

Providence and Theodicy in Hazal
Second to Fifth Classes

Tractate Avot (Pirkay Avot), chapter 4, mishna 19

Rebbi Yanai said: It is not in our hands to explain either the contentment of the wicked or the suffering of the righteous.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Menachot, page 29b

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab, When Moses ascended on high he found the Holy One, blessed be He, engaged in affixing coronets to the letters.⁵ Said Moses, 'Lord of the Universe, Who stays Thy hand?'⁶ He answered, 'There will arise a man, at the end of many generations, Akiba b. Joseph by name, who will expound upon each tittle heaps and heaps of laws'. 'Lord of the Universe', said Moses; 'permit me to see him'. He replied, 'Turn thee round'. Moses went and sat down behind eight rows⁷ [and listened to the discourses upon the law]. Not being able to follow their arguments he was ill at ease, but when they came to a certain subject and the disciples said to the master 'Whence do you know it?' and the latter replied 'It is a law given unto Moses at Sinai' he was comforted. Thereupon he returned to the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, 'Lord of the Universe, Thou hast such a man and Thou givest the Torah by me!' He replied, 'Be silent, for such is My decree'.⁸ Then said Moses, 'Lord of the Universe, Thou hast shown me his Torah, show me his reward'. 'Turn thee round', said He; and Moses turned round and saw them weighing out his flesh at the market-stalls.⁹ 'Lord of the Universe', cried Moses, 'such Torah, and such a reward!' He replied, 'Be silent, for such is My decree'.

(5) These are the Taggin, i.e., three small strokes written on top of the letters mdzbyga in the form of a crown. V. infra Raba's statement, and note thereon.

(6) I.e., is there anything wanting in the Torah that these additions are necessary?

(7) Of R. Akiba's disciples.

(8) Lit., 'so it has come to My mind'.

(9) R. Akiba died a martyr's death at the hands of the Romans during the Hadrianic persecution. V. Ber. 61b.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Brachot page 7a

R. Johanan further said in the name of R. Jose: Three things did Moses ask of the Holy One, blessed be He, and they were granted to him. He asked that the Divine Presence should rest upon Israel, and it was granted to him. For it is said: Is it not in that Thou goest with us [so that we are distinguished, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth].²² He asked that the Divine Presence should not rest upon the idolaters, and it was granted to him. For it is said: 'So that we are distinguished, I and Thy people'. He asked that He should show him the ways

of the Holy One, blessed be He, and it was granted to him. For it is said: Show me now Thy ways.²³ Moses said before Him: Lord of the Universe, why is it that some righteous men prosper and others are in adversity, some wicked men prosper and others are in adversity? He replied to him: Moses, the righteous man who prospers is the righteous man the son of a righteous man; the righteous man who is in adversity is a righteous man the son of a wicked man. The wicked man who prospers is a wicked man son of a righteous man; the wicked man who is in adversity is a wicked man son of a wicked man.

The Master said above: 'The righteous man who prospers is a righteous man son of a righteous man; the righteous man who is in adversity is a righteous man son of a wicked man'. But this is not so! For, lo, one verse says: Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children,²⁴ and another verse says: Neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers.²⁵ And a contradiction was pointed out between these two verses, and the answer was given that there is no contradiction. The one verse deals with children who continue in the same course as their fathers, and the other verse with children who do not continue in the course of their fathers! — [You must] therefore [say that] the Lord said thus to Moses: A righteous man who prospers is a perfectly righteous man; the righteous man who is in adversity is not a perfectly righteous man. The wicked man who prospers is not a perfectly wicked man; the wicked man who is in adversity is a perfectly wicked man. Now this [saying of R. Johanan]²⁶ is in opposition to the saying of R. Meir. For R. Meir said: only two [requests] were granted to him, and one was not granted to him. For it is said: And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, although he may not deserve it, And I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy,²⁷ although he may not deserve it.²⁸

(22) Ex. XXXIII, 16.

(23) Ex. XXXIII, 13.

(24) Ibid. XXXIV, 7.

(25) Deut. XXIV, 16.

(26) That all the three requests of Moses were granted.

(27) Ex. XXXIII, 19.

(28) And God's ways therefore cannot be known.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Brachot, page 33a

Our rabbis taught in a breita: In a certain place there was once a viper that used to injure people. They came to Rebbi Hanina ben Dosa. He said to them, "Show me its hole."

They showed him its hole, and he put his heel over the hole, the viper came out, bit Rebbi Hanina, and died.

Rebbi Hanina put it on his shoulder, brought it to the House of Study, and sent to them: "See my sons, it is not the viper that kills, it is sin that kills!"

Mechilta, Nezikin, 95b, paragraph 18

Rebbi Yishmael ben Elisha the High Priest and Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel were on their way out to be killed by the Romans, when Rabban Shimon said to Rebbi Yishmael, "Rebbi, my heart goes out, for I do not know why I am being killed."

Rebbi Yishmael said to Rabban Shimon, "Has it ever happened that a person came to you for judgement or with a question and you delayed him until you swallowed what was in your bag or until you tied your sandal or until you wrapped yourself in your shawl? Remember, the Torah says; 'You shall not ill treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them in any way, and they cry out to Me. I will surely hear their cry.'"

And for this explanation, Rabban Shimon said to him, "You have comforted me, Rebbi."

Talmud of the Land of Israel, Tractate Sota, chapter 1, halacha 7

According to the way of the world, a man stumbles by doing a transgression for which offenders are liable for death at the hands of heaven; subsequently his ox dies, his chicken is lost, his plate is shattered, his finger becomes sore, and his account is thereby settled.

