

CHAPTER TWO

THE WORK OF CREATION AND THE FIRST GENERATIONS

The Creation of the World

1. Quoting the verse "Inquire now concerning the days past" (Deut. 4:32),¹ the sages said: These words might be taken to imply that one is allowed to inquire concerning the entire pre-creation period which is "past." Hence Scripture goes on to allow inquiry only "since the day that God created man upon the earth" (ibid.). But these words might be taken to imply that one is also not allowed to inquire concerning the six days of creation [that preceded the making of man]; therefore Scripture extends the time when inquiry is allowed to "the [six] days past, which were [immediately] before thee" (ibid.). Since Scripture's extending the range of inquiry might be taken to imply that one is also allowed to inquire concerning what is above [the heavens] and what is below [the deep], what is before [the beginning of time] and what is after [its end], therefore, with the phrase "from one end of heaven unto the other" (ibid.), Scripture limits inquiry [to the finite span of time and space that the phrase suggests]. Accordingly, you are allowed to inquire concerning the things that are from one end of heaven to the other, but not concerning what is above [the heavens], what is below [the deep], what is before [the six days of creation], and what is after [the world's existence].²

2. Why was the world created with the letter *bet*?³ Just as *bet* is closed on three sides and open only in front, so you are not permitted to investigate what is above [the heavens] and what is below [the deep], what is before [the six days of creation] and what is [to happen] after [the world's existence]—you are permitted only from the time the world was created and thereafter [the world we live in].⁴

3. "The wise man, his eyes are at the beginning" (Eccles. 2:14)—he is one who inquires from the world's beginning, from the six days of creation and thereafter [the world we live in]. "But the fool walketh in darkness" (ibid.)—he is one who puts aside the time of the world's existence and inquires only concerning the time prior, the time of darkness.⁵

4. "Now the earth was worthless and waste (*tohu va vohu*)" (Gen. 1:2). R. Eleazar said in the name of Ben Sira: "Do not pry into things too hard for you or examine what is beyond your reach. Meditate on the commandments you have been given; what the Lord keeps secret is no concern

¹ In the parallel B. Hag 11b, the text goes on: "One may inquire but two may not."

² B. Hag 11b.

³ The first letter in *Bereshit*, "In the beginning" (Gen. 1:1).

⁴ Gen. R. 1:10. This may refer either to space or to time, or to both space and time. So Tosafot on B. Hag 11b, s.v. *yakhol*.

⁵ MhG Gen., pp. 7–8.

of yours" (Ecclesiasticus 3:21). One reason for such limiting of inquiry is suggested by the parable of a king who built a palace on a site of dunghills, sewers, and waste matter. Should a man come and say, "This palace was built on a site of sewers, dunghills, and waste matter," would one not be likely to value the palace less? So, too, should a man come and say, "This world was created upon that which 'was worthless and waste, *tohu va-vohu*'" (Gen. 1:2), does he not demean [God's creation? Hence] R. Huna stated in the name of Bar Kappara: Were not the account set down in Scripture, it would be impossible to say such a thing as "In the beginning God created" (Gen. 1:1). Created on what sort of site? On "the earth which was worthless and waste, *tohu va-vohu*" (Gen. 1:2).⁶

5. A pagan philosopher argued with Rabban Gamaliel: "Your God is indeed a great artist, but surely He found on hand suitable materials which were of help to him!"⁷ "What are they?" asked Rabban Gamaliel. The philosopher replied, "*Tohu, bohu*, darkness, water, wind, and the depths."⁸ Rabban Gamaliel exclaimed, "May the breath of a man such as you be blasted out! Since the term 'creation' is used by Scripture for all of them, [it is clear that God Himself brought them into being]. *Tohu* and *bohu*: 'I make peace [perfection] and create evil [lack of perfection]' (Isa. 45:7);⁹ darkness: 'I form the light, and create darkness' (ibid.); water: 'Praise Him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters' (Ps. 148:4). Why the water's praise? 'Because He commanded, and they were created' (Ps. 148:5); wind: 'For, lo, He that formeth the mountains and created the wind' (Amos 4:13); the depths: 'When there were no depths, I created them' " (Prov. 8:24).¹⁰

6. "God created" (Gen. 1:1). It happened that a heretic came to R. Akiva and asked "This world—who created it?" R. Akiva replied: "The Holy One, blessed be He." The heretic said, "Show me clear proof." R. Akiva replied, "Come back to me tomorrow." The next day, when the

⁶ P. Hag 2:1, 47c; Gen. R. 1:5.

