, for you neglected the tithes, as is said *Will a man rob (yikḅa') God?* (What is meant by *yikḅa'*? R. Levi taught that in everyday [Aramaic] speech, when a man has occasion to say to another: "Why dost thou rob me?" he says to him, "Why dost thou *ḵaḅa'* me?") In a further comment on *yikḅa'*, R. Berechiah taught in the name of R. Johanan that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: You restrain (*ḵaḅa'*) Me from reaching out My hand to My world,

and making it prosper; so that the verse *Shall a man yikba' God?* means: Do you presume to restrain Me?

And the proof that God approved the decree concerning the reading of the Scroll of Esther? It is written *They ordained what the Jews took upon them* (Esther 9:27),—that is, they decreed in heaven what the Jews on earth took upon themselves.

And the proof concerning the greeting with the name of God? It is written *And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers: "The Lord be with you"* (Ruth 2:4). And should you say that Boaz spoke thus of his own accord, but that in heaven they did not approve of what he said, then mark what the angel said to Gideon: *"The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor"* (Judg. 6:12).

3. R. Tahalifa of Caesarea taught: At the time that Saul violated the decree of the Holy One, blessed be He, concerning Amalek, Samuel came and rebuked him, saying *Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord* (1 Sam. 15:26); and as Samuel turned to go away, he rent Saul's robe, as is said *And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his robe, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him: "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou"* (1 Sam. 15:27-28). Saul asked, "And who is this neighbor of mine who is better than I, and who will rule instead of me?" Samuel answered, "I shall give thee a clue: he who rends thy robe shall take away thy kingship." And when Saul entered into the cave, and David cut off the skirt of his robe, Saul remembered at once what Samuel had told him. Thereupon Saul said, *"I know that as king thou wilt rule* (1 Sam. 24:21): Thou wilt be king in this world, and thou wilt rule in the world-to-come," for it is said *And My servant David shall be king* (Ezek. 37:24).

4. *Awake, my glory* (Ps. 57:9). David said: Awake, my glory, for the sake of my Maker's glory, my glory being nothing before my Maker's glory.

I will awake the dawn (ibid.). David said: "I will awake the

dawn, the dawn shall not awake me." Thereupon his Inclination-to-evil reproached him, saying: "David, is it the way of kings that the dawn awake them? Yet thou declarest *I will awake the dawn*. Though it is the way of kings to sleep three hours into the day, thou declarest *At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto Thee* (Ps. 119:62)." Thereupon David replied: "And so I shall, saying to God, *Because of Thy righteous ordinances (ibid.)*."

What did David use to do? R. Phinehas said in the name of R. Eleazar bar R. Menahem: David used to take a harp and a psaltery, put them under his head, and rise at midnight and play them, so that his companions in study of Torah would hear and rise. And what did his companions in study of Torah use to say? If King David is occupied with Torah, how much more and more should we be!

R. Levi taught: A harp was hung across David's window, and when the north wind came up at midnight, it blew through the harp, which then played of itself. Of this it is written *When the instrument played* (2 Kings 3:15): note that it is not written "When the minstrel played," but *When the instrument played*, meaning that the harp played of itself.

PSALM FIFTY-EIGHT

1. *For the leader; Al-tashheth. A Psalm of David; Michtam.* What is politic for men? Silence, yet speak ye righteousness¹ (Ps. 58:1-2). R. Isaac said: What is good policy² for a man in this world? To make himself out as dumb² in a time of conflict. Lest it be thought that a man should also remain dumb in debate on Torah, the Psalm goes on to say *Speak ye righteousness* (*ibid.*). Lest it be thought that he may then become arrogant towards others, the Psalm goes on to say *Debate with kindness the children of men* (*ibid.*).

In another comment, the words *Al-tashheth*, etc. are read *Thou shalt not destroy . . . Shalt thou indeed be dumb towards righteousness?* (Ps. 58:1). Consider these words in the light of what Solomon says: *The way of man is perverse and strange* (Prov. 21:8)—that is, wicked men are perverse, for they do not stand by what they say; they say a thing and then twist it. So was Saul perverse. This is the thing he said one night to David, as Scripture tells: *He said to David: "Thou art a righteous man because of me"*³ (1 Sam. 24:18). What did Saul mean by the phrase *because of me*? If the wheat is not bad, then the wheat is thought good; if thou art thought a righteous man, it is because of me. I am he who made thee a righteous man, because I went forth to seek thy life. If I had found thee, I would have slain thee. But because I have fallen into thy hand and thou didst not slay me, therefore *Thou art a righteous man because of me*.

So, too, in *The righteous is more excellent because of his neighbor* (Prov. 12:26), *his neighbor* is taken to mean Saul to whom Samuel said, "The Lord . . . hath given it to thy neighbor, even to David" (1 Sam. 28:17); and *The righteous* is taken to mean David to whom Saul said, "Swear now therefore unto me by the Lord, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me . . . And David swore unto Saul" (*ibid.* 24:22-23).

As soon as Saul departed, his mighty men said: "Is David to be esteemed a righteous man because he did not slay thee in the cave? He knew that if he did anything to thee, we would enter the cave, and at once destroy him; and because David was aware

of this, he was afraid." When Saul heard these words, he rose up, *and went down to the wilderness of Ziph having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph* (1 Sam. 26:3). Then *David and Abishai came to the people by night; and behold, Saul lay sleeping within the barricade* (1 Sam. 26:7). But do not the words "lay" and "sleeping" denote the same thing? The use of both words, however, implies that a sleep like a swoon was cast upon Saul and his people. Thus we read *For they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them* (1 Sam. 26:12). Hence it is said *Saul lay sleeping*.

Then said Abishai to David: "God hath delivered up thine enemy into thy hand this day," etc. . . . And David said to Abishai: Destroy him not ('al tashhitehu) (ibid. 26:8-9). Accordingly, *Al-tashheth* (Ps. 58:1) means, "Destroy not."

David said: Destroy him not . . . as the Lord liveth, for if not, by the Lord, he will smite him (1 Sam. 26:10). Why did David utter the name of the Lord twice? Because he said to Abishai: "As the Lord liveth, do not smite Saul. For if thou smite Saul, as the Lord liveth, I shall smite thee."

Another explanation of the phrase *As the Lord liveth* is that thereby David adjured Satan and rebuked him.⁴

So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's head . . . And David cried to the people, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying: "Answerest thou not, Abner?" (ibid. 26:12, 14), by which he meant: "What hast thou to answer now? Behold, the night before, ye said to Saul of the events in the cave: 'If David had done anything to thee, we would have entered the cave and at once destroyed him. Behold now the spear and the cruse of water! What hast thou to answer? Wilt thou not answer, Abner?'" And he was not able to answer. He was as one stricken dumb, and would not admit the righteousness of David. Therefore David said: *Shalt thou indeed be dumb towards righteousness?* Thou shouldst have spoken the truth. Instead, thou madest thyself out to be dumb and didst not declare my righteousness.

Another explanation of this verse is that David said to them:

Have ye pursued me with justice, as the Torah says, *With justice, with justice shalt thou pursue* (Deut. 16:20)? Or, have ye judged me in righteousness, as the Torah says, *In righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor* (Lev. 19:15)? Have ye acted thus? *Do ye judge with equity the sons of men?* Hence the Psalm asks: *Do ye indeed speak as a righteous company?*⁵

2. *Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh out in the earth the violence of your hands. The wicked are estranged from the womb; the speakers of lies go astray as soon as they are born* (Ps. 58:3-4). David said to them: The heart of a man was created to speak truth, as it is said "And he speaketh truth in his heart" (Ps. 15:2). But ye do not so, for even *in heart ye work wickedness. Ye weigh out in the earth the violence of your hands* (Ps. 58:3)—that is, the hands were created to work goodness and justice, but your hands work violence and robbery. The words *The wicked are estranged from the womb; the speakers of lies go astray as soon as they are born* mean that the righteous are sanctified even in the belly and the womb, as is said *Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee* (Jer. 1:5), and as Isaiah also said: *The Lord hath called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother hath He made mention of my name . . . And He said unto me: "Thou art My servant"* (Isa. 49: 1-3). But the wicked come estranged and wicked from the wombs of their mothers, as is said *The wicked are estranged from the womb; the speakers of lies go astray as soon as they are born*—that is, the wicked are known from the womb and from the belly as wicked.

Thus we know of the wicked Esau that even while he was in the belly of his mother, he strove with his brother Jacob, as it is said *The children struggled together within her* (Gen. 25:22), that is, in the very belly of his mother, Esau struggled with his brother. Hence David said: Ye, too, were estranged from the womb, and ye, too, went astray from the belly.

Their venom is like the venom of a serpent; they are like the deaf asp that stoppeth her ear; which hearkeneth not to the voice of charmers, or of the most cunning binder of spells (Ps. 58:

5-6). David said further to them: Know ye not what the Holy One, blessed be He, did to the serpent? He destroyed his feet and his teeth so that the serpent now eats dust. Even so will the Holy One, blessed be He, deal with maligners, as the next verse says, *Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth; break out the cheek-teeth of the young lions, O Lord (ibid. 58:7).*

They melt away as water that runneth apace (ibid. 58:8). David said: As water, when once it is poured out, may not be gathered together again, but runs off apace, so it is with the maligners' slander; once they utter their words of slander, the words can never be confined to speaker and hearer. *He aimeth his arrows (ibid.),* said David: as the arrow, when shot from the bow, smites and kills, so does the evil tongue, for it is said "Their tongue is an arrow shot out, it speaketh deceit" (Jer. 9:7). *Arrows as they speak (Ps. 58:8):*⁶ that is, whenever they speak.

3. *They are as a snail which oozeth as it goes its way; and so shall fall into fire and never see the sun*⁷ (Ps. 58:9). Like the snail which oozes on its way so that its track is known, so the evil tongue oozing on its way makes itself known by its slime. What is the punishment for the evil tongue? It will fall into the fire of Gehenna, and not see the sun of the world-to-come, for the words *and never see the sun* mean that the Holy One, blessed be He, said: Because you speak slander, you will fall into Gehenna, fire will devour you, and you will not see the sun of the world-to-come. But it is said of the righteous, *Unto you that fear My name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings (Mal. 3:20).*

4. A different reading: *Like the untimely births (nefel)*⁸ *of a woman that have not seen the sun (Ps. 58:9).* Behold, you will be regarded like the untimely births a woman lets fall that never see the sun. *Nefel* is here read in the sense of "the falling of an untimely birth," as in the verse *Or as a hidden untimely birth (nefel) I had not been; as infants that never saw light (Job 3:16).*

Another reading: *And so fall below like moles*⁹ *that have not seen the sun.* David said: You will fall below like moles that do not see the sun, but burrow into the earth and there squat.

Three creatures—the mole, the snake, and the frog—differ from all other creatures. The mole: If it could see, no creature could stand against it. The snake: If it had feet, it could overtake a horse in full stride and kill him. The frog: If it had teeth, no creature would enter the water for fear of it.

*Before your briar shoots harden into brambles*¹⁰ (Ps. 58:10). David said: The court ought to learn from the workman. When he finds a briar shoot in a vineyard, he destroys it with his mattock before it grows up and becomes thorns and brambles. *He cuts it down while it is unripe (ibid.)*, while the briar is green; and *while it is soft (haron)*¹¹ (*ibid.*), as soft as fresh bread. Here *haron* is read like *hori* in the phrase *Three baskets of fresh bread (hori)* (Gen. 40:16).

The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance (Ps. 58:11). Only if you are thought worthy by the Master of the vineyard to destroy the briars in His vineyard, may you, the righteous, rejoice in their destruction.

PSALM FIFTY-NINE

1. *To the Eternal God [who said:] do not destroy¹ David; Michtam; when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him (Ps. 59:1).* These words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Two are better than one . . . For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow . . . and if a man prevail against him that is alone, two shall withstand him . . . a threefold cord is not quickly broken* (Eccles. 4:9a, 10a, 12).² *Two are better than one:* It is better that two men go forth on the highway than that one man go forth alone. *For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow:* If either falls, his companion will lift him up. *And if a man prevail against him that is alone, two shall withstand him:* If a wicked man comes at one of the two, the two can withstand him. And if three men go forth, it is best, for *A threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

Another exposition: *Two are better than one.* It is better to be a righteous man and the son of a righteous man than to be a righteous man and the son of a wicked man. For the merit of the one righteous man is not to be compared with the merit of the two, whose reward is such that if adversity should befall the family, the merit of the two will stand by to save it. And if there are three—a righteous man, the son of a righteous man, and the grandson of a righteous man—their merit will never break apart, as is said of *A threefold cord.*

It was asked of R. Ze'era: "But was not So-and-so a righteous man, and the son of a righteous man, and the grandson of a righteous man? And yet the fourth generation was wicked!" R. Ze'era replied: "Solomon did not say 'A threefold cord is never broken,' but that it *is not quickly broken.* Even if it be broken, it will again be made whole, as is said *My words . . . shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever* (Isa. 59:21). For if a man is a disciple of the wise, and so is his son, and his son's son, the words of Torah will never wholly depart from them, since it is said *from henceforth and for ever.* Indeed, what can *Saith the Lord* mean except that

the Holy One, blessed be He, declared: I pledge Myself to this!"