Talmud of the Land of Israel, Tractate Hagigah, chapter 2, halacha 1

Said Rebbi Meir to his teacher Elisha ben Avuyah, "You have so much wisdom and yet you do not repent and return to your faith!" He answered, "I am not able." Rebbi Meir asked, "Why?" he answered, "For once I was passing before the Holy of Holies, riding upon my horse on Yom Kipur that fell on shabat, and I heard a heavenly voice emanating from the Holy of Holies and it was saying, "Return children in repentance –except for Elisha ben Ayuyah, who knew my power but nevertheless rebelled against me".

And that's all that happened, that's what brought this upon him?

Actually, once he was sitting and studying in the Valley of Ginosar and he saw a man ascend to the crown of a palm tree, reach into a nest, and snatch the mother bird that was roosting there upon her eggs. He descended the tree without incident. The next day, he saw another man ascend to the crown of the palm tree, and take away the eggs after sending the mother bird away. He descended, was bit by a snake, and died.

Elisha ben Avuyah said: "It is written in the Torah, 'And you shall surely send the mother bird away and take the eggs, in order that it shall be good for you and you shall have a long life'. Where is the goodness for this man? Where is the long life that he was promised?"

And some say that he saw the tongue of Rebbi Yehudah the Baker who had been tortured and murdered by the Romans, in the mouth of a dog, dripping with blood,

and he said: "This is Torah, and this is its reward?! This is the tongue that was engaged in study of the Torah all of its days! This is Torah, and this is its reward?! It appears to me that there is no reward and there is no ultimate resurrection of the dead."

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kidushin, page 39b

MISHNAH. HE WHO PERFORMS ONE PRECEPT IS WELL REWARDED,⁴ HIS DAYS ARE PROLONGED, AND HE INHERITS THE LAND,⁵ BUT HE WHO DOES NOT PERFORM ONE PRECEPT, GOOD IS NOT DONE TO HIM, HIS DAYS ARE NOT PROLONGED, AND HE DOES NOT INHERIT THE LAND.⁶

GEMARA. But a contradiction is shewn: These are the things the fruit of which man eats in this world,⁷ while the principal remains for him for the future world. Viz., honouring one's parents, the practice of loving deeds, hospitality to wayfarers,⁸ and making peace between man and his neighbour; and the study of the Torah surpasses them all.⁹ — Said Rab Judah: This is its meaning: HE WHO PERFORMS ONE PRECEPT in addition to his [equally balanced] merits¹⁰ IS WELL REWARDED, and he is as though he had fulfilled the whole Torah. Hence it follows that for these others [one is rewarded] even for a single one!¹¹ — Said R. Shemaiah: That teaches that if there is an equal balance, it tips the scale.¹²

Yet is it a fact that he who performs one precept in addition to his [equally balanced] merits is rewarded? But the following contradicts it: He whose good deeds outnumber his iniquities is punished,¹³ and is as though he had burnt the whole Torah, not leaving even a single letter;¹⁴ while he whose iniquities outnumber his good deeds is rewarded,¹⁵ and is as though he had fulfilled the whole Torah, not omitting even a single letter! — Said Abaye: Our Mishnah means that a festive day and an evil day are prepared for him,¹⁶ Raba said: This latter agrees with R. Jacob, who said: There is no reward for precepts in this world.¹⁷ For it was taught: R. Jacob said: There is not a single precept in the Torah whose reward is [stated] at its side which is not dependent on the resurrection of the dead.¹⁸ [Thus:] in connection with honouring parents it is written, that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee.¹⁹ In reference to the dismissal of the nest²⁰ it is written, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days.²¹ Now, if one's father said to him, 'Ascend to the loft and bring me young birds,' and he ascends to the loft, dismisses the dam and takes the young, and on his return falls and is killed — where is this man's happiness²² and where is this man's prolonging of days? But 'in order that it may be well with thee', means on the day that is wholly good; and 'in order that thy days may be long', on the day that is wholly long.²³

Yet perhaps there was no such happening?²⁴ — R. Jacob saw an actual occurrence. Then perhaps he²⁵ was meditating upon a transgression? — The Holy One, blessed be He, does not combine an evil thought with an [evil] act.²⁶ Yet perhaps he was meditating idolatry, and it is written, that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart?²⁷ — That too was precisely his point: should you think that precepts are rewarded in this world, why did the [fulfilment of these] precepts not shield him from being led to [such] meditation?²⁸

Yet R. Eleazar said: Those who are engaged²⁹ on a precept are never harmed?³⁰ — There, when they are going [to fulfil the precept], it is different.³¹ But R. Eleazar said: Those who are engaged on a precept are never harmed, either when going or returning? — It was a rickety ladder, so that injury was likely,³² and where injury is likely one must not rely on a miracle, for it is written, and Samuel said: How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me.³³

R. Joseph said: Had Aher³⁴ interpreted this verse³⁵ as R. Jacob, his daughter's son, he would not have sinned.³⁶ Now, what happened with Aher? Some say, he saw something of this nature.³⁷ Others say, he saw the tongue of Huzpith the Interpreter dragged along by a swine.³⁸ 'The mouth that uttered pearls licks the dust!' he exclaimed. [Thereupon] he went forth and sinned.³⁹

(4) Lit., 'good is done to him'.

(5) I.e., the future world.

(6) The Mishnah is explained in the Gemara.