⁷ The philosopher believed that God had indeed created the world, but in his question implied that He had used primeval matter, which was preexistent.

⁸ The philosopher construed "In the beginning God created heaven and earth" as a topical sentence that is followed by a detailed account of creation in which are mentioned *tohu*, *bohu*, darkness, etc., elements he presumed to be preexistent.

⁹ "By *tohu* and *bohu* the philosopher meant primeval matter without form. Thereupon Rabban Gamaliel quoted: 'I made *shalom* (that which is whole, i.e., what contains both matter and form) and evil, i.e., that which is defective, consisting of matter only without form.' Thus that too was created" (I. Husik). Perhaps, too, this is an allusion to the view that matter is a source of evil" (Gen. R. Soncino, p. 8, n. 5).

¹⁰ Gen. R. 1:9 (Soncino, p. 8, n. 1: "Since at one time there were no depths, God must have created them"); MhG Gen. 20.

heretic came, R. Akiva asked him, "What are you wearing?" The heretic replied, "A garment." R. Akiva asked, "Who made it?" The heretic: "A weaver." "I don't believe you," said R. Akiva; "show me clear proof." The heretic: "What can I show you? Don't you know that a weaver made it?" R. Akiva then asked; "And you, do you not know that the Holy One made His world?" After the heretic departed, R. Akiva's disciples asked him, "But what is the clear proof?" He replied, "My children, even as a house proclaims its builder, a garment its weaver, or a door its carpenter, so does the world proclaim the Holy One, blessed be He, that he created it."¹¹

7. R. Judah ben Pazzi expounded: At the beginning the world was nothing but water, as is said, "And the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). Then He proceeded to make it into snow: "He tosseth down hail like crumbs" (Ps. 147:17). Finally He made it into earth: "He said to the snow: 'Become earth' " (Job 37:6).¹²

8. R. Judah bar Simon said: "He revealed [to the prophets] deep and secret things" (Dan. 2:22) concerning the world's beginning. Thus Genesis merely says, "In the beginning God created the heaven" (Gen. 1:1), but does not explain how heaven was created. Who explains it? Isaiah: "He stretched out the heavens as a curtain, and spread them out as a tent to dwell in" (Isa. 40:22). Genesis says, "Created . . . the earth" (Gen. 1:1), but does not explain how it was created. Who explains it? Job: "He said to the snow: 'Become loose earth' " (Job 37:6), and presently "the loose earth stuck together" (Job 38:38). Genesis says, "God said: 'let there be light' " (Gen. 1:3), but does not explain how the light came into being. Who explains it? A psalm: "Thou didst cover Thyself with light as with a garment" (Ps. 104:2).¹³

9. Six things preceded the creation of the world. Some were actually created, and others came up only in God's thought as what was to be created. Torah and the throne of glory were created. The creation of the fathers, Israel, the Temple, and the name of the Messiah came up only in God's thought. R. Ahavah son of R. Ze'era said: So, too, repentance. And some say: Also the Garden of Eden and Gehenna.¹⁴

It is said in the name of R. Samuel son of R. Isaac that the thought of creating Israel preceded all else.¹⁵ Had not the Holy One foreseen that after twenty-six generations Israel would accept the Torah, He would not have written in the Torah: "Command the children of Israel" (Num. 5:2) or "Speak to the children of Israel" (Exod. 25:2).

R. Bannai said: The world and the fullness thereof were created only for the sake of Torah.¹⁶

¹¹ B. Tem 3.

¹² P. Hag 2:1, 77a.

¹³ Gen. R. 1:6.