Another exposition: *Two are better* when they engage in a business *than one* alone. And when there are three, it is best, as it is said of *A threefold cord*.

Still another exposition: The phrase *Two are better* alludes to Michal, the daughter of Saul, and to Jonathan, both of whom loved David. It is written of Michal *And Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him* (1 Sam. 18:28); and it is written of Jonathan *And Jonathan loved him as his own soul* (1 Sam. 18:1). Michal saved David from danger inside the house, and Jonathan from danger outside the house. Hence the *Two are better than one*. And *A threefold cord* was made by adding the love of Israel and Judah for David, as it is said *All Israel and Judah loved David* (ibid. 18:16). Hence it is written: *To the Eternal God [who said], Do not destroy David; Michtam; when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him* (Ps. 59:1).

2. Another comment. The words *Two are better than one* are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a great good* (Prov. 18:22). Yet in still another place Scripture is saying, *I find more bitter than death the woman* (Eccles. 7:26). What Scripture means, however, is that if she is a good wife, there is no end to her goodness, but if she is a bad wife, there is no end to her badness. Hence *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a great good*.

We find that before woman was created, it is written *It is not good that the man should be alone* (Gen. 2:18), but that after she was created, it is written *And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good* (Gen. 1:31). Hence *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a great good*.

Our Masters taught: A man without a wife lives without blessing, without life, without joy, without help, without good, and without peace: Without blessing, for it is said *And God blessed them* (Gen. 1:28), that is, blessed them when they were two; without joyful life, for it is said *Enjoy life with the wife whom thou lovest* (Eccles. 9:9); without joy, for it is said *Have joy of the wife of thy youth* (Prov. 5:18); without help, for it is

said *I will make him a help meet for him* (Gen. 2:18); without good, for it is said *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a great good* (Prov. 18:22); without peace, for it is said *And thou shalt know that thy tent is in peace* (Job 5:24), *tent* plainly meaning "wife," as in the verse *Go say to them: Return ye to your tents* (Deut. 5:27).

Some say that a man without a wife lives also without Torah, for it is said *If I have no help with me, then sound wisdom is driven quite from me* (Job 6:13). Hence *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a great good*.

Another comment: When a wife is good, a man findeth a great good. But when a wife is bad, she drains³ the good things—all of them—out of his house and makes him a poor man. But if she is good, what is written of her? *A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband* (Prov. 12:4), and *A woman of valor who can find?* (*ibid.* 31:10); and of her husband, it is said *He obtaineth favor of the Lord* (*ibid.* 18:22), and also *A prudent wife is from the Lord* (*ibid.* 19:4).

Come see how solemn is the estate of marriage: in the Pentateuch, in the Prophets, and in the Writings, the Holy One, blessed be He, links His own name with marriage. In the Pentateuch it is written *Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said: "The thing proceedeth from the Lord"* (Gen. 24:50). In the Prophets it is written *But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord* (Judges 14:4). And in the Writings it is said *A prudent wife is from the Lord* (Prov. 19:4). From these verses it follows that the Holy One, blessed be He, links His own name to the estate of marriage.

3. Another comment: *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a great good*, whereas a bad wife—is there anything more bitter? A story of R. Akiba's son when he married. How did he conduct himself? After his wife entered the nuptial chamber with him, he stayed awake the whole night, reading in the Torah and studying Haggadoṭ. He said to her: "Fetch a lamp for me and light it"; and she fetched a lamp for him and kept it lighted for him the whole night. Standing by his side, she held the light for him. He

opened the scroll, and he unrolled it from beginning to end, and from end to beginning, and all night she remained standing, holding the light for him until dawn came. At dawn, R. Akiba approached his son and asked him: "Is she well-found or ill-found?"⁴ and his son replied: "She is well-found." Hence *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a great good*.

A different comment: *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a great good*. Such was Michal, Saul's daughter, who loved her husband David more than she loved her father, for she saved David from her father. When? When Saul sent men to watch David's house.⁵ Of this it is written *To the Eternal God [who said]: Do not destroy David; Michtam; when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him* (Ps. 59:1).

4. *When he fled from Saul* (Ps. 57:1). How did David escape? R. Aibu and the Rabbis gave different answers. R. Aibu said: David had two gates in his house, one of which was locked; they watched for him at this gate, but he went out through the other gate and so escaped. The Rabbis maintained: David had only one gate, and they stood by the gate and watched that he not escape. What did Michal do? With a rope she lowered David from a window, and so he escaped.

When the messengers of Saul came to the house, what did Michal do? She took the teraphim, and laid them on the bed, and put a quilt of goats' hair at its head, as is said *And Michal took the teraphim*, etc. (1 Sam. 19:13). When they entered and asked for David, Michal said: "He is ill and lying in bed." They went back and told Saul. He said to them: "Bring him hither in the bed." They went and brought the bed to Saul, and Saul found the teraphim in the bed. Now he became angry at his daughter Michal, and said to her: "Why hast thou deceived me and let mine enemy flee?" Michal answered: "Thou didst wed me to thy brigand, and he stood over me with his sword as if to kill me, saying 'If thou dost not help me escape, I shall kill thee.' Whereupon I was frightened, so fearful of him that I helped him escape." As Scripture tells us, Michal said: "*He said unto me: Let me go; why should I kill thee?*" (1 Sam. 19:17). Because of

this incident the name Eglah was given to Michal, for in the verse *Unto David were born sons . . . the sixth, Ithream of Eglah, David's wife* (2 Sam. 3:2a, 5), *Eglah* refers to Michal. And why was the name Eglah, "heifer," given to Michal? Because like a heifer that will not take the yoke upon her neck, so Michal did not take the yoke from her father, but bucked against it.

5. *Thou, therefore, O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel. Arouse Thyself to punish all the nations* (Ps. 59:6). This is said because the Holy One, blessed be He, makes Himself out to be asleep in this world. Why? Because justice does not yet permit that the children of Israel be redeemed, as is said *Until the time, the Lord is as one asleep* (Ps. 78:65).⁶ Verily, in the time-to-come, when the time of redemption comes, the Holy One, blessed be He, will shake and arouse Himself, if one dare speak thus, against the nations, as is said *Arouse Thyself to punish all the nations*. In that hour *Show no mercy to any iniquitous traitors, ever* (Ps. 59:6).

PSALM SIXTY

1. *For the leader; upon Shushan Eduth; Michtam*¹ *of David, to teach* (Ps. 60:1). The phrase *Shushan Eduth* ("Lily of Testimony") is to be read in the light of the verse *He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me?* (Isa. 50:8). To what time do the words *He is near that justifieth me* refer? To the time after the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to the children of Israel, the Torah wherefrom they could draw testimony against all the nations. *When he strove with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah* (Ps. 60:2)—that is, when Joab went to make war with Aram—the Arameans said to him: Art thou not Jacob's descendant? And therefore, does not a covenant exist between us? For Laban, our forbear, said: "*Now come, let us make a covenant, I and thou*" . . . *And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar . . . And Laban said: "This heap is witness between me and thee this day"* (Gen. 31:44, 45, 48). When Joab heard this, he knew not how to contend with it, and he came to David and said: "Aram spoke thus-and-thus to me."

At once, David assembled the Sanhedrin to whom Solomon alluded in the verse *Thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies* (Song 7:3).² The Sanhedrin declared: Our fathers made two covenants. Abraham made one of the two, as is said *And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech . . . spoke unto Abraham: ". . . Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me" . . . So they made a covenant* (Gen. 21:22, 23, 32). Now when the children of Israel were about to enter the land of the Philistines, it was said to them: "Are you not sons of Abraham? And will you not keep the obligations of the covenant which Abraham made with Abimelech?" The children of Israel replied: "Indeed we would keep the covenant. But you are not Philistines, for the Philistines have long since departed. The testimony of Scripture in the verse *The Avvim . . . dwelt in villages as far as Gaza, but the Caphtorim, that came forth out of Caphtor, destroyed them* (Deut. 2:23),³ proves that you invalidated the oath." Thereupon, the children of Israel entered the land of the Philistines, and possessed it.

So, too, when the Arameans say to Joab: "Are you not of the sons of Jacob? And did not Aram make a covenant with Jacob when Laban said, *'This heap be witness, and the pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me for harm'* (Gen. 31:52)?" Joab is to reply: But were not the Arameans first to pass over this pillar with intent to harm? Indeed, [on his way to curse Israel] Balaam admitted: *Balaḳ, the king of Moab, bringeth me from Aram* (Num. 23:7). And this was not the only time that the Arameans passed over this pillar with intent to harm, for Scripture's testimony of the days of Cushan-rishathaim is that *The children of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim, king of Aram-naharaim* (Judg. 3:8). Thus Aram condemns itself by two iniquities: one of the time of Balaam, and one of the time of Cushan-rishathaim.

After they of the Sanhedrin taught him this, David said: *To the Eternal; in praise of the Lily of Testimony (Shushan Eduth); Michtam of David for the teaching [of the Sages]* (Ps. 60:1).

*Bḥaṣṣoḡo*⁴ *Aram-naharaim and Aram-zobah* (Ps. 60:2a). What is meant by the word *bḥaṣṣoḡo*? It means that Joab set Aram on fire.⁵ Or it may mean that he riddled it with arrows.⁶ Again, it may mean that he took up⁷ the people of Aram-naharaim and set them in Aram-zobah, and that he set the people of Aram-zobah in Aram-naharaim.

And Joab returned and smote . . . Edom (*ibid.* 60:2b). This verse teaches that he came back a second time and breached its walls. The first time he had said: "If I destroy Edom now, I shall not find food or drink on my return from Aram. But I shall let Edom's people be until I have smitten Aram, and then come back to attack them." So when he returned, he smote the people of Edom, as is said *And Joab returned and smote . . . Edom*.⁸

2. *O God, Thou hast cast us off, Thou hast broken us down; Thou hast been angry; O restore us again* (Ps. 60:3). The Holy One, blessed be He, said: I cast you off because you cast Me off. As Scripture says, *Israel hath cast off that which is Good; the enemy shall pursue him* (Hos. 8:3). But though Thou hast been

angry with me, turn and come back to me, as is said *Though Thou wast angry with me, let Thine anger be turned away, and do Thou comfort me* (Isa. 12:1).

Thou hast made the land to shake; Thou hast cleft it (Ps. 60:4). When Joab said: *O God, Thou hast cast us off*, etc., the earth shook. Because it was cleft and rolling under his feet, Joab found himself unable to continue fighting.⁹ Thereupon David stood up and prayed: *Heal the breaches thereof; for it tottereth* (*ibid.*).

What is the literal meaning of *pěšamtah* ("Thou hast cleft it")? It means that Thou hast split apart the doors of the earth. Thus in Aramaic the word for *sections* in the verse *When Jehudi had read three or four sections* (Jer. 36:23), is *pěšimin* ("splittings"). Our Masters also speak of "a potsherd big enough to place between one split board (*pěšim*) and another."¹⁰

Thou hast made Thy people to see hard things; Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment (tar'elah) (Ps. 60:5). How is *tar'elah* read literally? It is read as *tar* 'to tear' and 'olah¹¹ "its yoke," and thus intimates that the yoke of Torah has been torn from us.

3. *Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed* (Ps. 60:6). On what account was it given? For the sake of arrow-straight going, that is, *for the sake of the truth, for ever* (*ibid.*). *That Thy beloved may be delivered, save with Thy right hand, and answer me* (Ps. 60:7). The phrase *With Thy right hand* alludes to the Torah which was given with God's right hand, as is said *From His right hand went a fiery law for them* (Deut. 33:2). The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Dost thou seek this hand? I shall give it thee again, as Scripture says, *And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people* (Isa. 11:11).