(7) I.e., he is rewarded for them in this world.

(8) [This does not occur in the Mishnah, Pe'ah I, whence the passage is quoted, and is omitted in MS.M.]

(9) Thus, only for these is one rewarded in this world, whereas the Mishnah states this of any precept. To the Rabbis study was not only a means to religious observance (cf. infra 40b: study is great, as it leads to action), but a religious act in itself, — indeed, one of the most important, as is shewn by this and numerous other passages in the Talmud. Nevertheless, they were far from believing that religious sincerity might be replaced by mere intellectualism; v. M. Joseph, *Judaism as Creed and Life*, p. 360.

(10) I.e., his good deeds and bad are exactly balanced, and then he performs a precept, thus tipping the scale.

(11) Even if he has no other good deeds to his credit — surely not!

(12) If one's good deeds and bad are exactly equal, yet among the good deeds is one of those enumerated above, it causes the former to preponderate.

(13) Lit., 'evil is done to him'.

(14) Thus he is purged of his sins in this world, that he may wholly enjoy the next.

(15) For his good deeds in this world, that he may wholly suffer punishment in the next.

(16) By 'good is done to him' the Mishnah means that he is punished in this world; this punishment is regarded as a festive day for him, since he thereby wholly enjoys the next. Conversely the second half of the Mishnah.

(17) But our Mishnah disagrees, and is literally meant, referring to this world.

(18) Which shews that the reward spoken of is in the next world. R. Jacob appears to identify the next world with resurrection; v. Sanh. (Sonc. ed.) p. 601, n. 3.

(19) Deut. V, 16.

(20) V. Ibid. XXII, 6f; that precept is always technically so named.

(21) Ibid.

(22) Lit., 'the goodness of his days'.

(23) I.e., both refer to the next world, not to this, and thereby emphasize that regard comes only then, but not in this world.

(24) R. Jacob bases his deduction on a hypothetical event which may never have happened.

- (25) The one who was involved in this occurrence.
- (26) For punishment. — I.e., one is not punished for mere intention.
- (27) Ezek. XIV, 5: 'heart' implies intention; the reference is to idolatry; v. preceding verse, and thus we see that even the intention of idolatry is punished.
- (28) Cf. Aboth IV, 2: 'the reward of a precept is a precept, and the punishment of transgression is transgression, for precept draws precept and transgression draws transgression'.
- (29) Lit., 'sent'.
- (30) How then could this have happened?
- (31) But he was returning, having taken the bird etc.
- (32) Lit., 'established'.
- (33) 1 Sam. XVI, 2; he did not rely upon the fact that his mission was by God's command.
- (34) Elisha b. Abuyah, a great scholar and R. Meir's teacher, who turned against the Torah, whereupon he was dubbed Aher, a different man, a stranger.
- (35) The promise of reward and long life.
- (36) He interpreted it literally, as referring to this world, and seeing that the promise was not fulfilled turned unbeliever.
- (37) Stated above.
- (38) Lit., 'a different thing' — a euphemism for swine, the unmentionable. — Huzpith was one of the martyrs slain in the Hadrianic persecution, after the fall of Bethar; v. Dor. II, 119. The Interpreter was a functionary who interpreted the public readings of the Torah to the people.
- (39) According to this, it was the eternal question, why do the righteous suffer, which is even put into the mouth of Moses (Ber. 7a), which led him to religious apostasy. For other conjectures v. J.E. s.v. Elishah ben Abuyah.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Taanit, page 11a

A God of faithfulness and without iniquity.¹⁶ 'A God of faithfulness': Just as punishment will be exacted of the wicked in the world to come even for a slight transgression which they commit, So too is punishment exacted in this world of the righteous for any slight transgression which they commit. 'And without iniquity': Just as the righteous will receive their reward in the world to come, even for the least meritorious act which they do, so too are the wicked rewarded in this world even for the least meritorious act which they do. Just and right is He:¹⁷ They [the Rabbis] said: When a man departs to his eternal home all his deeds are enumerated before him and he is told, Such and such a thing have you done, in such and such a place on that particular day. And he replies, 'Yes'. Then they say to him. 'Sign' — And he signs, as it is said, He sealeth up the hand of every man.¹⁸ And what is even more, he acknowledges the justice of the verdict and he says. 'You have judged me well', in order that the words of Scripture may be fulfilled, That thou mayest be justified when Thou speakest.¹⁹

(16) Deut. XXXII, 4.

(17) [MS.M. reverses the application of the two texts.]

(18) Job XXXVII, 7.

(19) Ps. LI, 6.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Archin page 16b

The School of R. Ishmael taught: Anyone upon whom forty days have passed without suffering, has received his world.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin page 101a – 101b

Rabbah b. Bar Hana said: When R. Eliezer fell sick, his disciples entered [his house] to visit him. He said to them, 'There is a fierce wrath in the world.'²² They broke into tears, but R. Akiba laughed. 'Why dost thou laugh?' they enquired of him 'Why do ye weep?' he retorted. They answered, 'Shall the Scroll of the Torah²³ lie in pain, and we not weep?' — He replied, 'For that very reason I rejoice. As long as I saw that my master's wine did not turn sour, nor was his flax smitten, nor his oil putrefied, nor his honey become rancid,²⁴ I thought, God forbid, that he may have received all his reward in this world [leaving nothing for the next]; but now that I see him lying in pain, I rejoice [knowing that his reward has been treasured up for him in the next].' He [R. Eliezer] said to him, 'Akiba, have I neglected anything of the whole Torah?'²⁵ — He replied, 'Thou, O Master, hast taught us, For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not.'²⁶