¹⁴ The idea that all these came before the creation described in Genesis is based on Prov. 8:22, Ps. 93:2, Hos. 9:10, Ps. 74:2, Jer. 17:12, Ps. 72:17, Ps. 90:2–3, Gen. 2:8, and Isa. 30:33. See Gen. R. 1:4; TdE, ed. Friedmann, p. 160.

¹⁵ Including Torah.

¹⁶ So that its words may be studied and its precepts obeyed. Gen. R. 1:4.

10. R. Hoshai Rabbah began his discourse with the verse "Then I was by Him as a nursling (*amon*)" (Prov. 8:30). The word *amon* may be read *umman*, meaning "overall design"—I was in the mind of the Holy One, says the Torah, like the overall design in the mind of a craftsman. In the way of the world, when a king of flesh and blood builds a palace, he builds it not according to his own whim, but according to the idea of an architect. Moreover, the architect does not build it out of his own head; he has [a design]—plans and diagrams to know how to lay out the chambers and where to put in wicket doors. Even so the Holy One looked into the Torah as He created the world.¹⁷

11. R. Zutra bar Tobiah said in the name of Rav: The world was created by means of ten capacities and powers: By wisdom, by understanding,¹⁸ by reason,¹⁹ by strength,²⁰ by rebuke,²¹ by might,²² by righteousness, by judgment, by loving-kindness, and by compassion.²³

12. "The Lord God²⁴ made earth and heaven" (Gen. 2:4). A parable of a king who had cups made of delicate glass. The king said: If I pour hot water into them, they will [expand and] burst; if cold water, they will contract [and break]. What did he do? He mixed hot and cold water, and poured it into them, and so they remained unbroken. Likewise, the Holy One said: If I create the world with the attribute of mercy alone, its sins will be too many; if with justice alone, how could the world be expected to endure? So I will create it with both justice and mercy, and may it endure!²⁵

Heaven and Earth

13. The sages taught: The school of Shammai says, Heaven was created first and the earth was created afterward, for it is said, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth" (Gen. 1:1). But the school of Hillel says: The earth was created first and heaven afterward, for it is said, "In the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven" (Gen. 2:4). The school of Hillel said to the school of Shammai: According to you, a man should build the upper story of the house first and the lower story afterward, for in the verse "It is He that buildeth His upper chambers

¹⁷ Gen. R. 1:1.

¹⁸ The ability to understand what one learns.

¹⁹ Deductive power.

²⁰ Physical strength.

²¹ "In Job 26:11 it is implied that at first the pillars of heaven were weak and shaky, till God rebuked them, when, like a person taken aback by astonishment, they stiffened and hardened" (Israel Abrahams in Hag, Soncino, p. 65, n. 6).

²² Moral power.

²³ The aforementioned capacities and powers are taken to be intimated in Prov. 3:19–20, Ps. 65:7, Job 26:11, Ps. 89:15, and Ps. 25:6. B. Hag 12a.

²⁴ In rabbinic conception, Adonai ("Lord") represents the attribute of mercy, while Elohim ("God") represents the attribute of justice. Both, according to Gen. 2:4, were brought together at the making of heaven and earth.

²⁵ Gen. R. 12:15; Yalkut, *Bereshit*, §19.

in the heaven, and hath founded His [lower] vault upon the earth" (Amos 9:6), [the upper chambers are identified with heaven]. The school of Shammai replied to the school of Hillel: According to you, a man should first make a footstool and then make the throne,¹ for in the verse "The heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool" (Isa. 66:1) [the earth is identified as God's footstool]. But the sages say: Both were created at one and the same time, for it is said, "Yea, Mine hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand hath spread out the heavens; when I called unto them, they stood up together" (Isa. 48:13).²

In the name of the sages, R. Yohanan said: In creation, heaven was first; in being brought to completion, earth was first. R. Tanhuma said, I will state the proof for this statement: the verse "God created heaven and earth" (Gen. 1:1) shows that heaven was first in creation; while the verse "In the day the Lord God completed making earth and heaven" (Gen. 2:4) shows that earth was first in being brought to completion.³

14. R. Eleazar son of R. Simeon observed: Why does Scripture at times put earth before heaven, and at other times heaven before earth? To teach that the two are of equal value.⁴