Gilead is Mine (Ps. 60:9). God said: "I am He who wrought a miracle for Jephthah the Gileadite, and I am also He who wrought a miracle for Gideon the son of Joash of the tribe of Manasseh. His deliverance was deliverance for only an hour, but

in the everlasting time-to-come I shall deliver you through the Messiah the son of Ephraim, and through the Messiah the son of David of the tribe of Judah."

Ephraim also is the strength of My beginning (ibid.): The Messiah, the son of Ephraim, will be the first to take upon himself the yoke of kingship; but *Judah is My sceptre (ibid.)*, that is, the Messiah, the son of David [will finally rule]. *Moab is my washpot* (Ps. 60:10), as it is said "And they shall fly down upon the shoulder of the Philistines on the west; together they shall spoil the children of the east; they shall put forth their hand upon Edom and Moab" (Isa. 11:14). Hence the words *Moab is My washpot* mean: "Moab is like a pot which a man pushes away after he has washed his feet in it."

Upon Edom do I cast My shoe (Ps. 60:10) to trample it under foot, as is said *The foot shall trample it down* (Isa. 26:6). This is the foot of the Holy One, blessed be He, for Scripture says, "Yea, I trod them in Mine anger, and trampled them in My fury" (Isa. 63:3). *Even the feet of the poor* (Isa. 26:6): that is, the king Messiah, "poor, and riding upon an ass" (Zech. 9:9), will trample Edom down, and so, too, will *The steps of the needy* (Isa. 26:6), that is, the steps of Israel of whom it is said "And Israel was greatly impoverished" (Judg. 6:6).

*Philistia, hitro'a'i*¹² *because of Me* (Ps. 60:10). Some take *hitro'a'i* to mean "be broken," as in the verse "The earth is broken, broken down" (Isa. 24:19); but others take *hitro'a'i* to be a war-cry.

The words *Who will bring me into the fortified city?* (Ps. 60:11) allude to the war against Rome. The words *Who will lead me unto Edom?* (*ibid.*) allude to the war against Constantinople;¹³ at that time the children of Israel will find themselves in great trouble, and will pray, *Wilt not Thou, O God, which hadst cast us off, and Thou, O God, which didst not go out with our armies, give us help from trouble?* (Ps. 60:12-13a). And when they see Nehemiah, the son of Hushiel,¹⁴ dead before the gates of Jerusalem they will say, *For vain is the help of man. Through God we shall do valiantly; for He it is that will tread down our adversaries* (Ps. 60:13-14).

PSALM SIXTY-ONE

1. *For the leader; with string-music. A Psalm of David. Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer* (Ps. 61:1-2). Elsewhere this is what Scripture says: *The Lord is far from the wicked; but He heareth the prayer of the righteous* (Prov. 15:29). Wherever the children of Israel cried out to the Holy One, blessed be He, He heard them. Thus in Egypt, they cried out to God, and He heard them, as is said *I . . . have heard their cry* (Ex. 3:7). At the Red Sea, they cried out to God, and He heard them, as is said *Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward* (Ex. 14:15). In the wilderness, they cried out to the Lord, and He heard them, as is said *And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Israel* (Num. 21:3). After they entered the Land of Israel, they cried out to the Lord, and He heard them, as is said *And Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him* (1 Sam. 7:9); they cried out also in the time of Solomon, as is said *when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the Lord* (1 Kings 8:54). And the Lord hears us now, us that are banished, as is said *I called upon Thy name, O Lord, out of the lowest dungeon. Thou heardest my voice* (Lam. 3:55-56). Therefore, *From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart fainteth* (Ps. 61:3). But the Holy One, blessed be He, replies: From the ends of the earth you cry out to Me; yet when you were in the Land, you did not cry out to Me. As Scripture says: *I said: "Behold Me, behold Me," unto a nation that had not cried unto My name* (Isa. 65:1). You did not call upon My name when you were within the Land. But whence do you cry out to Me now? From the ends of the earth. As is prophesied in Scripture: *Then shall ye cry unto Me, and ye shall go, and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me* (Jer. 29:12-13). Moses also said: *But from thence ye will seek the Lord thy God; and thou shalt find Him, if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. In thy distress, when all these things are come upon thee* (Deut. 4:29-30). Hence it is said *From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee*.

2. *When my heart fainteth* (Ps. 61:2). For how long a time is a man required to stand at prayer? R. Judah said: Until his heart grows faint, as is said *A prayer of the afflicted, when he fainteth, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord* (Ps. 102:1). Hence it is said *When my heart fainteth*.

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I (Ps. 61:3). What rock? [The rock of the Temple in] Jerusalem, of which it is said *And the side-chambers were broader as they encompassed the house higher and higher* (Ezek. 41:7). Hence it is said *Lead me to the rock that is higher than I*.

The congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, I do not seek to dwell with the enemy; *I would dwell in Thy tent for ever* (Ps. 61:5). So, too, it is said in another Psalm, *Lord, I love the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth* (Ps. 26:8). And in yet another Psalm: *For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather stand a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness* (Ps. 84:11).

3. Another comment. *I will dwell in Thy tent for ever*. Could the thought have come into David's mind that he would live for ever? No. David was saying to the Holy One, blessed be He: May it be Thy will that my songs and praises of Thee shall be sung for ever in houses of prayer and in houses of study.

May his years be as many generations (Ps. 61:7): May the Messiah's years be as many as the generations of this world and of the world-to-come.

Appoint (man) mercy and truth, that they may preserve him (Ps. 61:8): Mercy and truth, which are appointed to go before Thee for ever, shall honor him, for it is said *Mercy and truth go before Thee* (Ps. 89:15). The [Hebrew] word *man* clearly means "appoint," as in the verse *And the king appointed (wayēman) for them* (Dan. 1:5).

PSALM SIXTY-TWO

1. *For the leader; for Jeduthun. A Psalm of David. Wait, my soul, only for God, for YH¹* (Ps. 62:1-2). Elsewhere this is what Scripture says: *Wait ye upon the Lord for ever* (Isa. 26:4). The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Know ye upon whom you wait? Upon Him who created two worlds with the two letters of His name: *With Y and H He formed worlds* (*ibid.*),² this world as well as the world-to-come. This world was created with the letter *he* (H), for in the verse *These are the generations of the heaven and of the earth when they were created* (*bhbr'm*) (Gen. 2:4), *bhbr'm* is not to be read *When they were created*, but “with *he* created He them.” And the world-to-come was created with the letter *yod* (Y). Hence *With Y and H He formed worlds*.

And why was this world created with the letter *he*? To tell you that in the same way as a man utters the sound of *he*, letting it slip from his mouth without movement of the lips and without pressure of the tongue, so God created the world without any drudgery and without any labor, as is said *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made* (Ps. 33:6).

The verse *For He hath brought down them that dwell on high* (Isa. 26:5), and the verse *The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor* (*ibid.* 26:6), and also the verse *Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion* (Micah 4:13), imply that the Holy One, blessed be He, spoke thus to the children of Israel: “I shall redeem you. But not before you have known trouble! And by what means shall I make you know trouble? *With Jeduthun*”—that is, with the judgments and trials Thou wilt impose upon us. Hence it is said *With Jeduthun*.

Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from Him cometh my salvation (Ps. 62:2). Similarly, Scripture says, *Neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee* (2 Chron. 20:12).

2. *He only is my Rock and my salvation* (Ps. 62:3). What does *Rock* mean? It means “duress”: God puts me under duress in this world, and because of the duress He puts me under, He will save me. Therefore the verse concludes *He is my defence, I shall not be moved into the great place* (Ps. 62:3), the great place being

a name for Gehenna, the place into which the wicked fall and stay. So, too, in the verses *The vats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision* (Joel 4:13b-14), what can *valley of decision* mean except that if a man fall into this valley, the judgment upon him is decided for ever.

But in the hour of judgment *I shall not be moved into the great place*, for though *The Lord shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem* (Joel 4:16), at the same time *The Lord will be a refuge unto His people, and the strength of the children of Israel* (*ibid.*). So, too, the sons of Korah said: *Nations were in tumult, kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge*, etc. (Ps. 46:7-8).

3. *Trust in Him at all times* (Ps. 62:9). R. Hiyya bar Abba of Joppa said: A man's breathing—in, out—shows that his spirit is striving to escape from him. And how is it made to remain in his body? The Holy One, blessed be He, fills the whole earth with His glory, and when the spirit, close to escaping, sees its Maker, it turns back. And where was this thought plainly expressed? Among the men of the Great Synagogue who expressed it plainly in their comment on *Thou art the Lord, even Thou alone; Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, the earth and all things that are thereon, the seas and all that is in them, and Thou preservest them all* (Neh. 9:6). Whence do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, fills the whole space of the universe? Because He said: *Do not I fill heaven and earth?* (Jer. 23:24).

R. Nahmani said in the name of R. Levi: They who brought the first fruits used to sing the song *Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord* (Ps. 150:6). What is meant by the words *Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord*? That as long as the breath goes in and out of a man's body, we are bound to sing Hallelujah unto God, for He does wonders for us.

Hence David said, "Since God works so many miracles for us all the time, take care not to be diverted from Him for one instant: *Trust in Him at all times; ye people pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us for ever*" (Ps. 62:9).

4. *Also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for Thou renderest to every man according to his work* (Ps. 62:13). What is meant by the words *Also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy*, etc.? R. Judah and R. Nehemiah differed. R. Judah maintained that good works are not barren, but bear fruit, as is said *Say ye of the righteous, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings* (Isa. 3:10); sin, however, is barren, for it is said *Also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for Thou renderest to every man according to his work* (Ps. 62:13). Consider a man with ten good works and with ten sins. Do the good works and the sins cancel one another out? ³ No; the Holy One, blessed be He, permits no such thing. He first makes a man pay for his iniquities, and only afterwards gives him his reward for his good works. Our Masters taught that God pays him a reward for his good works, but does not deal strictly with him for the sins he has accumulated; that is, God does not minutely examine the sin in order to punish him exactly as much as he sinned, for it is said *Thou, our God, hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve* (Ezra 9:13). Here also, the verse says literally, *Thou renderest to every man somewhat like his work* (Ps. 62:13): not "according to his work," but *somewhat like his work*. And what is meant by the words *less than our iniquities deserve*? That God makes a man pay for these iniquities out of what comes into his possession. How? When a young man is so inflamed by lust that he deserves death, what does the Holy One, blessed be He, do but suspend the punishment of the young man until after he has taken a wife and begotten sons. Then the Holy One, blessed be He, takes one of his sons instead of punishing the man himself for the sin he committed.⁴ Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, makes a man pay what is due Him out of what a man comes to possess. Is there greater mercy than this? Hence it is said *Unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy*.

R. Nehemiah, however, had a different interpretation of *Thou renderest to every man according to his work*: What is meant by the words *according to his work*? This: say that a man considers committing a sin, but does not commit it; the Holy One,

blessed be He, does not write it down against his name unless he commits it. But if he considers doing a good deed and is prevented from doing it, the Holy One, blessed be He, writes it down in his favor as though he had done it. From whose life can you learn this? From David's, for he grievously desired to build a Temple, as it is said *Lord, remember unto David all his grief; how he swore unto the Lord . . . : "Surely I will not come into the tent of my house . . . until I find out a place for the Lord"* (Ps. 132:1, 2a, 3a, 5a), and again *Now, behold, in my grief have I prepared for the house of the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold* (1 Chron. 22:14). To this grief Scripture refers also in the verse *And it came to pass, when the king dwelt in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies round about* (2 Sam. 7:1). At that time, as David was meditating in his heart the building of the Temple, he said to Nathan the prophet: *"See, now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the Ark of God dwelleth within curtains"* (*ibid.* 7:2). Thereupon Nathan the prophet replied: If the thought that thou shouldst build Him a house had not come into the heart of the Holy One, blessed be He, neither would it have come into thy heart, as is shown by the verse which the Holy One, blessed be He, ordered me to write of thee: *The Lord hath sought him a man according to that which had come into His heart* (1 Sam. 13:64). And at once, through Nathan, the Holy One, blessed be He, made His thought known to David, as is said *And it came to pass the same night, that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, saying: Go and tell My servant David: Thus saith the Lord: Thou shalt build Me a house for Me to dwell in!* (2 Sam. 7:4-5). But another verse says, *Thou shalt not build Me a house to dwell in!* (1 Chron. 17:4). How can the two statements be maintained? Thus: Even though thy son Solomon is to build the house, it will be called by thy name.⁵ Though David deserved to build the house, the prophet Nathan came and said to David: *Thou shalt not build a house unto My name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight* (1 Chron. 22:8). When David heard this, he was afraid, and he said: "Behold, I am unfit to build the Temple." According to

R. Judah bar Ilai, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to David: "David, be not afraid. By thy life, all the blood thou hast shed is no more to me than the blood of the hart or of the gazelle, of which it is said *The unclean and the clean may eat thereof, as of the gazelle, and as of the hart. Only ye shall not eat the blood; thou shalt shed it upon the earth as water*"⁶ (Deut. 12:15-16). David then asked God: "If this is so, why am I not allowed to build the Temple?" The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "If thou build the Temple, behold! it will stand and abide and never be destroyed." David said: "But that is as it should be!" The Holy One, blessed be He, answered: "It is revealed and known unto Me that the children of Israel will sin, and then I shall cool the fire of My fury upon the Temple and destroy it, and only thus will the children of Israel be saved." Of this destruction it is written *He hath bent His bow like an enemy . . . In the Tabernacle of the daughter of Zion He hath poured out His fury like fire* (Lam. 2:4). The Holy One, blessed be He, also said to David: "Even if thou art not to build the Temple, nevertheless, since thou didst think to build it, I shall record it in thy name," as is said *A song at the dedication of the house of David* (Ps. 30:1): Scripture does not say "the house of Solomon" but *the house of David*. Why? Because David thought in his heart to build the Temple. Thus we learn that when a man thinks of doing a good work, even if he is prevented from doing it, the Holy One, blessed be He, reckons it as though he had done it.