Our Rabbis taught: When R. Eliezer fell sick, four elders went to visit him, viz., R. Tarfon, R. Joshua, R. Eleazar b. Azariah, and R. Akiba. R. Tarfon observed, 'Thou art more valuable to Israel than rain; for rain is [precious] in this world, whereas thou art [so] for this world and the next.'²⁷ R. Joshua observed, 'Thou art more valuable to Israel than the sun's disc: the sun's disc is but for this world, whilst my master is for this world and the next.' R. Eleazar b. Azariah observed, 'Thou art better to Israel than a father and a mother: these are for this world, whereas my master is for this world and the next. But R. Akiba observed, 'Suffering is beloved.' Thereupon he [the sick man] said to them, 'Support me, that I may hear the words of Akiba, my disciple, who said, "Suffering is beloved.'²⁸ Akiba,' queried he, 'whence dost thou know this?' — He replied, 'I interpret a verse: Mannasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem etc. and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.²⁹ Now it is [elsewhere] written,

(22) He referred to himself-God must be very angry with him so to have afflicted him. So Rashi. Graetz Geschichte IV. p. 47 conjectures that his death took place shortly before Trajan's attack upon the Jews of many countries (c. 116-117 C.E.), to which he was alluding in this remark, as the storm was already brewing.

(23) I.e., R. Eliezer.

(24) He was prosperous in everything.

(25) That thou sayest that I now suffer for my sins, so that I may have nothing but reward in the world to come.

(26) Ecc. VII, 20.

(27) For as a result of his teaching Israel would enjoy a reward in the next world too.

(28) Because they make atonement for the sufferer.

(29) II Kings XXI, 1f.

These are also the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.¹ Now, would Hezekiah king of Judah have taught the Torah to the whole world, yet not to his own son Manasseh? But all the pains he spent upon him, and all the labours he lavished upon him did not bring him back to the right path, save suffering alone, as it is written, And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people: but they would not hearken unto him. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.² And it is further written, And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And prayed unto him, and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem unto his kingdom, and Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.³ Thus thou learnest how precious is suffering.'

(1) Prov. XXV, 1. This implies than they copied it out for general instruction. Cf. also supra 94a, that Hezekiah had the whole nation taught.

(2) II Chron. XXXIII, 10f.

(3) Ibid. 12f.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabat page 55a – b

R. Ammi said: There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity. There is no death without sin, for it is written, The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son, the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him, etc.,²⁸ There is no suffering without iniquity, for it is written, Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.²⁹

(28) Ezek. XVIII, 20.

(29) Ps. LXXXIX, 33.

An objection is raised: The ministering angels asked the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Sovereign of the Universe! Why didst Thou impose the penalty of death upon Adam?' Said He to them, I gave him an easy command, yet he violated it.' 'But Moses and Aaron fulfilled the whole Torah,' they pursued — 'yet they died'. 'There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, etc.,¹ He replied .² — He maintains as the following Tanna. For it was taught: R. Simeon b. Eleazar said: Moses and Aaron too died through their sin, for it is said, Because ye believed not in me[...therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given

them]:³ hence, had ye believed in Me, your time had not yet come to depart from the world.⁴

An objection is raised: Four died through the serpent's machinations,⁵ viz., Benjamin the son of Jacob, Amram the father of Moses, Jesse the father of David, and Caleb the son of David. Now, all are known by tradition, save Jesse the father of David, in whose case the Writ gives an explicit intimation. For it is written, And Absalom set Amasa over the host instead of Joab. Now Amasa was the son of a man whose name was Ithra the Israelite, that went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister to Zeruiah Joab's mother.⁶ Now, was she the daughter of Nahash? Surely she was the daughter of Jesse, for it is written, and their sisters were Zeruiah and Abigail?⁷ Hence it must mean, the daughter of one who died through the machinations of the nahash [serpent].⁸ Who is [the author of this]? Shall we say, the Tanna [who taught] about the ministering angels? — Surely there were Moses and Aaron too! Hence it must surely be R. Simeon b. Eleazar, which proves that there is death without sin and suffering without iniquity. Thus the refutation of R. Ammi is [indeed] a refutation.

(1) Eccl. IX, 2.

(2) Showing that death may come without sin.

(3) Num. XX, 12.

(4) On the view that they died sinless, this deduction is made: but had ye believed, you would have led the assembly into the land, etc. The punishment therefore was that they would not lead, not that they should die, which would have been disproportionate to their fault (Maharsha).

(5) I.e., because the serpent caused Adam and Eve to sin, but not on account of their own sin. — This is not to be confused with the doctrine of Original sin, which is rejected by Judaism, v. B.B., Sonc. ed., p. 86, n. 11.

(6) II Sam. XVII, 25.

(7) I Chron. II, 16. 'Their sisters' refers to the sons of Jesse; v. preceding verse.

(8) It may be observed that the Talmud calls this an explicit intimation.