15. "From the beginning . . . [the inhabitants of] the earth [were such dissemblers that they] set one to wonder what their true nature (*tohu va-vohu*) was" (Gen. 1:2).⁵ And so R. Berekhiah began his discourse with the verse "Though his actions appear to be innocent and proper, even a child may in fact dissemble in his behavior" (Prov. 20:11).⁶ Accordingly, R. Berekhiah went on to say: At the very beginning, mankind was like a young fig tree which put forth thorns even before it bore fruit. Hence, in prophetic vision it was to be said, "I looked at [the inhabitants of] the earth, and they set one to wonder what their true nature was" (Jer. 4:23).⁷

Differing, R. Abbahu [construed the verse "The inhabitants of the earth were bewildered and confounded (*tohu va-vohu*)" (Gen. 1:2) and in explanation] told the parable of a king who bought two slaves, both on one bill of sale and at the same price. For one, he decreed that he be fed by the royal treasury; and for the other, that he must toil to eat. The latter sat bewildered and confounded (*toheh u-voheh*), and said: Both of us were acquired through one bill of sale and at the same price. Yet he is fed by the treasury, and I am fed only for my toil! Likewise, the earth sat bewildered and confounded (*tohu va-vohu*), say-

ing: The beings above and the beings below were created at the same time. Yet those above are nourished by the splendor of the Presence, while those below do not eat if they do not toil. I am perplexed!

R. Judah bar Simon told the parable of a king who bought two maidservants, both on one bill of sale and at the same price. For one, he decreed that she need never leave the palace; while for the other, he decreed banishment. The second one sat there bewildered and confounded (*tohu va-vohu*), and said: Both of us were acquired through the same bill of sale and at the same price. Yet she need never leave the palace, while for me the king has decreed banishment. I am perplexed! Likewise, the earth sat bewildered and confounded (*tohu va-vohu*), saying: The beings above and the beings below were created at the same time. Yet the beings above live on, while the beings below die. Hence Scripture: "The earth was bewildered and confounded (*tohu va-vohu*)" (Gen. 1:2).

R. Tanhuma told the parable of a prince who slept in a cradle while his nurse sat by anxious and troubled (*tohu va-vohu*). Why? Because she knew she was to receive her punishment through him. Likewise, the earth foresaw that she was to receive her punishment through Adam, as is said, "Cursed be the earth because of thee" (Gen. 3:17). Hence Scripture: "The earth was bewildered and confounded."⁸

16. "And God made the firmament" (Gen. 1:7). This is a verse whose apparent implication caused Ben Zoma to shake the world [of Jewish learning]. "'And God made!'—an unbelievable utterance," he said. "Did not the firmament come into being by God's word—'by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth' (Ps. 33:6)?"⁹

17. Concerning the verse "And God said: 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters'" (Gen. 1:6), the sages observed: When the Holy One commanded, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters," the middle layer solidified, and thus the separation between the lower heaven and the upper heaven of heavens came into being.¹⁰

"Let there be a firmament." But was not heaven already made on the first day? Rav explained: On the first day, heaven was in a form that was still fluid, but on the second day, it congealed. Hence, "Let there be a firmament" is to be understood as meaning: Let the firmament congeal, let it be covered by an overlay, let it be stretched out, let it become firm.¹¹

R. Hanina said: Fire descended from above and licked the top surface of the firmament. Hence, whenever R. Yohanan came to the verse "By His [fiery] breath heaven was smoothed"¹² (Job 26:13), he would say, "R. Hanina taught me well."¹³

⁸ Gen. R. 2:1–2.

⁹ "Made" would seem to imply almost blasphemously that God had to work at the "making" of the firmament. Gen. R. 4:6; Yalkut, *Beresheet*, §6.

¹⁰ Gen. R. 4:2.

¹¹ P. Ber 1:1, 2c; Gen. R. 4:2.

¹² JV: "was serene."

¹³ Gen. R. 4:2.

¹ "The size of the footstool cannot be determined till the throne has been made" (Israel Abrahams in Hag, Soncino, p. 66, n. 6).

² B. Hag 12a; Gen. R. 1:15.

³ Gen. R. 1:15.