PSALM SIXTY-THREE

1. *A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah. O God, Thou art my God, earnestly will I seek Thee* (Ps. 63:1-2). Elsewhere this is what Scripture says: *Lord, in trouble have they sought Thee, silently they poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them* (Isa. 26:16). When do the children of Israel seek the Holy One, blessed be He? In the time of their distress, for it is said *In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God* (Ps. 18:7). Thus David also, whenever he found himself in distress, sought the Holy One, blessed be He, as is said *A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son* (Ps. 3:1); and again *When the Ziphites came and said to Saul: "Doth not David hide himself with us?"* (Ps. 54:2); and again *When he fled from Saul in the cave* (Ps. 57:1). So here, also: *A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah*. The verse does not say "A Psalm of David, when he was king," but *when he was in the wilderness of Judah*. Thus again David said, *I called upon the Lord in distress* (Ps. 118:5), and also, *What time that I am afraid, I will trust in Thee* (Ps. 56:4), and again *It is good for me that I have been afflicted, in order that I might learn Thy statutes* (Ps. 119:71). Hence it is said *A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah. O God, Thou art my God, earnestly will I seek Thee*.

O God, Thou art my God, earnestly will I seek Thee (Ps. 63:2). Elsewhere this is what Scripture says: *I love them that love me, and those that seek me earnestly shall find me* (Prov. 18:17). The Torah says: *I love them that love me*; who loves me, I love him.

Another interpretation: Who loves Me, I love him. David—because he loved Me, I loved him; and because he sought Me earnestly, I sought him earnestly, and was found by him. Hence it is said *O God, Thou art my God, earnestly will I seek Thee*.

My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is (Ps. 63:2). The thirsty land where no water is is Edom. R. Joshua ben Levi taught that when Moses said, *The Lord, the God . . . who led thee through the*

great and dreadful wilderness, wherein were serpents, fiery serpents, and scorpions, and thirsty land where no water is (Deut. 8:15), by *serpents* he meant Babylon; by *fiery serpents*, Media; by *scorpions*, Greece; and by a *thirsty land where no water is*, Edom. There is a charm against the serpent; there is a charm against the fiery serpent; there is a charm against the scorpion; but there is no charm against a *thirsty land where no water is*. So, too, there is no charm against this wicked kingdom. Hence a *dry and thirsty land where no water is* is a land where our souls thirst for words of Torah, but where it is not permitted us to drink,¹ as is said *When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst; I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them* (Isa. 41:17).

PSALM SIXTY-FOUR

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David. Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer; preserve my life from fear of the enemy (Ps. 64:1-2).* These words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets (Amos 3:7).* R. Tahalifa maintained: The Holy One, blessed be He, made known to David what would be done to Daniel.¹ Indeed, had the heathen any power at all to do anything to the Holy One, blessed be He, they would have done it. This, the sons of Korah² implied when they said, *They have cast fire into Thy sanctuary (Ps. 74:7)*—that is, had the heathen been able to ascend so as to break into the heavens, they would have broken in; for the words *But now they break down the carved work thereof . . . with axes and hammers (ibid. 74:6)* mean that since the heathen were unable to break into heaven, they broke down the sanctuary on earth;³ and the words *The kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His anointed (Ps. 2:2)* mean that because the heathen could not prevail against God in heaven, they took counsel against Daniel, as is said *All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps . . . took counsel together that the king should establish a statute, and make a strong interdict, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the interdict, and sign the writing (Dan. 6:8-9a).* The presidents and the satraps said to Darius: "Art thou not a king to do just such? All kings establish statutes and make laws, as it is said *according to the law of the Medes and Persians (ibid. 6:9b)*. But in thy life time, thou hast not established any statute!" The king, hearing them say "Now, O king, establish the interdict and sign the writing," gave in to them, and *King Darius signed the writing and the interdict (ibid. 6:9a, 10).* And when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his

knees three times a day, and prayed (ibid. 6:11) saying: Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer; preserve my life from the terror of the enemy (Ps. 64:1). When they sought out Daniel, they found him as he stood praying, as it is said *Then these men came tumultuously, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God (Dan. 6:12).* Whereupon Daniel uttered the following words before God: *These men come tumultuously upon me: Hide me from the council of evil-doers; from the tumult of the workers of iniquity (Ps. 64:3).* As soon as the presidents and satraps found the means, they approached the king, as is said *Then they came near, and spoke before the king concerning the king's interdict: "Hast thou not signed an interdict, that every man that shall make petition unto any god or man within thirty days, save unto thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said: "The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not." Then answered they and said before the king: "That Daniel, who is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the interdict that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day." Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to rescue him (Dan. 6:13-15).* As the presidents and the satraps reproached the king, he said: "Look you! You are not to be believed," and so they kept quiet the whole day. At the going down of the sun, Daniel began to pray, saying: "Because of these wicked men, should not a man pray?" Hence it is said *The king labored till the going down of the sun to rescue him.*⁴ (Surely, if Daniel did what he did for the sake of a prayer which a man may omit without fear of being cut down by heaven or being put to death by a court, how much more ought we to heed other obligations for whose neglect we are liable to be cut down by heaven or put to death by a court!) And although the king sought to save Daniel, he could not do so, for the presidents and the satraps said to him: "Thou hast told us: 'You are not to be believed.' Behold! thou hast seen for thyself."

Then, as Scripture says, *The king commanded and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions (ibid. 6:17).*

And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den (ibid. 6:18). But whence stones in Babylon? This stone flew from the Land of Israel and came to rest at the mouth of the den. R. Huna, in the name of R. Jose, interpreted the word *stone* as meaning that an angel, in the likeness of a lion, came and sat at the mouth of the den. And the proof? The verse *My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me (ibid. 6:23).*

Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting; neither were diversions brought before him; and his sleep fled from him (ibid. 6:19), for he said: What did this affliction—that I should be the cause of this man's dying—see in me that made it come? *Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came near unto the den to Daniel, he cried with a pained voice: . . . O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? (ibid. 6:20, 21).* And though Daniel heard, he did not answer because he was reading the Shema. *Then said Daniel unto the king: O king, live for ever! My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths (ibid. 6:23).* How did this happen? When Daniel went down to the lions, they became like tame beasts in his presence, as is said *The lion, which is mighty, and turneth not away for any, became a tame beast (Prov. 30:30).* For the Holy One, blessed be He, said: Let a lion come and deliver a lion from the mouth of a lion.⁵

Then was the king exceeding glad, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den . . . And the king commanded and they brought those men that had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions (Dan. 6:24, 25). For the accusers had said to the king: "Because the lions were already satiated, they did not devour Daniel." The king said to them: "If the lions are satiated, go ye down and lodge with them this night. Then we shall see whether they are satiated."⁶ When the

accusers were cast into the den, they were at once devoured, as is said *But God shall shoot at them with an arrow. Suddenly, shall they be smitten* (Ps. 64:8). As Scripture says, *And they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives* (Dan. 6:25). How many were cast into the den of lions? Mark what Scripture says: *It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty satraps . . . and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one* (*ibid.* 6:2-3). Thus there were one hundred and twenty-two men, and one hundred and twenty-two wives, and one hundred and twenty-two children—for Scripture says, *them, their children, and their wives*—making three hundred and sixty-six in all. And for every single one of these there were four lions who tore each one into four pieces, one piece for every beast, the beasts tearing them apart even before they got down to the bottom of the den, as is said *They had not come to the bottom of the den* (*ibid.*); there were one thousand four hundred and sixty-four lions. Hence it is said *He that is righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and shall take refuge in Him; and all the upright in heart shall glory* (Ps. 64:11).

PSALM SIXTY-FIVE

1. *For the leader. A Psalm. A song of David. For Thee silence is praise* (Ps. 65:1-2). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *I have long time held My peace, I have been silent, and refrained Myself; now will I cry like a travailing woman* (Isa. 42:14), for, as the children of Israel said, *Thy holy cities are become a wilderness, Zion is become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised Thee, is burned with fire. Wilt Thou refrain Thyself for these things, O Lord?* (*ibid.* 64:10-11), God replied, *Fury is not in Me* (*ibid.* 27:4), as if to say, "I cannot do anything for you; the measure of justice requires that I refrain." And God went on: *O that I could give [the hostile nations] over to destruction as briers and thorns in flame!* (*ibid.*). By these words, the Holy One, blessed be He, meant: "I could do something against them, but the measure of justice makes Me refrain in silence." Therefore in saying *For Thee silence is praise*, David implied: All men give Thee praise because Thou couldst remain silent. For Thou wast silent at what they did to Thee *in Zion* (*ibid.*), and at the noise that they made in Thy holy house, as is said *They have made a noise in the house of the Lord, as in the day of a solemn assembly* (Lam. 2:7). And what was the noise they made? They said, *Our high hand and not the Lord hath done all this* (Deut. 32:27); and they also said, *Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted?* (*ibid.* 32:37).

Hence by the words *For Thee silence is praise*, David meant: Thou art silent, and I shall be silent, as is said *Be silent to the Lord, and wait patiently for Him* (Ps. 37:7).

2. *O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee doth all flesh come* (Ps. 65:3). Scripture does not say "all men," but *all flesh*. From these words the Sages inferred that unless a man makes his heart as yielding as flesh, his prayer will not be heard.

Indeed, in repentance, we have made our hearts like flesh. Thou hearest the prayer of all flesh: wilt Thou not hear ours? The

Holy One, blessed be He, replied: *Unto thee also shall the vow be performed* (Ps. 65:2). Hence it is said *O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee doth all flesh come* (Ps. 65:3).

A mortal king—can he give ear to two or three men? He cannot give ear to all of them at once. Not so the Holy One, blessed be He. Though all men prayed at the same time, He would hear their prayers as if all were one. A mortal—his ear can be filled so that he does not hear, and his eye can be filled so that he does not see; but of the Holy One, blessed be He, it is said *The Eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the Ear filled with hearing* (Eccles. 1:8). Hence it is said *O Thou that hearest prayer*.

A man coming into a synagogue finds the congregation praying and begins his prayers alongside theirs, and the Holy One, blessed be He, hears all of the prayers, his and theirs. Hence it is said *O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee doth all flesh come*.

Scripture says, *Yea, when I cry and call for help, He shutteth out my prayer* (Lam. 3:8), and says further, *Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, so that no prayer can pass through* (ibid. 3:44). Then God asked the children of Israel: "Which sins are you praying Me to forgive—unwitting sins, or wilful sins?" The children of Israel replied: We pray forgiveness not for unwitting sins alone, nor for wilful sins alone, nor for unknown sins alone. *The tale of iniquities is too heavy for me; our transgressions, do Thou forgive them* (Ps. 65:4).

3. *Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and bringest near, that he may dwell in Thy courts* (Ps. 65:5). R. Hoshaia taught in the name of R. Samuel bar Shila who taught in the name of Rab: When David said, "Master of the universe, *Blessed is the man whom . . . Thou bringest near to court*," he referred not to the court of the Temple, but to the court on high. This court he also referred to in the words *How precious is Thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house* (Ps. 36:9). To this the sons of Korah also referred in saying: *For a day in Thy courts is better than a*

thousand elsewhere (Ps. 84:11). And this is also referred to in the verse *Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house* (*ibid.* 84:5).