(9) Gen. XXXV, 22.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Brachot, page 60b

IT IS INCUMBENT ON A MAN TO BLESS etc. What is meant by being bound to bless for the evil in the same way as for the good? Shall I say that, just as for good one says the benediction 'Who is good and bestows good', so for evil one should say the benediction 'Who is good and bestows good'? But we have learnt: FOR GOOD TIDINGS ONE SAYS, WHO IS GOOD AND BESTOWS GOOD: FOR EVIL TIDINGS ONE SAYS, BLESSED BE THE TRUE JUDGE? — Raba said: What it really means is that one must receive the evil with gladness. R. Aha said in the name of R. Levi: Where do we find this in the Scripture? I will sing of mercy and justice, unto Thee, O Lord, will I sing praises,⁸ whether it is 'mercy' I will sing, or whether it is 'justice' I will sing. R. Samuel b. Nahmani said: We learn it from here: In the Lord I will praise His word, in God I will praise His word.⁹ 'In the Lord¹⁰ I will praise His word': this refers to good dispensation; 'In God¹¹ I will praise His word': this refers to the dispensation of

suffering. R. Tanhum said: We learn it from here: I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord;¹² I found trouble and sorrow, but I called upon the name of the Lord.¹³ The Rabbis derive it from here: The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away,' blessed be the name of the Lord.¹⁴

R. Huna said in the name of Rab citing R. Meir, and so it was taught in the name of R. Akiba: A man should always accustom himself to say 'Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good', [as exemplified in] the following incident. R. Akiba was once going along the road and he came to a certain town and looked for lodgings but was everywhere refused. He said 'Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good', and he went and spent the night in the open field. He had with him a cock, an ass and a lamp. A gust of wind came and blew out the lamp, a weasel came and ate the cock, a lion came and ate the ass. He said: 'Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good'. The same night some brigands came and carried off the inhabitants of the town. He said to them:¹⁵ Did I not say to you, 'Whatever the All-Merciful does is all for good?

(8) Ps. CI, 1.

(9) Ibid. LVI, 11. in the M.T. the order of the divine names is reserved.

(10) The name of the Attribute of Mercy.

(11) The name of the Attribute of Justice.

(12) Ibid. CXVI, 13.

(13) Ibid. 3.

(14) Job. I, 21.

(15) Apparently to the men of the town, on a subsequent occasion; or perhaps to his disciples who accompanied him.

Midrash Shir haShirim Raba on chapter 2, verse 16

Rebbi Yochanan was sick, becoming ill with chills for three and a half years. Rebbi Hanina went up to visit him. He said to him: "What is on your mind?"

He replied: "My suffering is more than I can bear."

He said to him: "Don't say that, rather say, 'This is from the faithful God.'"

When his pain became greater, he would say, "This is from the faithful God." But when his pain became too great for him, Rebbi Hanina went up to him, recited a word over him, and he was relieved.

After some time, Rebbi Hanina became ill. Rebbi Yochanan went up to visit him. He said to him: "What is on your mind?"

Rebbi Hanina replied: "How difficult are my sufferings!"

Rebbi Yochanan said to him: "But how great is their reward!"

Rebbi Hanina replied: "I want neither them nor their reward."

Rebbi Yochanan said to him: "Why don't you recite that word that you recited over me, and heal yourself?"

Rebbi Hanina replied: "When I was outside, I could be responsible for others, but while I am inside, do I not need others to be responsible for me?"

Rebbi Yochanan said to him: "My beloved is mine, and I am his, that feeds among the lilies' (Song of Songs 2:16). The rod of the Holy One blessed be He, only seeks out and sets upon one whose heart is as soft as a lilly."

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Brachot page 5a – b

Rava (some say, R. Hisda) says: If a man sees that painful sufferings visit him, let him examine his conduct. For it is said: Let us search and try our ways, and return unto the Lord.²¹ If he examines and finds nothing [objectionable], let him attribute it to the neglect of the study of the Torah. For it is said: Happy is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest out of Thy law.²² If he did attribute it [thus], and still did not find [this to be the cause], let him be sure that these are chastenings of love. For it is said: For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth.²³

Rava, in the name of R. Sahorah, in the name of R. Huna, says: If the Holy One, blessed be He, is pleased with a man, he crushes him with painful sufferings. For it is said: And the Lord was pleased with [him, hence] he crushed him by disease.²⁴ Now, you might think that this is so even if he did not accept them with love. Therefore it is said: To see if his soul would offer itself in restitution.²⁵ Even as the trespass-offering must be brought by consent, so also the sufferings must be endured with consent. And if he did accept them, what is his reward? He will see his seed, prolong his days.²⁶ And more than that, his knowledge [of the Torah] will endure with him. For it is said: The purpose of the Lord will prosper in his hand.²⁷

R. Jacob b. Idi and R. Aha b. Hanina differ with regard to the following: The one says: Chastenings of love are such as do not involve the intermission of study of the Torah. For it is said: Happy is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest out of Thy law.²⁸ And the other one says: Chastenings of love are such as do not involve the intermission of prayer. For it is said: Blessed be God, Who hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me.²⁹ R. Abba the son of R. Hiyya b. Abba said to them: Thus said R. Hiyya b. Abba in the name of R. Johanan: Both of them are chastenings of love. For it is said: For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth.³⁰ Why then does it say: 'And teachest him out of Thy law'? Do not read *telammedenu*, [Thou teachest him] but *telammedenu*, [Thou teachest us]. Thou teachest us this thing out of Thy law as a conclusion a fortiori from the law concerning tooth and eye.³¹ Tooth and eye are only one limb of the man, and still [if they are hurt], the slave obtains thereby his freedom. How much more so with painful sufferings which torment the whole body of a man! And this agrees with a saying of R. Simeon b. Lakish. For R. Simeon b. Lakish said: The word 'covenant' is mentioned in connection with salt, and the word 'covenant' is mentioned in connection with sufferings: the word 'covenant' is mentioned in connection with

salt, as it is written: Neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking.³² And the word 'covenant' is mentioned in connection with sufferings, as it is written: It has been taught: R. Simeon b. Yohai says: The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Israel three precious gifts, and all of them were given only through sufferings. These are: The Torah, the Land of Israel and the world to come. Whence do we know this of the Torah? — Because it is said: Happy is the man whom Thou chastenest, o Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law.³⁴ Whence of the Land of Israel? — Because it is written: As a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee,³⁵ and after that it is written: For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land.³⁶ Whence of the world to come? — Because it is written: For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light, and reproofs of sufferings are the way of life.³⁷

A Tanna recited before R. Johanan the following: If a man busies himself in the study of the Torah and in acts of charity

(21) Lam. III, 40.