⁴ Ibid. Accordingly, the difference in order has no bearing on the priority of either in creation.

⁵ JV: "Now the earth was unformed and void." But *tohu* ("unformed") may be derived from *thh* ("to wonder"); and *bohu* [*vohu*] ("void"), broken into the syllables *bo* [*vo*] ("within") and *hu* ("it"), may be taken to mean "what is in it."

⁶ NJV: "A child may be dissembling in his behavior even though his actions be innocent and proper."

⁷ JV: "I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was waste and void."

18. "And God called the firmament heaven (*shamayim*)" (Gen. 1:8). Rav said: *Shamayim* is a composite of *esh* ("fire") and *mayim* ("water"). The Holy One took fire and water, and worked them into each other; and out of the two, heaven was made.

Another comment: *Shamayim* is so called because men wonder (*mishtomemim*) at it, saying: Of what (*shel mah*) is it composed? Of fire? Of water? It is an enigma!¹

19. "All that has been generated in heaven and on earth is now in the form in which it was created² on the day the Lord God made earth and heaven" (Gen. 2:4), which implies, R. Nehemiah stated: On the very same day that heaven and earth were created, they brought forth at once the generations that have since issued from them. R. Judah objected: But is it not said, "And there was evening and there was morning, one day . . . a second day . . . a third day . . . a fourth day . . . a fifth day . . . a sixth day"?³ R. Nehemiah replied: All that has been generated from heaven and earth corresponds to the experience of those who harvest figs⁴—each being [was created at the beginning but] became visible only at the time designated for it.

[In agreement with R. Nehemiah], R. Berekhiah said: The words "And the earth brought forth" (Gen. 1:12) imply that what was brought forth had already been deposited within it.⁵

20. A Caesar said to Rabban Gamaliel [of Yavneh]: He who created the mountains did not create the wind, for it is written, "There is He that formed the mountains and there is He that created the wind" (Amos 4:13).⁶ Rabban Gamaliel replied: If so, then in the account of the making of Adam, where Scripture says, "He created" (Gen. 1:27) and "He formed" (Gen. 2:7)—would you, in keeping with your reasoning, also say that He who created one part of Adam did not create any other part of him? Further, there is an area of the human body no more than a handbreadth square, which contains two openings,⁷ of which it is written, "He that planteth the ear, shall He not hear? He that formeth the eye, shall He not see?" (Ps. 94:9)⁸—would you maintain here, too, that He who created the one did not create the other? "Yes, even so," answered Caesar. "Yet," Rabban Gamaliel retorted, "Would you say that at

¹ Gen. R. 4:7.

² JV: "These are the generations of the heaven and of the earth when they were created."

³ Which would indicate that only heaven and earth were created on the first day, whereas what issued from them was created on subsequent days.

⁴ Figs on the tree assume their shape at about the same time but do not all ripen simultaneously. So, too, all that was to issue from heaven and earth had already been created on the first day: only their appearance was delayed to subsequent days.

⁵ Gen. R. 12:4.

⁶ JV: "He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind." Caesar took these words to refer to two divine beings.

⁷ The face, which contains the eye and the ear.

⁸ "Two different expressions are used for the creation of the eye and ear respectively" (Jacob Shachter in Sanh, Soncino, p. 249).

a creature's death the creators of the eye and the ear agree to let their creature die?"⁹

The Light

21. "And God said: 'Let there be light'" (Gen. 1:3). R. Judah taught: The light was created first, and then [all that is in] the world.¹⁰ A parable of a king who wanted to build a palace, but the site was dark. What did he do? He lit lamps and lanterns to see where to lay the foundations. Hence, light had to be created first. But R. Nehemiah maintained: The world was created first; just as a king would first build a palace and then adorn it with lights and lanterns.¹¹

22. R. Simeon ben Jehozadak interrogated R. Samuel bar Nahman, saying: Since I hear that you are a master of *Aggadah*, tell me how light was created. R. Samuel bar Nahman replied: God wrapped Himself in a white garment, and the radiance of His majesty illuminated the world from one end to the other.¹²