4. *With wondrous works dost Thou answer us in righteousness, O God of our salvation; Thou the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of the sea, afar off* (Ps. 65:6). With regard to this verse, R. Hanina bar Papa asked R. Samuel bar Nahmani: What is meant by the words *Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, so that no prayer can pass through* (Lam. 3:44)? R. Samuel bar Nahmani answered: There are times when the gates of prayer are open, and times when the gates of prayer are shut, but the gates of repentance are never barred. The words *Thou the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of the sea, afar off* mean that repentance is like the sea which is never barred, so that whoever desires to bathe in it, bathes in it whenever he desires; whenever a man desires to repent, the Holy One, blessed be He, receives him. For prayer, however, there are set times.

R. Jose bar Halafta taught: In the words *But as for me, let my prayer be unto Thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time* (Ps. 69:14), *an acceptable time* shows that there are set times for prayer.

R. Berechiah, R. Helbo, and R. Anan bar Joseph taught in the name of Rabbi: In truth, the gates of prayer are not ever barred. With regard to the gates of prayer, Ben Azzai and R. Akiba differed in their comments. One of them maintained: "He who practices loving-kindness may feel assured that his prayer will be heard, for it is said *Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in loving-kindness* (Hos. 10:12). And what does the verse go on to say? *That is the time to seek the Lord* (*ibid.*), meaning that when such a man prays to the Holy One, blessed be He, he is heard." And the other said: "I do not set aside the words of my Master, but from Scripture I merely add another proof to his comment, for directly after the verse *O God, because of the abundance of Thy loving-kindness* (Ps. 69:14), there follows *Hear me in the truth of Thy salvation* (*ibid.*)."

PSALM SIXTY-SIX

1. *For the leader. A song, a Psalm. Shout unto God, all the earth; sing forth the honor of His name* (Ps. 66:1-2). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent* (Zeph. 3:9). R. Johanan taught: What is the service of the Holy One, blessed be He? It is prayer. Moses implied this when he said: *And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto My commandments . . . which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, to serve Him with all your heart* (Deut. 10:12). What, then, is the service that a man may render to God? It is none other than prayer; as Scripture says, *Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing* (Ps. 100:2), and further *O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation* (Ps. 95:1). It was to prayer that Darius referred when he said to Daniel: *Thy God whom thou servest continually* (Dan. 6:17). For how did Daniel serve God? By prayer, as is said *And he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed* (ibid. 6:11).

Say unto God: "*How fearful is Thy work! Through the greatness of Thy might shall Thine enemies dwindle away before Thee. All the earth shall worship Thee*" (Ps. 66:3-4). Even as it was said to God at the Red Sea: *Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the mighty?* (Ex. 15:11), so now, I say to God: *How fearful is Thy work! Through the greatness of Thy might shall Thine enemies dwindle away before Thee. All the earth shall worship Thee*. This, Isaiah also said: *And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the Lord* (Isa. 66:23). This is also said in the verse *All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; and shall glorify Thy name* (Ps. 86:9). Indeed, not only shall all the nations worship Thee, but *All the earth shall worship Thee* (Ps. 66:4). Why so? Because flesh and blood will no longer have rule and dominion. So, too, the sons of Korah said: *O clap your*

hands, all ye peoples; shout unto God with the voice of triumph (Ps. 47:2). Why? Because The Lord Most High, fearful, will be the great King over all the earth (ibid. 47:3). Then The Lord shall be King over all the earth; in that day shall the Lord be one, and His name one (Zech. 14:9).

PSALM SIXTY-SEVEN

1. *For the leader; with string-music. A Psalm, a song. God be merciful unto us, and bless us* (Ps. 67:1-2). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Surely the Lord's mercies are not consumed, surely His compassions fail not* (Lam. 3:22). We know that the mercies of the Holy One, blessed be He, abide and that they are not consumed, because when the nations of the earth said: *Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation* (Ps. 83:5), His compassion for us did not fail. Hence it is said *Surely the Lord's mercies are not consumed, surely His compassions fail not*. Nay more, every morning Thou renewest and raisest us up, as is said *They are new every morning* (Lam. 3:23). The end of the verse, *Great is Thy faithfulness*, refers to Thy faithfulness in what Thou didst promise to our fathers: After we went down before Babylon, Thou didst raise us up, and Babylon is gone. When our master Moses foresaw the kingdom of Greece, he began to pray. For what did he pray? That Greece should fall at the hand of the tribe of Levi.¹ And Moses said: *Bless, Lord, his might* (Deut. 33:11). By *bless*, Moses meant "Bless the tribe of Levi, with that blessing wherewith the Levites bless Thy children," that is, *The Lord bless thee. . . . the Lord make His face to shine. . . . the Lord lift up His countenance*, etc. (Num. 6:24-26). And so, too, bless Thou the children of Israel, as it is said *God be merciful unto us, and bless us*. If Thou dost bless us, Thou shalt make Thy strength and Thy way known among the nations, as is said *That Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy salvation among all nations* (Ps. 67:3).

The Holy One, blessed be He, does not save Israel because of their good deeds, but only to make His strength known and to make His great name known. As Asaph said, *Through Judah will God be known; His name shall be great through Israel* (Ps. 76:2). And as Asaph also said, *Thou art the God that doest wonders; Thou hast made known Thy strength among the peoples* (Ps. 77:15). What is meant by the words *Thy strength*?

In that thou redeemest Israel by Thy strength and by Thine arm, Thou makest Thy might known in the world.

Another Psalm says, *Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake* (Ps. 106:8). Why? To make His might known. It might be supposed that when the Holy One, blessed be He, saves the children of Israel, the nations will say: "God is partial to them." But in truth, the nations will acknowledge God's justice, as is said *The nations will acknowledge Thee, all of them* (Ps. 67:6). Why? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring forth the righteousness of the children of Israel to the light, as it is said *And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light* (Ps. 37:6); and as it is written *And the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory* (Isa. 62:2); and as it is also written *The Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations* (*ibid.* 61:11).

PSALM SIXTY-EIGHT

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David, a song. Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered* (Ps. 68:1-2). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *When the wicked rise, men hide themselves; but when they perish, the righteous increase* (Prov. 28:28). How so? Because it is through the wicked that the Holy One, blessed be He, punishes the righteous; when the wicked rule, the righteous cannot lift up their heads nor open their mouths. When the wicked perish, the righteous increase. Hence it is said *When the wicked rise, men hide themselves; but when they perish, the righteous increase*. So, too, when Deborah said, *So perish all Thine enemies, O Lord; but they that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might* (Judg. 5:31), she meant that when the wicked perish, at once *They that love Him are as the sun when he goeth forth in his might*. And so, too, David said, *I will keep a curb upon my mouth, while the wicked is before me* (Ps. 39:2). From this verse it follows that the righteous can neither open their mouths nor raise their heads in the presence of the wicked.

David pleaded: Deal with these as Thou hast dealt with former enemies. Even as Moses prayed to Thee, *Rise up, O Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered* (Num. 10:35), so I pray Thee to scatter these: *Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered* (Ps. 68:2).

When Zophar the Naamathite said, *But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall have no way to flee* (Job 11:20), he meant that the wicked have nowhere a refuge, for wherever they flee, *Their hope shall be a puff of breath* (ibid.). Of them, Jeremiah also said: *These shall perish from the earth, and from under the heavens* (Jer. 10:11). Hence it is said *Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered*.

2. *As smoke after it has been driven away—so drive them away* (Ps. 68:3): Drive them away not only as smoke is driven away, but make it seem as if they never existed.

In a different interpretation the verse is read *Like smoke that is made to come up* are the wicked. A parable of a king and

the slaves in his palace. He was in the upper part of the palace, and the slaves were in the lower part of the palace, and they raised such a smoke that the smoke came up to him. So the wicked, as Isaiah says, are *A people that provoke Me to My face continually, that sacrifice in gardens, and burn incense upon bricks; that sit among the graves, and lodge in the vaults, that eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels . . . These are a smoke in My nose* (Isa. 65:3-5). Like makers of smoke are the wicked, and when they make smoke come up in My face, that is, provoke Me, then, as it is said, *The anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall smoke against that man* (Deut. 29:19); and it is also written *Smoke arose up in His nostrils* (Ps. 18:9), which is to say that the wicked make themselves go up in smoke, as it is said *The enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs—they shall pass away in smoke, they shall pass away* (Ps. 37:20).

A different interpretation. Taking the first part of this verse to read *The enemies of the Lord shall be as the glory*¹ *of lambs*, R. Aḥa said: The wicked shall come to such glory as comes to lambs. For what happens to lambs? They are killed and hung up to smoke.

Another interpretation. Taking the first part of this verse to read *The enemies of the Lord shall be as the glory* [of the dwellers] *on the plain*, R. Joḥanan said: The enemies of the Lord shall come to such glory as will befall the dwellers on the plain²—so called in the vision of Moses when the Lord showed him *The south and the plain* (Deut. 34:3)—as will befall them on the day when God raises such a cloud of smoke that in the murk no man will be able to see his fellow. So it will be with the wicked. Hence it is said *As smoke is driven away, so drive them away . . . so let the wicked perish at the presence of God* (Ps. 68:3). The righteous will then rejoice, as is said *But the righteous will be glad, they will exult before God; yea, they will rejoice with gladness* (ibid. 68:4).

3. *Sing unto God, sing praises to His name; extol Him that*

rideth upon the skies (*ibid.* 68:5). Like a man riding a horse and guiding³ it over the plain, the Holy One, blessed be He, rides upon the skies. As Moses said, "He who rideth upon the sky, is thy help" (Deut. 33:26).

The end of the verse, *With His name YH⁴* (Ps. 68:5), means that with the two letters *yod* and *he*, which spell out but half of God's name,⁵ God created two worlds.⁶

A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows (Ps. 68:6): The children of Israel in banishment are like widows and orphans, as is said *We are become orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows* (Lam. 5:3). Not widows in fact; rather, like a woman whose husband has gone to a land beyond the sea, but intends to return to her. And not orphans in fact; rather, like children whose father has gone to a land beyond the sea, and who have no one to provide for them. As Scripture says, *For Israel is not widowed, nor Judah, of his God, of the Lord of hosts* (Jer. 51:5).

A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows is God in His holy habitation (Ps. 68:6), for it is said *The Lord God . . . executeth justice for the oppressed . . . giveth bread to the hungry. The Lord looseth the prisoners* (Ps. 146:7).

4. *God setteth the solitary in families* (Ps. 68:7). Elsewhere this is what Scripture says, *It is not good that the man should be solitary* (Gen. 2:18). God fashioned Eve out of Adam's rib and set her in a bridal chair.

In a different interpretation, the verse is taken to read *God setteth the solitary to dwell within*; that is, God made Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were solitary in the world, to dwell in the Land of Israel which is called *within*. Since it is said *While as yet He had not made the Land nor the lands without* (Prov. 8:26), the Land of Israel is called "the land within," and the other lands are called *lands without*.

He bringeth out the prisoners because of good works (Ps. 68:7)—that is, the children of Israel who were prisoners in Egypt. God brought them forth because of the good works of

their fathers, but the Egyptians who were *rebellious remained dwelling in a parched land (ibid.)*, as it is said "Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore" (Ex. 14:30).

O God, when Thou wentest forth before Thy people (Ps. 68:5). As Scripture says, "The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud" (Ex. 13:21). It was *When Thou didst march through the wilderness* (Ps. 68:8) on the day of the giving of the Torah.

5. *The earth trembled* (Ps. 68:9), and at once all the living in the Land of Israel died: But the dead came to life as the Holy One, blessed be He, dropped the dew of resurrection on them, for the verse goes on to say *The heavens also dropped at the presence of God (ibid.)*.

Zeh⁷ Sinai (ibid.) means "Sinai was on fire." Here *zeh* is clearly a term for "fire and conflagration"—as in the verse *It was wont to be fired (mezyeh)* (Dan. 3:19)—for it is said *The mountain burned with fire unto the heart of heaven* (Deut. 4:11).

A bounteous rain (Ps. 68:10). When the ministering angels saw that the breath of life had flown out of the children of Israel, they asked the Holy One, blessed be He: "To whom wilt Thou give the Torah, to the dead or to the quick?" At once the Holy One, blessed be He, waved out rains of life over the children of Israel so that they should receive the Torah with abounding spirit. And the ministering angels waved the rain along with fans upon the children of Israel, as is said *Thou didst pour out, O God (ibid.)*.