(22) Ps. XCIV, 12.

(23) Prov. III, 12.

(24) Isa. LIII, 10.

(25) Ibid. The Hebrew word for 'restitution' is *asham* which means also 'trespass-offering'.

(26) Ibid.

(27) Ibid.

(28) Ps. XCIV, 12.

(29) Ps. LXVI, 20.

(30) Prov. III 12.

(31) V. Ex. XXI, 26, 27. If the master knocks out the tooth or eye of his slave, then the slave has to be set free.

(32) Lev. II, 13.

(33) Deut. XXVIII, 69. These words refer to the chapter dealing with the sufferings of Israel.

(34) Ps. XCIV, 12.

(35) Deut. VIII, 5.

(36) Ibid. v. 7.

(37) Prov. VI, 23.

and [nonetheless] buries his children,¹ all his sins are forgiven him. R. Johanan said to him: I grant you Torah and acts of charity, for it is written: By mercy and truth iniquity is expiated.² 'Mercy' is acts of charity, for it is said: He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, prosperity and honour.³ 'Truth' is Torah, for it is said: Buy the truth and sell it not.⁴ But how do you know [what you say about] the one who buries his children? — A certain Elder [thereupon] recited to him in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: It is concluded from the analogy in the use of the word 'iniquity'. Here it is written: By mercy and truth iniquity is expiated. And elsewhere it is written: And who recompenseth the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children.⁵

R. Johanan says: Bodily suffering and [the lack of] children are not chastisements of love. But is bodily suffering not a chastisement of love? Is it not

taught: If a man has one of these four symptoms of bodily suffering,⁶ it is nothing else but an altar of atonement? — They are an altar of atonement, but they are not chastisements of love. If you like, I can say: This [teaching of the Baraita] is ours [in Babylonia], and that [saying of R. Johanan] is theirs [in Palestine].⁷ If you like, I can say: This [teaching of the Baraita] refers to hidden [bodily suffering], that [saying of R. Johanan] refers to a case of visible [bodily suffering]. But is [the lack of] children not a chastisement of love? How is this to be understood? Shall I say that he had children and they died? Did not R. Johanan himself say: This is the bone of my tenth son?⁸ — Rather [say then] that the former saying refers to one who never had children, the latter to one who had children and lost them.

R. Hiyya b. Abba fell ill and R. Johanan went in to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? He replied: Neither they nor their reward.⁹ He said to him: Give me your hand. He gave him his hand and he¹⁰ raised him.

R. Johanan once fell ill and R. Hanina went in to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? He replied: Neither they nor their reward. He said to him: Give me your hand. He gave him his hand and he raised him. Why could not R. Johanan raise himself?¹¹ — They replied: The prisoner cannot free himself from jail.¹²

R. Eleazar fell ill and R. Johanan went in to visit him. He noticed that he was lying in a dark room,¹³ and he bared his arm and light radiated from it.¹⁴ Thereupon he noticed that R. Eleazar was weeping, and he said to him: Why do you weep? Is it because you did not study enough Torah? Surely we learnt: The one who sacrifices much and the one who sacrifices little have the same merit, provided that the heart is directed to heaven.¹⁵ Is it perhaps lack of sustenance? Not everybody has the privilege to enjoy two tables.¹⁶ Is it perhaps because of [the lack of] children? This is the bone of my tenth son! — He replied to him: I am weeping on account of this beauty¹⁷ that is going to rot in the earth. He said to him: On that account you surely have a reason to weep; and they both wept. In the meanwhile he said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? — He replied: Neither they nor their reward. He said to him: Give me your hand, and he gave him his hand and he raised him.

Once four hundred jars of wine belonging to R. Huna turned sour. Rab Judah, the brother of R. Sala the Pious, and the other scholars (some say: R. Adda b. Ahaba and the other scholars) went in to visit him and said to him: The master ought to examine his actions.¹⁸ He said to them: Am I suspect in your eyes? They replied: Is the Holy One, blessed be He, suspect of punishing without justice? — He said to them: If somebody has heard of anything against me, let him speak out. They replied: We have heard that the master does not give his tenant his [lawful share in the] vine twigs. He replied: Does he leave me any? He steals them all! They said to him: That is exactly what the proverb says:¹⁹ If you steal from a thief you also have a taste of it!²⁰ He said to them: I pledge myself to give it to him [in the future]. Some report that thereupon the vinegar became wine again; others that the vinegar went up so high that it was sold for the same price as wine.

(1) An allusion to R. Johanan himself, who was a great scholar and a charitable man, and was bereft of his children.

