

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Avoda Zara, page 54b

MISHNAH. THE ELDERS<sup>21</sup> IN ROME WERE ASKED, 'IF [YOUR GOD] HAS NO DESIRE FOR IDOLATRY, WHY DOES HE NOT ABOLISH IT?' THEY REPLIED, 'IF IT WAS SOMETHING UNNECESSARY TO THE WORLD THAT WAS WORSHIPPED, HE WOULD ABOLISH IT; BUT PEOPLE WORSHIP THE SUN, MOON, STARS AND PLANETS; SHOULD HE DESTROY HIS UNIVERSE ON ACCOUNT OF FOOLS!' THEY SAID [TO THE ELDERS], 'IF SO, HE SHOULD DESTROY WHAT IS UNNECESSARY FOR THE WORLD AND LEAVE WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR THE WORLD!' THEY REPLIED, '[IF HE DID THAT], WE SHOULD MERELY BE STRENGTHENING THE HANDS OF THE WORSHIPPERS OF THESE,<sup>22</sup> BECAUSE THEY WOULD SAY, "BE SURE THAT THESE ARE DEITIES, FOR BEHOLD THEY HAVE NOT BEEN ABOLISHED!"'

GEMARA. Our Rabbis taught: Philosophers asked the elders in Rome, 'If your God has no desire for idolatry, why does He not abolish it?' They replied, 'If it was something of which the world has no need that was worshipped, He would abolish it; but people worship the sun, moon, stars and planets; should He destroy the Universe on account of fools! The world pursues its natural course, and as for the fools who act wrongly, they will have to render an account. Another illustration: Suppose a man stole a measure of wheat and went and sowed it in the ground; it is right that it should not grow, but the world pursues its natural course and as for the fools who act wrongly, they will have to render an account. Another illustration: Suppose a man has intercourse with his neighbour's wife; it is right that she should not conceive, but the world pursues its natural course and as for the fools who act wrongly, they will have to render an account.' This is similar to what R. Simeon b. Lakish said: The Holy One, blessed be He, declared, Not enough that the wicked put My coinage to vulgar use, but they trouble Me and compel Me to set My seal thereon!<sup>23</sup>

(21) They were R. Gamaliel, Eleazar b. Azariah, Joshua b. Hananiah and Akiba, who visited Rome in 95 C.E. V. Bacher, *Agada d. Tann*, I, p. 84, and the authorities quoted by him.

(22) The essential things which God spared.

(23) The wicked make wrong use of the sexual instinct with which they have been endowed by God and trouble Him to form the embryo which results from their immorality.

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And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God.<sup>5</sup> What does 'great' imply? — R. Joseph said in the name of Rab: He magnified Him by [pronouncing] the Ineffable Name.<sup>6</sup> R. Giddal said: [He recited], Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting even to everlasting.<sup>7</sup> ... And [they] cried with a great [loud] voice unto the Lord, their God.<sup>10</sup> What did they cry? — Woe, woe, it is it<sup>11</sup> who has destroyed the Sanctuary, burnt the Temple, killed all the righteous, driven all Israel into exile, and