When Thine inheritance was weary (ibid.): When Thine inheritance grew weary at the noise of thunder and of earthquake, *Thou didst steady it (ibid.)*.

Through Thy quickening, they inhabited it (Ps. 68:11): Thy quickening them enabled the children of Israel to inhabit the Land. The end of the verse, *Thou, O God, by saying it is well, didst approve [the plea of] the poor⁸* (Ps. 68:11), refers to the occasion when *They said unto Moses: "Speak thou with us, and we will hear"* (Ex. 20:16). Note that it is written in Deuteronomy of this occasion *If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any*

more, then we shall die . . . Go thou near and hear all that the Lord our God may speak to thee (Deut. 5:22, 24). Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses: *They have well said all that they have spoken* (ibid. 5:25).

6. *The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it* (Ps. 68:12). When the Holy One, blessed be He, whose name and whose might are to be praised, gave forth the divine word, the voice divided itself into seven voices, and from the seven voices passed into the seventy languages of the seventy nations, so that all men understood it. Hence it is said *Great was the company of those that published it*.

Another comment on *The Lord gave the word*. The divine word came forth out of the mouth of the Almighty, and Moses and Aaron published it to the *great company*, that is, to the congregation of Israel.

7. *Hosts of angels did move them, did move them* (Ps. 68:13). These words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *And when the people saw it, they were removed, so that they stood afar off* (Ex. 20:15); *afar off* implies that they were removed to a distance of twelve *mil*⁹ from the mountain. This verse intimates that the children of Israel recoiled a distance of twelve *mil* and returned a distance of twelve *mil*—twenty-four *mil* at each Commandment. Thus the children of Israel went back and forth two hundred and forty *mil* on that day.

And on that day the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the ministering angels: "Go down and help your brothers," for it is said *Hosts of angels did move them, did move them*—that is, moved them at the going away from the mountain and moved them at the coming back.

R. Judah bar Ilai taught: Because the children of Israel were scorched by flames of fire from above,¹⁰ the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the clouds of glory: Distill the dew of life for My children. Hence it is said *A bounteous rain Thou didst pour out, O God* (Ps. 68:10). The end of the verse, *After Thine inheritance had been weary, Thou didst steady it*, means that after the children of Israel had been refreshed, at once they received

the Torah, as is said *The beauty of the house*¹¹ *Thou didst divide as spoil* (Ps. 68:13).

8. *If ye have lain in dunghills*¹² (Ps. 68:14). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the nations: If ye sprawl among the dunghills of your circuses and theatres, then the congregation of Israel, dove-like, shall receive the Torah, as is said *The wings of a dove shall be covered with silver* (*ibid.*).

Why are the children of Israel called dove-like? To tell you that as a dove does not struggle when it is killed, so the children of Israel do not struggle when they are killed for the hallowing of the Name; and that as a dove can save itself only by its wings, so the children of Israel can save themselves only by means of Torah, which is likened to silver in the verse *The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in the open before all men*,¹³ *refined seven times* (Ps. 12:7). In the end of the verse, *And her pinions with the shimmer of gold* (Ps. 68:14), *gold* refers to the collections of Mishnah and the treatises of the Talmud.

9. *When kings expound, the Almighty is within it*¹⁴ (Ps. 68:15): when Israel engages continually in the study of Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, makes His presence dwell within Israel. *Thou wilt make Zalmon as white as snow*¹⁵ (*ibid.*): even if the interpretation of a law be obscured from Israel as if by a shadow (*zalmuṭ*), the Holy One, blessed be He, makes it white as snow and clarifies it for them.

Whence do we know that the disciples of the wise are called kings? Because it is said *By me kings reign and princes decree justice* (Prov. 8:15).

A mountain of God, the mountain of Bashan. A mountain of peaks, the mountain of Bashan (Ps. 68:16). R. Nathan taught: When the Holy One, blessed be He, sought to give the Torah to the children of Israel, Carmel came from Aspamea and Tabor came from Beth-elim.¹⁶ Later revelation refers to their coming in the verse *As I live, saith the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts, surely like Tabor among the mountains, and like Carmel by the sea, so shall he come* (Jer. 46:18). The one said: "I am called Mount Tabor. It is fitting that the Presence should rest

upon me, for I am the highest of all the mountains, and not even the water of the deluge overwhelmed me." And the other said: "I am called Mount Carmel. It is fitting that the Presence should rest upon me, for I put myself in the middle of the Red Sea, and it was by my help that the children of Israel got across."¹⁷ The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "By the blemish of arrogance in you, you have already made yourselves unworthy of My presence. Each of you is unworthy of My presence." The mountains asked: "Art Thou partial to another? Is it possible that Thou wilt deprive us of our due?" The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "Because you put yourselves to trouble for My honor, I shall give you a reward. Behold, in the time of Deborah I shall give deliverance to the children of Israel upon Mount Tabor, as is said *Go and draw toward Mount Tabor* (Judg. 4:6); and also I shall give deliverance to Elijah upon Mount Carmel, as is said *Ahab . . . gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel* (1 Kings 18:20)."

All the other mountains then began to thunder protests and to make a commotion, as is said *The mountains quaked in [contesting for] the presence of the Lord* (Judg. 5:5). Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, asked: *Why look ye askance (tēraṣṣēdun)?* (Ps. 68:17). (That is, why do you wish [*tirēṣu*] to contend [*dun*] with Sinai?) Ye are all *peak-backed mountains* (*ibid.*)! Here "peak-backed" has the sense of "blemished," as in the verse "He that hath a blemish . . . shall not approach . . . a man that is . . . peak-backed" (Lev. 21:18-20).¹⁸

At the mountain which God hath desired for His abode (Ps. 68:17). God said: "My wish is to dwell only on Sinai because Sinai is the lowliest of all of you," for, as Scripture says, *I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and lowly spirit* (Isa. 57:15), and also *For though the Lord be high, yet regardeth He the lowly, and the haughty He knoweth from afar* (Ps. 138:6). Lest it be thought, however, that God has dwelt upon Sinai for all the generations since, the verse ends by saying *But the Lord will dwell in eternity* (Ps. 68:17)—that is, God returned His presence to heaven.

Whence did Sinai come? R. Jose taught: Out of Mount Moriah, out of the place where our father Isaac had been bound as a sacrifice, Sinai plucked itself as a priest's portion¹⁹ is plucked out of the bread. For the Holy One, blessed be He, said: Since their father Isaac was bound upon this place, it is fitting that his children receive the Torah upon it.

And whence do we know that Mount Moriah will be restored to its pre-eminence? Because it is said *The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the mountains* (Isa. 2:2), *mountains* referring to Tabor, Carmel, Sinai, and Zion. *The mountains* (*heharim*), however, implies five mountains,²⁰ equaling in number the five books of the Torah.

10. *The chariots of God: two myriads, thousands of angels* (Ps. 68:18). R. Abdimi²¹ of Haifa said: In the course of my study I learned that the Holy One, blessed be He, came down upon Mount Sinai, and with Him were twenty-two thousand chariots of ministering angels.

R. Berechiah said: Their number equaled the number of Levites in the camp of the tribe. For the Holy One, blessed be He, foresaw that at the making of the golden calf, they in the camp of Levi would abide in their limpid integrity,²² as is said *All the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him* (Ex. 32:26). Accordingly, down from the camp of the Holy One, blessed be He, came twenty-two thousand chariots, equaling in number the Levites in the camp of the tribe.

Another interpretation of *The chariots of God*: Twenty-two thousand chariots came down with the Holy One, blessed be He, and every chariot was like the chariot which Ezekiel the son of Buzi saw.

In the name of a company of scholars that came up from Babylonia, it is reported that there were forty-two thousand chariots, for the verse ends by saying *The Lord is among them* (*bm*) *as in Sinai, in the holy place* (*ibid.*), and the numerical value of the letters *bm* is forty-two.²³ So also taught Elijah, ever remembered on good occasions.

In a different reading of the verse, namely, *The chariots of*

God are myriads, even thousands of angels (Ps. 68:17), R. Tanhūm bar Ḥanilai said: There were as many chariots as only an accountant can imagine—a thousand thousands of thousands, and myriads of myriads.

On another reading of the verse, namely, *The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands of sharp-visaged ones*,²⁴ R. Eleazar ben Pedath commented: All of them came down sharply²⁴ intent on destroying the world, if the children of Israel did not accept the Torah.

But, according to R. Levi, the children of Israel had seen the countenance of the Holy One, blessed be He, and if a man has seen the countenance of the Holy One, blessed be He, he cannot die, as is said *In the light of the King's countenance is life* (Prov. 16:15).

The Lord is in them (Ps. 68:17). R. Simeon ben Laḳish said: There is a tablet [with *El* upon it] over the heart of every angel such as Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Anael, and in this way the Holy One, blessed be He, is in them, as is said *The Lord is in them*.²⁵ The end of the verse, *even as Sinai is upon holiness* (*ibid.*), means that though the Holy One, blessed be He, seemed to be coming down upon Mount Sinai, for it is said *And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai* (Ex. 19:20), in truth, Sinai hung upon God, as is said *The Lord is among them, even as Sinai is upon holiness*.

II. *Thou hast gone up on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men* (Ps. 68:19). These words are to be read in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *A wise man goeth up to the city of the mighty, and bringeth down the strength wherein it trusteth* (Prov. 21:22). This *wise man* is Moses, of whom it is said "And Moses went up unto God" (Ex. 19:3); the words *thou hast received gifts for men* refer to the Torah which was bestowed upon Israel as a gift, at no cost. The words *The rebellious dwell but in a parched land* (Ps. 68:7) refer to the nations of the earth who were unwilling to accept the Torah; on the other hand, in the words *Yea, among the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them* (*ibid.*

68:19), *among the rebellious* refers to the children of Israel who had also been rebellious, but among whom, the presence of God came to dwell after they accepted the Torah.

12. *Blessed be the Lord, who daily loaded us with benefits* (Ps. 68:20)—He who daily put more and more precepts and laws upon the children of Israel. *God is unto us a God of deliverances* (Ps. 68:21): *Deliverances* refers to the way of life which He gave to us and to our children. *Also unto God the Lord belong the issues of death* (*ibid.*), that is, belongs the way of death, as it is said *See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil* (Deut. 30:15).

Surely God will break the head of His enemies (Ps. 68:22). Here the Psalmist refers again to the enemies of God and to the enslavement in Egypt, which are also referred to in such verses as *Thou didst break the sea in pieces by Thy strength; Thou didst break the heads of the sea-monsters in the waters* (Ps. 74:13), and in *Thou breakest the head out of the house of the wicked* (Hab. 3:13), where *head* refers to Pharaoh and his host.

13. *The Lord said: "I will bring again from Bashan"* (Ps. 68:23)—that is, bring those whom wild beasts devoured; *"I will bring My people again from the depths of the sea"* (*ibid.*)—that is, bring those who were drowned in the depths for the hallowing of the Name. [Or, reading the end of the verse, *I will bring them again from the depths of the sea*, and taking the word *them* to refer to the enemies of Israel, the verse means that] even as the Holy One, blessed be He, requited Og, the king of Bashan, and requited Pharaoh and the Egyptians at the Red Sea, so will the Holy One, blessed be He, requite the mighty men of wicked Edom. What is meant by the words *I will bring them again*? They mean: "Upon them, as upon Og and Pharaoh, it is in My power to bring requital."

That Thy foot may be red in the blood of Thine enemies (Ps. 68:24): in the wars against Gog and Magog. Or, in the war against Edom, of which it is said "Who is this that cometh from Edom . . . Wherefore art Thou red in Thine apparel, and Thy

garments like him that treadeth in the winevat?" (Isa. 63:1, 2). The end of the verse, *and the tongue of thy dogs in the same* (Ps. 68:24), means that the beasts of the field will be invited to the feast, for it is said "Come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field, come to devour" (Jer. 12:9), and also "Every beast of the forest" (Ps. 50:10).

They have seen Thy goings, O God (Ps. 68:25), Thy goings at the Red Sea; *even the goings of the God my King in holiness* (*ibid.*) upon Mount Sinai.

The singers went before (Ps. 68:26), as it is said "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel" (Ex. 15:1); and *The players on instruments followed after, among them were the damsels playing with timbrels* (*ibid.*): "And Miriam the prophetess . . . took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances" (Ex. 15:20).

14. *Bless ye God in full assemblies, even the Lord, ye that are the fountain of Israel* (Ps. 68:26): *full assemblies* includes children, and *the fountain of Israel* refers to embryos in the wombs of their mothers. This verse teaches that every child and every embryo pointed their fingers over against the Presence and said: *This is my God, and I will glorify Him* (Ex. 15:2).