- (2) Ibid. XVI, 6.
 (3) Ibid. XXI, 21.
 (4) Ibid. XXIII, 23.
 (5) Jer. XXXII, 18.
 (6) Which are enumerated in Mishnah Nega'im I, I.
 (7) In Palestine where a leprous person had to be isolated outside the city (cf. Lev. XIII, 46), leprosy was not regarded as 'chastisements of love' owing to the severity of the treatment involved.
 (8) Who died in his lifetime. The Gemara deduces from that saying that he regarded the death of children as a chastisement of love. Aruch understands this to have been a tooth of the last of his sons which he preserved and used to show to people who suffered bereavement in order to induce in them a spirit of resignation such as he himself had in his successive bereavements.
 (9) The implication is that if one lovingly acquiesces in his sufferings, his reward in the world to come is very great.
 (10) R. Johanan. He cured him by the touch of his hand.
 (11) If he could cure R. Hiyya b. Abba, why could not he cure himself?
 (12) And the patient cannot cure himself.
 (13) R. Eleazar was a poor man and lived in a room without windows.
 (14) R. Johanan was supposed to be so beautiful that a light radiated from his body, v. B.M. 84a.
 (15) Men. 110b.
 (16) Learning and wealth. Or perhaps, this world and the next.
 (17) I.e., the beautiful body of yours.
 (18) You may perhaps have deserved your misfortune through some sin.
 (19) Lit., 'what people say'.
 (20) Even if your tenant is a thief this does not free you from giving him his lawful share.

Midrash Rabbah - Genesis XXXIV:2

2. The Lord trieth the righteous, etc. (Ps. XI, 5). R. Jonathan said: A potter does not test defective vessels, because he cannot give them a single blow without breaking them. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, does not test the wicked but only the righteous: thus, 'The Lord trieth the righteous.' R. Jose b. R. Hanina said: When a flax worker knows that his flax is of good quality, the more he beats it the more it improves and the more it glistens; but if it is of inferior quality, he cannot give it one knock but it splits. Similarly, the Lord does not test the wicked but only the righteous, as it says: 'The Lord trieth the righteous.' R. Eleazar said: When a man possesses two cows, one strong and the other feeble, upon which does he put the yoke? Surely upon the strong one. Similarly, the Lord tests none but the righteous; hence, 'The Lord trieth the righteous.'

Midrash Rabbah - Genesis LXV:9

9. AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT WHEN ISAAC WAS OLD. R. Judah b. Simon said: Abraham requested [the appearance of] old age,¹ pleading before Him: 'Sovereign of

the Universe! When a man and his son enter a town, none know whom to honour! But if Thou wilt crown him [the father] with [the appearance of] old age, one will know whom to honour.' Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: 'As thou livest, thou hast asked well, and it will commence with thee.' Thus from the beginning of the Book until here old age is not mentioned, but when Abraham arose [the appearance of] old age was granted to him: And Abraham was old, well stricken in age (Gen XXIV, 1). Isaac demanded suffering, pleading thus: 'Sovereign of the Universe! When a man dies without previous suffering, the Attribute of Judgment is stretched out against him; but if Thou causest him to suffer, the Attribute of Judgment will not be stretched out against him.² Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: 'By thy life, thou hast asked well, and I will commence with thee.' Thus suffering is not mentioned from the beginning of the Book until here: AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT WHEN ISAAC WAS OLD, AND HIS EYES WERE DIM. Jacob demanded illness, saying to Him: 'Sovereign of the Universe! A man dies without previous illness and does not settle his affairs with his children; but if he were ill two or three days, he would settle his affairs with his children.' Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: 'By thy life, thou hast asked well, and it will commence

(1) Until Abraham old and young looked alike (B.M. 87a).

(2) For through suffering he will have expiated some at least of his misdeeds.

with thee.' Hence, And one said to Joseph: Behold, thy father is sick (ib. XLVIII, 1). R. Levi said: Thus Abraham introduced old age, Isaac suffering, and Jacob illness. Hezekiah introduced repeated sickness.¹ Said he to Him: 'Thou hast kept him in good health until the day of his death; but if a man falls sick and recovers, falls sick and recovers, he will fully repent.' Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: 'By thy life! thou hast asked well, and with thee will I commence.' Thus it is written, The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness (Isa. XXXVIII, 9). R. Samuel b. Nahman said: This intimates that between one sickness and another he had an illness more severe than both.²

(1) Till his time there was only one sickness-that which preceded death.

(2) E.J.: between this sickness and his fatal sickness there was another. This is deduced from Of his sickness, which is really superfluous, and therefore understood to hint at another illness.

Midrash Rabbah - Genesis IX:5

5. In the copy of R. Meir's Torah [Pentateuch] was found written: AND, BEHOLD, IT WAS VERY (ME'OD) GOOD: and behold, death (maweth) was good.¹ R. Samuel b. Nahman said: I was seated on my grandfather's shoulder going up from my own town to Kefar Hana via Beth-Shean,² and I heard R. Simeon b. R. Eleazar as he sat and lectured say in R. Meir's name: AND, BEHOLD, IT WAS VERY GOOD: and, behold, death was good.³ R. Hama b. R. Hanina and R. Jonathan said the following. R. Hama b. R. Hanina said: Adam deserved to be spared the experience of death. Why then was the penalty of death decreed against him? Because the Holy One, blessed be He,

foresaw that Nebuchadnezzar and Hiram would declare themselves gods; therefore was death decreed against him. Thus it is written, Thou wast in Eden the garden of God (Ezek. XXVIII, 13): was then Hiram in Eden? Surely not! But He said thus to him: 'It is thou who causedst him who was in Eden [sc. Adam] to die.' R. Hiyya, the son of R. Berekiah's daughter, quoted in R. Berekiah's name: Thou wast the far-covering cherub--kerub (ib. 14): it was thou who didst cause that youth

(1) This may mean either that the MS. read ,un instead of stn , or that this was inserted as a marginal comment.