is still dancing around among us! Thou hast surely given it to us so that we may receive reward through it.<sup>12</sup> We want neither it, nor reward through it! Thereupon a tablet fell down from heaven for them, whereupon the word 'truth'<sup>13</sup> was inscribed. (R. Hanina said: One may learn therefrom that the seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, is truth). They ordered a fast of three days and three nights, whereupon it<sup>11</sup> was surrendered to them. It came forth from the Holy of Holies like a young fiery lion. Thereupon the Prophet said to Israel: This is the evil desire of idolatry, as it is said: And he said: This is wickedness.<sup>14</sup> As they took hold of it a hair of it beard fell out, it raised his voice and it went [was audible] four hundred parasangs. Thereupon they said: How shall we act? Perhaps, God forbid, they might have mercy upon it from heaven! — The prophet said unto them: Cast it into a leaden pot, closing its opening with lead. Because lead absorbs the voice, as it is said: And he said: This is wickedness. And he cast her down into the midst of the measure, and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof.<sup>14</sup> They said: Since this is a time of grace, let us pray for mercy for the tempter to evil.<sup>15</sup> They prayed for mercy, and it was handed over to them. He said to them: Realize that if you kill it, the world goes down. They imprisoned it for three days, then looked in the whole land of Israel for a fresh egg and could not find one.<sup>16</sup> Thereupon they said: What shall we do now? Shall we kill it? The world would then go down. Shall we beg for half-mercy?<sup>17</sup> They do not grant 'halves' in heaven.<sup>17</sup> They put out its eyes and let it go. It helped inasmuch as it no more entices men to commit incest.<sup>18</sup> In the West [Palestine] they taught it thus: R. Giddal said: [And Ezra praised...the] great [God]:<sup>19</sup> i.e., he magnified Him by pronouncing the Ineffable Name. R. Mattena said: He said: The great, the mighty, and the awful God.<sup>20</sup> The interpretation of R. Mattena seems to agree with what R. Joshua b. Levi said: For R. Joshua b. Levi said: Why were they called men of the Great Synod? Because they restored the crown of the divine attributes to its ancient completeness.<sup>21</sup> [For] Moses had come and said: The great God, the mighty, and the awful.<sup>22</sup> Then Jeremiah came and said: Aliens are destroying<sup>23</sup> His Temple. Where are, then, His awful deeds? Hence he omitted<sup>24</sup> [the attribute] the 'awful'. Daniel came and said: Aliens are enslaving his sons. Where are His mighty deeds? Hence he omitted the word<sup>25</sup> 'mighty'. But they came and said: On the contrary! Therein lie His mighty deeds that He suppresses His wrath,<sup>26</sup> that He extends long-suffering to the wicked. Therein lie His awful powers: For but for the fear of Him, how could one [single] nation persist among the [many] nations! But how could [the earlier] Rabbis<sup>27</sup> abolish something established by Moses? R. Eleazar said: Since they knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, insists on truth, they would not ascribe false [things] to Him.<sup>28</sup>

(5) Neh. VIII, 6.

(6) [Shem ha-Meforash. Lit., 'the Distinguished Name' synonymous with the Shem ha-Meyuhad 'the Unique Name', and generally held identical with the Tetragrammaton uttered as written, v. Sanh., Sonc. ed., p. 408, n. I].

(7) I Chron. XVI, 36.

(10) Ibid. IX, 4. [Here too the text is in disorder as the verse has no connection with the preceding verse to which it is adduced in explanation of the emergency referred to, the incident in the first verse having taken place on the first of the seventh month, whilst that of the second verse on the twenty-fourth. Var. lec. accordingly omit the first quotations from ibid. VIII, 4 and substitute in its place the second verse ibid. IX, 4; v. Bah.]

(11) The evil desire, tempter of idolatry.

(12) For resisting him successfully Israel would be rewarded.

(13) I.e., I agree with you: you spoke the truth.

(14) Zech. V, 8.

(15) The evil desire, for idolatry is also the evil desire for immorality. The two were found to go hand in hand.

(16) Whereas there is no good in idolatry there is at least some good in the desire for sex indulgence. Perpetuation of the race depends upon it. So does human food. The people who found themselves with the opportunity to destroy the temptation of flesh-love discovered that, when the genius of sex-love is cancelled, no eggs are available.

(17) To ask that temptation or the tempter should live, but not tempt, is to ask a thing that Heaven will not grant. The tempter lives to tempt. But by depriving its flame of its major glare, by keeping it within lawful limits, one promotes domesticity and prevents depravity.

(18) Lit., 'against relatives'.

(19) [On the variant given supra p. 327. n. 6, the reference is to 'great' mentioned in Neh. IX, 4.]

(20) Ibid. 32.