There is Benjamin, the youngest, ruling them (rodem) (Ps. 68:28). R. Meir taught: When the tribes stood at the sea, one said: "I shall go down first," and another said: "I shall go down first." As they stood there defying one another, the tribe of Benjamin jumped first into the sea, as is said *There is Benjamin, the youngest, rodem*. Do not read *rodem*, but *rd ym*, meaning "braved (*rd*) the sea (*ym*)."

Thereupon the princes of Judah began to pelt the tribe of Benjamin with stones, as is said *The princes of Judah stoned them*²⁸ (Ps. 68:28).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: "My children, because each of you intended an act of piety in Mine honor, therefore I shall not withhold your reward." Thus it is said of the tribe of Benjamin *The beloved—with him the Lord shall dwell in secure habitation* (Deut. 33:12),²⁷ and also *Benjamin shall*

raven as a wolf (Gen. 49:27),²⁸ that is, the tribe of Benjamin was thought worthy of having the presence of God dwell in its part of the land. And as for the tribe of Judah, it was thought worthy of royalty, for in the verse *The princes of Judah, theirs is the purple* (Ps. 68:28), *purple* implies that the princes of Judah were thought worthy of wearing purple,²⁹ the symbol of royalty, as Scripture says, *Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with purple* (Dan. 5:29).

The princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali (Ps. 68:28). The verse teaches that on account of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, miracles were wrought for Israel at the Red Sea, and so, too, on account of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, miracles were wrought for Israel in the time of Deborah and Barak. For it is said *And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali* (Judg. 4:6), and also *Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardied their lives unto the death, and Naphtali, upon the high places of the field* (*ibid.* 5:18).

15. *Thy God hath commanded Thy strength* (Ps. 68:29). The congregation of Israel said: Master of the universe, command the deliverances of Thy people, and give strength to Thine anointed, as is written *He will give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed* (1 Sam. 2:10).

Out of Thy Temple at Jerusalem, whither kings shall bring presents unto Thee (Ps. 68:30). When shall kings bring presents unto Thee? When the kingdom of Edom is destroyed.

Rebuke the wild beast of the reed (Ps. 68:31a), that is, rebuke wicked Edom whose decrees, all done with [an undeviating] reed,³⁰ impose only persecution upon the children of Israel and command them to worship idols.

The multitude of bulls, with the calves of the people, every one submitting himself with pieces of silver (Ps. 68:31 b-c).³¹ What does this verse say that the children of Israel must do? They must open their palms to the Romans and appease them with money, as is said *Every one submitting himself with pieces of silver*.³² Therefore *Scatter Thou the people that delight in war* (*ibid.*).

*Because of Thy Temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto Thee . . . ḥašmannim*³³ *shall come out of Egypt* (Ps. 68:30, 32). Choice flocks shall be brought out of Egypt as presents³⁴ to be offered upon Thine altar, as is said *All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto Thee* (Isa. 60:7). *Ethiopia shall hasten to stretch out her hands unto God* (Ps. 68:32b); that is, with a stretching out of the hand sacrifices will be offered to God, and thereupon it will be said *Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth* (Ps. 68:33a).

A different interpretation: *In haste shall gifts (ḥašmannim) be brought to Thee out of Egypt* (Ps. 68:31). Here *ḥašmannim* is taken as made up of *manim*, 'minas' and of *ḥašut*, "haste": Thus in haste and with zeal shall presents weighty as minas be brought out of Egypt, as it is said *Kings shall bring presents unto Thee* (Ps. 68:30). And in the words *Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God* (*ibid.* 68:31), *shall soon stretch out* has the sense of "shall carry quickly," as in the verse *They . . . carried them quickly* (2 Chron. 35:13).

Another interpretation: *Ready-hasting (ḥašmannim) they shall come out of Egypt*. Here *ḥašmannim* is taken as made up of *ḥašim*, "they that are in haste" and of *mēmunnim*, "they that are ready": Thus they shall come in haste, ready to be proselytes. So, too, the end of the verse implies that Ethiopia shall hasten and run to reach out her hands toward God.

Or, the letter *ḥet* being interchangeable with the letter 'alef, *ḥašmannim* may be equated with 'ašmannim, "men burnished by the sun," and thus means "black people," referring to the verse *The sons of Ham: Ethiopia and Egypt* (Gen. 10:6).

PSALM SIXTY-NINE

1. *For the leader; upon Shoshannim. A Psalm of David. Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto the soul* (Ps. 69:1-2). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights* (Song 7:7)—that is, “How fair and pleasant were the children of Israel when they stood at the sea and beheld the Holy One, blessed be He!” As Scripture says, *And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord, and believed in the Lord, and in His servant Moses* (Ex. 14:31). Indeed, whenever the children of Israel beheld the Holy One, blessed be He, how fair and pleasant they are! They beheld God as He gave them the Torah at Sinai, and all of them became upright persons, as is said *He layeth up sound wisdom for the upright* (Prov. 2:7); Scripture also says, *Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts* (Ps. 125:4).

They beheld the Lord come into the Tent of Meeting, and they became righteous, as is said *Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous* (Ps. 33:1).¹ They beheld God upon the waters of the sea, and they became Shoshannim, “lilies,” as is said *For the leader; upon Shoshannim*. And when *Shoshannim*? When, as the Psalm says, they prayed: *Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto the soul*.

2. *I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me* (Ps. 69:3). *Deep mire* alludes to the exile in Babylon. For Babylon is the miry deep in “Thus saith the Lord . . . that saith to the deep: Be dry” (Isa. 44:27). The words *where there is no standing* allude to the exile in Media and in Persia, *deep waters* to the exile in Greece, and *floods* to the exile in wicked Edom. The verse *I am weary with my crying; my throat is dried* (Ps. 69:4) together with the remaining verses of the Psalm alludes to the oppression of the present exile: There is nothing else I can do except pray, for it is said *But as for me, let my prayer be unto Thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time* (Ps. 69:14).

R. Jose ben Ḥalafta taught that there are set times for prayer.² What is an acceptable set time? The hour when a congregation prays. And thus Scripture says, *In an acceptable time have I heard Thee* (Isa. 49:8).

Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink (Ps. 69:15); that is, deliver me out of the punishment of hell, of which it is said *He brought me up also out of the tumultuous pit, out of the miry clay* (Ps. 40:3).

PSALM SEVENTY

1. *For the leader. A Psalm of David; to bring to remembrance. Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O Lord* (Ps. 70:1-2). The word *remembrance* is to be read in the light of the verse *And I will sow them among the peoples, and they shall remember Me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and return* (Zech. 10:9). And in reward for their remembering Me, I shall have them dwell with Me. So, too, Jeremiah said: *Go ye, stand not still; remember the Lord from afar* (Jer. 51:50). Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, say "Remember Me" time and time again? Because whenever you remember Me, My heart yearns for you, as is said *Ephraim a darling son unto Me . . . For whenever My word is with him,¹ I do earnestly remember him still, therefore My heart yearneth for him* (Jer. 31:19). Also in the verse *And he appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the Ark of the Lord, to bring to remembrance, and to thank* (1 Chron. 16:4), why were the Levites told to bring to remembrance? Because it is said *Remember His marvellous works that He hath done* (*ibid.* 16:12). That is, "Remember His marvellous works which He does for you always." Did He not do them for you? And did He not redeem Israel only that they might bring His marvellous works to remembrance? Hence David said: Since this is so, I shall bring God to remembrance, and He will deliver me, as is said *For the leader. A Psalm of David; to bring to remembrance. Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O Lord.*

To whom may David be likened? [To the shepherd in the story of] the king who had a flock of sheep. When the king became vexed with them, he turned out the flock, tore down the shed, and let the shepherd go. After a time the king gathered the sheep and rebuilt the shed, but he did not bring the shepherd to remembrance. The shepherd said: Behold, the sheep are gathered, the shed is rebuilt, and I—I am not brought to remembrance. Just so, in the previous Psalm, David said: *God will save Zion, and build the cities of Judah* (Ps. 69:36), as if to say, "Behold, the shed is rebuilt"; and also, *They shall abide there, and have it in possession. The seed also of His servants shall inherit it; and they*

that love His name shall dwell therein (ibid. 36-37), as if to say, "Behold, the sheep are gathered." And in this Psalm, David the shepherd asks: And I—shall I not be brought to remembrance? Hence, A Psalm of David; to bring to remembrance.

2. Woe unto the wicked who in the world-to-come will die out of envy of what they see, and out of anger, as is said *For anger killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one (Job 5:2)*. They will waste away on account of their envy and anger, as is said *Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul; let them be turned backward and put to confusion that delight in my hurt (Ps. 70:3-4)*.

3. *But I am poor and needy; O God, make haste unto me (Ps. 70:6)*. In a previous Psalm, David said *But I am poor and needy, may the Lord think of me (Ps. 40:18)*. What David was saying, however, in the two verses to the Holy One, blessed be He, was: "Master of the universe, think of me in my poverty and in my need, and Thou wilt then make haste to deliver me, for *Thou art my help and my deliverer*." And what is meant by the words *O Lord, tarry not (Ps. 70:6, 40:18)*? They mean that it is for Thee to deliver me, whether today or tomorrow. Hence *Thou art my help and my deliverer, O Lord, tarry not*.

4. Isaiah said: *Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God (Isa. 50:10)*. This is as if God said: "Who among you was in trouble and called upon Me, that I did not answer? Who was in darkness, that I did not give light to?" So Nebuchadnezzar said: *Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent His angel, and delivered His servants that trusted in Him (Dan. 3:28)*. And Darius said: *Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he had trusted in his God (ibid. 6:24)*. And Scripture says, *Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for the Lord is God, an everlasting Rock (Isa. 26:4)*. Hence, David said, "Surely this is the divine promise: I, too, will trust in Thee—do not put me to shame."

PSALM SEVENTY-ONE

1. *In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me not be put to shame in the world* (Ps. 71:1). This Psalm comes close to the matter of the preceding Psalm, in which David said: "Master of the universe, if such is the promise, then, *In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me not be put to shame in the world.*" But were not the children of Israel put to shame in this world, even though Scripture has them saying, *In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust, let me not be put to shame in the world?* David meant, however: Let it be enough that we are put to shame in this world; let us not be put to shame in the world-to-come. As Isaiah said: *O Israel, that art saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded in the world without end* (Isa. 45:17).

2. *Deliver me in Thy righteousness and rescue me* (Ps. 71:2). The congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He: When Thou deliverest us, Thou wilt deliver us not because of our righteousness, nor because of the good works which we have accumulated, but Thou wilt deliver us—whether today or tomorrow—on account of Thy righteousness, as it is said *And He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no intercessor. Therefore . . . He put on righteousness as a coat of mail* (Isa. 59:16, 17). Hence, it is said *Deliver me in Thy righteousness, and rescue me*. The verse concludes, *Incline Thine ear unto me, and save me*: If Thou but inclinest Thine ear unto me, then I know that Thou heedest, as is said *I love the Lord, because He heedeth my voice and my supplication, because He hath inclined His ear unto me* (Ps. 116:1). And at once He saves me, as is said *When I was brought low, He saved me* (*ibid.* 116:6). So, too, Hezekiah said: *Incline Thine ear, O Lord, and heed* (Isa. 37:17). And because Thou inclinest Thine ear, Thou dost heed and save. For Thou didst say to Hezekiah: *That which thou hast prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heeded* (*ibid.* 19:20). Why? Because Thou didst incline Thine ear. Hence it is said *Incline Thine ear unto me, and save me*.

3. *Be Thou my strong habitation* (Ps. 71:3) in my exile—*my . . . habitation whereunto I may continually resort* (*ibid.*): In my exile, when I am in anguish, I go into a synagogue for prayer, and my prayer becomes a strong tower for me, as is said *The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it, and is safe* (Prov. 18:10), and further, *And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered* (Joel 3:5).

Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man (Ps. 71:4): *the unrighteous . . . man* is Ishmael; and the *cruel man* is Edom whose decrees enacted against me are as bitter as vinegar.¹

For Thou art my hope, O Lord God; Thou art my trust from my youth (Ps. 71:5), my trust from the times of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

By Thee have I been holden up from birth (Ps. 71:6a)—that is, from the time during the banishment in Egypt when Pharaoh charged all his people, saying: "Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river" (Ex. 1:22).