(2) Scythopolis, in Galilee; v. 'A.Z. (Sonc. ed.), p. 64, n. 7.

(3) Because it is a potent force for repentance.

(robeh--sc. Adam) to die. Said R. Jonathan to him: If so, He should have decreed death for the wicked but not for the righteous! But the reason is lest the wicked perform a fraudulent repentance, saying: 'Surely the righteous live only because they treasure up religious acts and good deeds; so shall we too lay up a store of religious acts and good deeds,' and as a result their performance of such would be with ulterior motives. R. Johanan and R. Simeon b. Lakish discussed this. R. Johanan said: Why was death decreed against the wicked? Because as long as the wicked live they anger the Lord, as it is written, Ye have wearied the Lord with your words (Mal. II, 17); but when they die they cease to anger Him as it is written, There the wicked cease from raging (Job III, 17), which means, there the wicked cease from enraging the Holy One, blessed be He. Why was death decreed against the righteous? Because as long as the righteous live they must fight against their evil desires, but when they die they enjoy rest; that is the meaning of And there the weary are at rest (ib.): [they say]: We have laboured sufficiently.¹ R. Simeon b. Lakish said: [Death was decreed] in order to reward the righteous in double measure and to punish the wicked in double measure. To reward the righteous, who had not deserved to experience death, yet did accept the experience of death: Therefore in their land they shall possess double (Isa. LXI, 7); and to punish the wicked, since the righteous had not deserved death yet accepted it on their account; therefore, And destroy them with double destruction (Jer. XVII, 18).

(1) M.K.: in our fight against evil; Y.T.: we have laboured to attain a sufficient reward.

Midrash on Psalms (Buber) psalm 8

And so it was at the giving of the Torah, when the Holy One blessed be He came to give Torah to Israel at Sinai, the angels begin presenting arguments to the Holy One blessed by He, saying 'What is man that thou should be mindful of him', 'God our master, how great is Your name in all that earth, that you have put your majesty upon the heavens', and they said before Him: Master of the Universe, it is more befitting for you to give the Torah here in the heavens, because we are holy and pure, and the Torah is holy and pure; we are alive, and your Torah is the tree of life, it is better that it be with us. He answered them: it is not fitting that it be in the upper realms, as it is said: 'Should it not be found in the land of the living?' (Job

28:13), and is there land in the upper realms? Where should it be? - In the lower realms, as it is said: 'It is I who made the earth and created man upon it' (Isaiah 45:12). Rebbi Nechemya in the name of Rebbi Yehudah says: it may be compared to a man who had a son who was missing one his fingers, and his father sent him to learn flax combing, silk processing and other similar skills, trades that require all the fingers. After some time, his father traveled to him and said to him: Why did you not teach these skills to my son? He replied: These skills require all the fingers, while your son is missing one finger, and you ask me to teach him flax combing and silk processing! So said the Holy One blessed be He: The Torah cannot be by you, because there is no reproduction among you, nor is there impurity, or death or disease. Rather all of you are holy, while in the Torah it is written: 'If a man will die in a tent' (Numbers 19:14), 'This is the procedure for a leper' (Leviticus 14:2), 'If a women will conceive' (Leviticus 12:2), 'If a woman will have a menstrual flow' (Leviticus 15:25), 'This you should not eat' (Leviticus 11:4). That is why it says: 'Should it not be found in the land of the living?' (Job 28:13).

Midrash Yalkut Shimoni, Proverbs, section 964

Rebbi Meir was studying in the beit midrash one shabat afternoon, when his two sons died suddenly. What did their mother [Beruriah] do? She left the two of them on the bed, and pulled a sheet over them. When shabat concluded, Rebbi Meir returned from the beit midrash and asked, "Where are my two sons?" Beruriah answered. "They went to the beit midrash."

"But I looked for them there," said Rebbi Meir, "and did not see them." She gave him a cup of wine and he concluded shabat with the recitation of havdalah. Again he asked, "Where are my sons?" She answered, "Sometimes they go to someone's house, they will soon return." She gave him to eat, and after he ate she said, "My teacher, I have a question to ask you." "Then ask your question," he said.

"At an earlier time, someone came and left a deposit with me, and now he has come to take it back; should I return it to him or not?" He answered, "Is not one who is holding a deposit obligated to return it its owner?" She said to him, "If this were not your position, I would not have been inclined to return it."

She took him by the hand, led him to the bedroom, and brought him close to the bed. She removed the sheet from upon them, and he saw the two of them lying there dead on the bed. He began to cry, "My children, my children, my teachers, my teachers." At that moment she said to him, "Did you not just say to me that we are obligated to return the deposit to its owner?"

Said Rebbi Haninah: With these words, Rebbi Meir was comforted.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yevamoth pages 49b - 50a

Concerning the number of thy days I will fulfil, 26 Tannaim are in disagreement. For it was taught: The number of thy days I will fulfil 26 refers to the years of the generations.¹ If one is worthy one is allowed to complete the full period; if unworthy, the number is reduced; so R. Akiba. But the Sages said: If one is worthy years are added to one's life;² if unworthy, the years of his life are reduced.

(26) Ex. XXIII, 26, but will not make any additions.

(1) The span of life allotted to every human being at his birth.

(2) The meaning of fulfil is addition to the allotted span of life.