23. "And God saw the light, that it was [for the] good, and God set it aside" (Gen. 1:4). R. Eleazar said: By the light that the Holy One created on the first day, one could see from one end of the world to the other. But as soon as the Holy One observed the generation of the flood and the generation of the dispersion of mankind,¹³ and saw that their conduct was to be depraved, He proceeded to secrete His light from them. And for whom did He secrete it? For the righteous in the time-to-come, just like a king who has a goodly treasure and sets it aside for his son. And where did He hide the light? In the Garden of Eden.¹⁴

24. "And God divided the light from the darkness" (Gen. 1:4). R. Berekhiah said: Two men of renown, R. Yohanan and R. Simeon ben Lakish, took the words "And . . . divided" to imply actual division of domains and illustrated this interpretation by a parable: A king had two chiefs of the guards who argued with each other. One said: I am to be in charge during the day. And the other said: No! I am to be in charge during the day. So the king summoned the first, saying to him: So-and-so, daytime is to be your domain; then he summoned the second: So-and-so, nighttime is to be your domain. Likewise, "for the light God summoned the day" (Gen. 1:5), saying, "Daytime is to be your domain"; "and for the darkness He

⁹ B. Sanh 39a. "The one who *planted* and the one who *created*, i.e., assuming that there were two creators of man, he could not completely die unless both agreed; otherwise, the creator of the eye might insist that the eye go on living, whilst the creator of the ear might wish it to die" (Jacob Shachter in Sanh, Soncino, p. 249).

¹⁰ According to R. Judah, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1) is a general statement, followed by details which begin with the command "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3).

¹¹ Gen. R. 3:1; Exod. R. 34:2.

¹² Gen. R. 3:4; MTeh 104:4.

¹³ See Gen. 11:9.

¹⁴ B. Hag 12a; Gen. R. 3:6; Exod. R. 35:1.

land. If those of the sea were to come up on dry land, they would immediately die; and if those of the dry land were to go down into the sea, they would immediately die. You have creatures that grow in fire,¹ and You have creatures that grow in the air. If those of the fire were to come up into the air, they would immediately die. [If those of the air were to come down into the fire, they would immediately die.] The place of life for the one is the cause of death for the other; and the place of death for the one is the cause of life for the other. "What variety Thou hast created, O Lord!"²

40. "And all the host of them" (Gen. 2:1). Even those creatures that you may look upon as superfluous in the world, such as flies, fleas, or gnats—they too are part of the entirety of creation. The Holy One effects His purpose through all creatures, even through a frog or a flea.³

41. R. Judah said in the name of Rav: Of all that the Holy One created in His world, He did not create a single thing that is useless.⁴

42. Elijah told the following: One day, as I was walking through the greatest city of the world,⁵ there was a draft roundup and I was peremptorily seized and brought into the king's house. Presently a Parsee priest came and asked me, "Are you a man of books?" I replied, "A bit of one." He said, "If you can answer the particular question I am about to ask, you may go in peace." I replied, "Ask." He then asked, "Why did God create loathsome reptiles and creeping things?"⁶ I replied, "God is a judge who is indeed holy and just, but He is also loving because He is perceptive [of man's condition] forever and ever and ever. He knows both beginning and end, and can tell from the beginning what the end of anything is to be, long, long before it has been made; still, He chooses to see the good and chooses not to see the evil [in whatever is made]. In His wisdom and with His understanding He created His world and set it on its foundation. Then He created Adam and brought him into the world. And He created him for no other purpose than to serve Him with a whole heart; He would thus find contentment in him and in his descendants after him until the end of all generations. But then, after Adam complied with the command to be fruitful and multiply, one [descendant] worshiped the sun and the moon, and another worshiped wood and stone, and thus every day Adam's descendants came to be deemed by Him as deserving annihilation. Nevertheless, upon reconsidering all the work of His hands in the world of His creation, God said: These [human beings] have life, and those [other

¹ Salamanders were believed to live in fire.

² B. Hul 127a; Yalkut, Ps., §862.

³ Gen. R. 10:7; Exod. R. 10:1.

⁴ B. Shab 77b.