(21) The crown, I.e., the praise of the Lord. By re-embodiment of the attributes, which Jeremiah and Daniel had omitted.

(22) Deut. X, 17.

(23) Or, revel in.

(24) In his prayer, Jer. XXXII, 17f.

(25) In his prayer, Dan. IX, 4ff.

(26) So MS.M. cur. edd. He subdues his inclination.

(27) Jeremiah, Daniel.

(28) Since to them the circumstances indicated that He desired to hide His mighty or awful deeds.

### 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 woman 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).

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 fulfill 26 refers to the years of the generations.<sup>1</sup> 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 fulfill is addition to the allotted span of life.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Hagigah pages 4b - 5a

R. Joseph, when he came to the [following] verse, wept: But there is that is swept away without judgment.<sup>27</sup> [He said]:<sup>28</sup> Is there anyone who passes away before one's [allotted] time?<sup>29</sup> — Yes, as in the story [heard] by R. Bibi b. Abaye,<sup>30</sup> who was frequently visited by the Angel of death. [Once] the latter said to his messenger: Go, bring me Miriam, the women's hairdresser!<sup>31</sup> He went and brought him Miriam, the children's nurse. Said he to him:<sup>32</sup> I told thee Miriam, the women's hairdresser. He answered: If so, I will take her back. Said he to him: Since thou hast brought her, let her be added.<sup>33</sup> But how were you able to get her?<sup>34</sup> She was holding a shovel in her hand and was heating

(27) Prov. XIII, 23.

(28) Rashi and Tosaf. delete the words: the question is then asked by the Gemara.

(29) I.e., although the person has committed no sin to merit shortening of life.

(30) An occultist; cf. Ber. 6a where he performed an experiment with the object of seeing demons.

(31) Supposed by Tosaf. to be the Mother of Jesus; cf. Shab. 104b in the earlier uncensored editions. [Her description megaddela (hairdresser) is connected by some with the name of Mary Magdalene whose name was confused with that of Mary, the mother of Jesus, v. Herford R.T. Christianity in Talmud and Midrash, pp. 40f].

(32) I.e., the Angel of death to his messenger.

(33) I.e., to the dead.

(34) Since it was not yet her time to die.

and raking<sup>1</sup> the oven. She took it and put it on her foot and burnt herself; thus her luck was impaired and I brought her. Said R. Bibi b. Abaye to him<sup>2</sup> : Have ye<sup>3</sup> permission to act thus? He answered him: Is it not written: 'There is that is swept away without judgment'? He countered: But behold it is written: One generation

passeth away, and another generation cometh!<sup>4</sup> He replied: I have charge of them<sup>5</sup> till they have completed the generation,<sup>6</sup> and then I hand them over to Dumah!<sup>7</sup> He [then] asked him: But after all, what do you do with her years?<sup>8</sup> He replied: If there be a Rabbinic scholar who overlooks his hurt, I shall give them to him in her stead.<sup>9</sup>

(1) I.e., raked the fire in (Jast.); Rashi: raked it out.

(2) I.e., the Angel of death.

(3) I.e., the Angel of death and his messenger.

(4) Eccl. I, 4; implying that every generation is complete.

(5) Lit., 'shepherd them'.

(6) I.e., the years allotted to them.

(7) Lit., 'Silence', the Angel in charge of the dead.

(8) I.e., the remaining years which she should have continued to live.

(9) Cf. the ref. to Hezekiah in Yeb. 49a-50a.

Talmud of the Land of Israel, Tractate Shabat, chapter 14, halacha 3

Rav and Rav Chiya the Great – both of them said that ninety-nine die by the eye, and one dies by the hands of heaven.

Rebbi Haninah and Shmuel – both of them said that ninety-nine die through exposure to cold, and one by the hands of heaven.

Rebbi Shmuel ben Nachman said in the name of Rebbi Yonatan that ninety-nine die by heat wave, and one by the hands of heaven.

And the sages said that ninety-nine die as a result of negligence, and one by the hand of heaven.