Thou art He that cut me loose ² (*gozi*) *from my mother's womb* (Ps. 71:6b). *Gozi* is a form of the verb *gazaz*, "cut down," which occurs in the verse "Even so shall they be cut down (*naḡozzu*)" (Nahum 1:12). Thou art He who cut me loose from my mother's womb in safety, and Thou art also He who cut me loose from the power of Egypt.

I am as a wonder unto many (Ps. 71:7). The congregation of Israel said: How many wonders didst Thou perform for me in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness! Because *Thou art my strong refuge* (*ibid.*), therefore *Shall my mouth be filled with Thy praise* (Ps. 71:8).

4. *Cast me not off in the time of old age* (Ps. 71:9). The congregation of Israel said: I have become old in my exile. *When my strength faileth* (*ibid.*)—that is, when I lack good works—*forsake me not* (*ibid.*). And all the rest of the Psalm deals with the anguish of the present exile.

O God, Thou hast trained me since my youth (Ps. 71:17a).

Ever since the days of our fathers we have been trained to expect miracles. *And hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works* (Ps. 71:17b) time after time and in all seasons. *Now also when I am old and greyheaded* (Ps. 71:18), I will declare Thy works until the end of exile.

Until I have declared Thy strength unto the next generation; Thy might to everyone that is to come (ibid.), to my sons and to my sons' sons. The same thing is said in the account of the exodus from Egypt: *That thou mayest declare to the ears of thy son and thy son's son what I have wrought upon Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them* (Ex. 10:2).

Thou . . . wilt quicken me again (Ps. 71:20)—that is, quicken me at the resurrection of the dead. The words *And bring me up again from the depths of the earth (ibid.)* allude to the bringing up of those men who were swallowed in the abyss: Even Korah and his entire company shall be brought up again.

Some maintain that *Thou . . . wilt quicken me again* means that Thou wilt bring me out of exile which is like death and the abyss. And thereupon *I also will give thanks unto Thee*, etc. (Ps. 71:22).

PSALM SEVENTY-TWO

1. *A Psalm of Solomon. Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the king's son* (Ps. 72:1). These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Say ye of the Righteous, that He is good; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings* (Isa. 3:10).

R. Judah the Levite bar Shallum¹ taught: Who is the only one that can be called the Righteous? The Holy One, blessed be He, of whom it is said *For the Lord is righteous, He loveth righteousness* (Ps. 11:7). Accordingly God rewards us with what is ours if we have merit and if we have accumulated good works. But if we have not, God bestows righteousness and mercy upon us with what is His. Is there a righteous one greater than He? Hence, *Say ye of the Righteous that He is good.*

In a different interpretation, the verse is read *Say ye no more of the righteous than that he is good*. R. Aibu taught: You find it said of the Holy One, blessed be He, while He was creating His world, that after each day's work *God saw that it was good*. But note that it was only after He came to the end of His work and ceased that Scripture says, *God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good* (Gen. 1:31).²

R. Jose taught in the name of R. Hanina: When the Holy One, blessed be He, sought to send Moses to Egypt, what did Moses ask? He asked: *Behold, when . . . the children of Israel . . . shall say to me: What is His name? What shall I say unto them?* (Ex. 3:13). The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: Knowest thou not My name! Come, and I shall tell thee: *I AM that I AM; and He said: Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: I AM hath sent me unto you* (*ibid.* 3:14). You find *I am* written three times, and this means that the Holy One, blessed be He, said: I created My world with compassion, I will guide it with compassion, and I will return to Jerusalem with compassion, as is said *I return to Jerusalem with compassion* (Zech. 1:16). After Moses went and spoke to the children of Israel, they said to him: "What are we obliged to say of the Righteous One of the universe? That He is good!" Hence, *Say ye of the Righteous that He is good.*

And David also said, *O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever* (Ps. 106:1).

2. Another comment on *For they shall eat the fruit of their doings* (Isa. 3:10). Scripture does not say, "They shall eat the fruit of His doings," but says, *the fruit of their doings*. Hence the verse refers to the righteous who leave the fruit of their doings to their sons—as David left the fruit of his doings, for it is said *David bestowed justice and righteousness upon all his people* (2 Sam. 8:15). In this same connection, David said of Solomon:³ *Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the king's son*. He did not say "Give the king my judgments," but *Thy judgments*, as if to say, "Master of the universe, endow the king's son with Thy power in the rendering of judgments: Even as Thou art able to render judgment without witnesses and without warning,⁴ so may Solomon be able to render judgment without witnesses and without warning." The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: And so he shall. Hence Scripture says, *Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord* (1 Chron. 29:23). Is it possible that flesh and blood could sit on the throne of the Lord? Is it not written "His throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire" (Dan. 7:9)? What then do the words *Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord*⁵ mean? They mean that like his Maker, Solomon was able to render judgments without witnesses and without warning.

This was true of him at the trial of the harlots, for it is said *Then came there two women that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him* (1 Kings 3:16). Rab said that the two were evil spirits who simulated women. But Samuel held that the two were really harlots. R. Benjamin maintained, in the name of R. Judah, that the two were sisters-in-law whose husbands had died without issue,⁶ and who came before Solomon for judgment.

And the one woman said: "O my lord . . ." etc. Then said the king: "The one saith: This is my son that liveth, and thy son is the dead; and the other saith: Nay; but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living" (1 Kings 3:17 ff., 23). R. Simon taught: A judge must repeat the pleas of the litigants in the presence of

both of them, for Scripture tells us *Then said the king: "The one saith: This is my son that liveth, and thy son is the dead; and the other saith: Nay; but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living" (ibid.)*.

When the king heard these pleas, he said at once: *Divide the living child in two (ibid. 3:25)*. And then, his wit spilling over, he said: The Holy One, blessed be He, foresaw that this case would come before me. Therefore He made mankind with two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, two hands, and two feet. *Divide the living child in two*, Solomon said. (R. Judah bar R. Ilai said: If I had been there, I would have put a rope around Solomon's neck, for one child dead was apparently not enough for him,—no, he had to command that the second be divided in two).

When the king's counselors saw what he was about, they began to say, *Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a boy (Eccles. 10:16)*. But nothing came of his command, for he went on to say, *Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it (1 Kings 3:27)*. Thereupon a heavenly voice⁷ came forth, and said: *She is the mother thereof (ibid.)*. When the counselors saw the outcome, they exclaimed: *Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles (Eccles. 10:17)*. Hence, it is said *Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the king's son*.

R. Eleazar taught: The Holy One, blessed be He, showed Himself in three courts of justice: in the court of Shem, son of Noah; in the court of Samuel the Ramathite; and in the court of Solomon.

With regard to God's showing Himself in the court of Shem,⁸ it is said *And Judah acknowledged them, and said: "She speaks the truth. [She is with child] because of me" (Gen. 38:26)*. How did Judah know? If he had gone in to her, another man might have gone in to her! But it was a heavenly voice that came forth and said: *Because of Me*—that is, it was My will that these deeds be kept secret.⁹

With regard to God's showing Himself in the court of Samuel, in the part of Scripture where *And he said: "The Lord is a*

witness" (1 Sam. 12:5) occurs, does not the context require that it be written *And they said*, etc.? The words *And he said* imply, however, that it was a heavenly voice that came forth and said: I am a witness for Samuel.

And with regard to God's showing Himself in the court of Solomon, it is said *Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. She is the mother thereof* (1 Kings 3:27). How did Solomon know? Perhaps the woman had spoken craftily, so that Solomon would award the child to her? But it was a heavenly voice that came forth and said: *She is the mother thereof*.¹⁰

3. In a different exposition, the verse is read *Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy victory unto the king's son*. Here *judgments* mean punishments: David said to the Holy One, blessed be He, "I accept the punishments, but surely, therefore, Thou wilt give Thy victory unto the king's son, unto Solomon."

Another comment on *Give the king Thy judgments O God, and Thy righteousness*: here *king* means the King Messiah, of whom it is said *And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse . . . And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him . . . And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither decide after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the land* (Isa. 11:1a, 3b-c, 4a).

R. Eliezer taught: Where there is no judgment, there will be judgment; and where there is judgment, there will be no judgment. How so? Because when courts on earth render judgment, there will be no judgment in heaven; but when no judgment is rendered on earth, there will be judgment in heaven. For the Holy One, blessed be He, will sit in judgment upon the guilty and make them pay. But when judgment is rendered on earth, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say: "What is there for Me to do? This was My calling," as it is said *For the Lord is a God of justice* (Isa. 30:18). *When ye walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them* (Lev. 26:3)—that is, when you have taken up My calling—I shall seek another calling, as is

said in the next verse *Then I will give your rains in their season* (*ibid.* 26:4). Hence it is said *He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with justice. The mountains shall bring peace to the people* (Ps. 72:2, 3a). Once judgment is rendered, at once the mountains will bring peace to the people. But is it possible for mountains to bring peace? Yes. For there is contention in the world when crops are scanty. Why? Because then a man goes into his neighbor's vineyard¹¹ and is met with: "What dost thou in my vineyard?" and thus they contend, one with the other. But when crops are plentiful in the world, people look kindly on one another, and there is peace in the world, as is said *In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig-tree* (Zech. 3:10).

4. In further comment on *He shall judge Thy people with righteousness . . . They shall fear Thee while the sun endureth* (Ps. 72:2, 5), R. Jose bar Halafta said: A man is judged every morning, for it is said *Thou visitest him mornings* (Job 7:18).

The verse *He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor* (Ps. 72:4) is like the verse in which it is said of the Messiah, "But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the land; and he shall smite the land with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked" (Isa. 11:4).

They shall fear thee as long as the sun is upon them and the moon is before them until the generation of generations (Ps. 72:5): They shall fear the Messiah *as long as the sun is upon them*—that is, fear him in this world in which the light of the sun is required; and shall fear him *as long . . . as the moon is before them*—that is, fear him for as long as the moon looks down upon them before its light is finally confounded. For there will come a time of which it is said "Then the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem" (Isa. 24:23), and of which it is also said "The sun shall be no more thy light by

day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory" (Isa. 60:19). And how are we to interpret *until the generation of generations*? It is the [immortal] generation which is not to be followed by another generation.

Another comment: The words *They shall fear Thee as long as the sun is upon them* allude to the morning prayer, for the Shema must be read at sunrise; the words *and the moon is before them* allude to the afternoon prayer which must be said before it gets dark and the world needs the light of the moon.

Our Masters read *They shall fear Thee* etc., as *They shall fear Thee as the light of the sun withers*¹² and therefore take these words to apply to the prayer said at dusk.

5. *He shall come down like rain upon the shearing* (Ps. 72:6a). How are we to interpret the phrase *upon the shearing*? If you say that the phrase refers to shorn fleece, what good would rain do it? Therefore the phrase must refer to rain upon the shorn field. *As showers that water (zarzif) the earth (ibid.)*: what does *zarzif* connote? Waters that awaken (*zarev*) and beautify (*yafeh*) the earth.

In his days shall the righteous flourish (Ps. 72:7). Elsewhere another Psalm says, *The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God* (Ps. 92:13-14). The verse concludes *And abundance of peace, till there be no moon* (Ps. 72:7). Till when? Till the moon comes to an end.

Even as the sun and the moon give light in this world, so the righteous will give light in the world-to-come, as is said *And nations shall walk at thy light, and kings at the brightness of thy rising* (Isa. 60:3).

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea (Ps. 72:8). All this glory of dominion will be the king Messiah's. And why all this? Because of righteous judgments, for it is said of him *He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper (ibid. 72:12).*

6. *There shall be handsized corn in the land* (Ps. 72:16). R. Ḥiyya bar Asi said in the name of R. Joḥanan: The Land of Israel will bring forth handfuls of delicate breads and wool garments as well. Hence it is said *There shall be handsized corn* (*pissat bar*)¹³ *in the land*.

The fruit shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth (*ibid.* 72:16). *They shall flourish* (*yašišu*): that is, they shall flower with fringes (*šišit*).¹⁴

His name shall endure for ever (Ps. 72:17)—that is, the king Messiah will never know the taste of death.

Before the sun was, his name existed (*ibid.* 72:17).¹⁵ Seven things existed before the world was created: the throne of glory, the name of the Messiah, Torah, Israel, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna, repentance, and the Temple.

The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended (*kalu*) (Ps. 72:20). And are not the remaining prayers also prayers of David the son of Jesse? *Kalu*, however, is to be read as *kol 'ellu*, "all of these," and hence the verse means that all of these were the prayers David uttered concerning his son Solomon and concerning the king Messiah.

In a different interpretation of *The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended*, *prayers* is taken to mean the prayers of yearning, as is written *My soul yearneth, yeah, even pineth*¹⁶ (Ps. 84:3).