⁵ Probably Ctesiphon, capital of the Sassanids. See Jacob Mann, "Date and Place of Redaction of Seder Eliahu Rabbah and Zuta," *HUCA* 4, 302-10, particularly n. 137. (To a Babylonian Jew, Ctesiphon no doubt seemed the largest city in the world—Leon Nemoy.)

⁶ In Zoroastrian teaching, such creatures are the work of Ahriman, the god of darkness and evil. But for Elijah, as will become evident, such creatures serve an admirable purpose.

creatures] have life. These have breath and those have breath; these crave food and drink, and those crave food and drink. Human beings ought therefore to be deemed as important as cattle or wild beasts, or, at worst, as important as the variety of loathsome reptiles and creeping things that I created upon the earth. At once He felt some measure of contentment and resolved not to annihilate mankind. And so you see that reptiles and creeping things were created in the world as a means of mankind's preservation.⁷

43. [The Roman general Quintus asked Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai]: One verse speaks of fowl as having been created out of the waters of the sea: "God said, 'Let the waters bring forth abundantly . . . fowl that may fly above the earth'" (Gen. 1:20). But another verse speaks of them as having been created out of the earth: "Out of the ground the Lord God formed . . . every fowl of the air" (Gen. 2:19). Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai replied: [Both are true.] Fowl were created out of the alluvial mud.

R. Samuel of Cappadocia commented: Just the same, [fowl are related to fish], for the skin of chickens' feet resembles the scale-covered skin of fish [and so fowl are considered fishlike].⁸

Man

44. "And God said: 'Let us make man'" (Gen. 1:26). With whom did He take counsel? R. Ammi said: He took counsel with His own heart. He was like a king who built a palace with the counsel of an architect. When he saw the palace, it did not please him. At whom was he indignant? Was it not at the architect? Hence, "and it grieved Him at His heart" (Gen. 6:6) [with which He had taken counsel at the making of man].

R. Hanina said: He consulted the ministering angels.

R. Berekhiah said: When the Holy One was about to create Adam, he saw both the righteous and the wicked who were to issue from him. So He said: If I create him, wicked men will issue from him; if I do not create him, how are righteous men to be born? What did the Holy One do? He diverted the way of the wicked from before His sight,⁹ partnered the quality of mercy¹⁰ with Himself, [saying to it, "Let us make man], and then created him.¹¹

45. R. Judah said in the name of Rav: When the Holy One was about to create man, He first created a company of ministering angels and asked them: Is it your desire that "we make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26)? They replied: Master of the universe, what will be his deeds? God said: Such-and-such will be his deeds. Indignantly, they exclaimed: Master of the universe, "what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou thinkest of him" (Ps. 8:5)? At once He stretched out His little

⁷ TdE, Ed. Friedmann, pp. 5-6.

⁸ B. Hul 27b, and Tosafot and En Yaakov, ad loc.

⁹ He deliberately disregarded it.

¹⁰ Mercy is often hypostatized.

¹¹ Gen. R. 8:3-4; Yalkut, *Beresheet*, §13.

finger among them and consumed them with fire. The same thing happened with a second company. The third company said to Him: Master of the universe, what did it avail the former [angels that they spoke to You] as they did? The whole world is Yours, and whatever You wish to do therein, do it.

When God came to the generation of the flood and to the generation of the dispersion of mankind, whose deeds were so corrupt, the angels said: Lord of the universe, did not the first [company of angels] speak justly? He retorted, "Even to old age . . . and even to hoar hair will I put up [with man]" (Isa. 46:4).¹

46. R. Simon said: When the Holy One was about to create Adam, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and companies, some of them saying, "Let him be created," while others urged, "Let him not be created." Thus it is written, "Love and truth fought together, righteousness and peace combated each other" (Ps. 85:11).² Love said, "Let him be created, because he will perform acts of love." Truth said, "Let him not be created, because all of him will be falsehood." Righteousness said, "Let him be created, because he will do righteous deeds." Peace said, "Let him not be created, because he will be all strife." What did the Holy One do? He took truth and cast it to the ground, as is said, "Thou didst cast down truth to the ground" (Dan. 8:12). The ministering angels dared say to the Holy One, "Master of the universe, why do You humiliate Your seal?"³ Let truth arise from the earth." Hence it is written, "Let truth spring up from the earth" (Ps. 85:12).⁴

The elder R. Huna of Sepphoris said: While the ministering angels were parleying with one another and disputing with one another, the Holy One created Adam and then said: What are you parleying about? Man is already made.⁵

47. R. Huna said in the name of R. Aibu: God created Adam with due deliberation. He first created the means of man's sustenance and only then did He create him. The ministering angels spoke up to the Holy One: "Master of universes, 'what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou thinkest of him?' [Ps. 8:5]. This source of trouble—why should he be created?" "If what you hint in your question is to be followed," God replied, "'sheep and oxen, all of them' [Ps. 8:8]—why should they have been created? Why should 'the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea' [Ps. 8:9] have been created? I am like a king who has a tower full of good things, but no guests. What joy can the tower give the king who filled it?" At that, the ministering angels declared, "Master of uni-

¹ B. Sanh 38a.

² JV: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." But the commentator interprets "met" in the sense of "fought," and derives *nashaku* ("kissed") from *neshek* ("arms"), reading: "have taken arms against each other."

³ Truth is the seal of God.

⁴ Gen. R. 8:5.

⁵ Gen. R. 8:5 (Soncino, p. 58). R. Huna thus reads not *na'aseh* ("Let us make") but *ne'esah* ("is already made").

verses, 'Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Thy Name in all the earth' [Ps. 8:10]. Do what pleases You."⁶

48. R. Samuel bar Nahman said in the name of R. Jonathan: At the time when Moses was engaged in writing the Torah, he had to set down what happened on each of the six days of creation. When he got to the verse "And God said: 'Let us make Adam'" (Gen. 1:26), Moses dared ask, "Master of the universe, why do You give heretics their opportunity?"⁷ "Write, O son of Amram," God replied: "Whoever wishes to err, let him err." The Holy One then added, "O Moses, this Adam whom I created by Myself—will I not cause both greater and lesser men to issue from him? Accordingly, whenever a great man is inclined to seek approval [for an important act] from one who is less than he and holds back, saying, 'Why should I seek approval from one who is less than I?' he will be told: Learn from your Creator, who created the creatures above and the creatures below [on His own], yet when He was about to create Adam, He took counsel with the ministering angels."⁸

R. Hila⁹ differed: No taking counsel is implied here. What happened will be understood by the parable of a king who was strolling at the entrance to his palace when he saw a clump of earth lying about. So he said: What shall we¹⁰ do with it? Some might suggest: [Use it to build] public baths; others might suggest: Private baths. But I will make a statuelike figure out of it! Who is to hinder me?¹¹

49. R. Aha said: When the Holy One desired to create the first man, He consulted the ministering angels and said to them, "Shall we make man?"¹² They asked, "What is to be his character?" God replied, "This being whom I desire to create—his wisdom will be greater than yours." How did God prove it? He assembled all domestic animals, all wild beasts, and all fowls, and made them pass before the angels. Then He asked, "What are the names of these creatures?" The angels did not know. Subsequently, when He created the first man, He again assembled all domestic animals, all wild beasts, and all fowl, and made them pass before him. He asked him, "What are the names of these creatures?" Adam replied, "This one—the name 'ox' fits him. This one—'ass.' And this one—'horse.' And this one—'camel.' And this one—'lion.' And this one—'vulture.'" And he named the others as well. Thus it is written, "And the man gave names to all cattle, to the fowl of the air," etc. (Gen. 2:20). God asked him, "And you, what is your name?" He replied, "The name Adam fits me." God asked, "Why?" He replied, "Because I was fashioned out of the earth (*adamah*)." God asked, "And I, what is My Name?" "The name Lord fits You." God asked, "Why?" "Because You are Lord over all Your works."¹³

⁶ Gen. R. 8:6.

⁷ They will say that there are numerous deities.

⁸ Gen. R. 8:8.

⁹ So Gen. R. TA; BR: "R. Levi."

¹⁰ The royal plural.

¹¹ Gen. R. 8:8.

¹² JV: "Let us make man."

¹³ PR 14:9 (YJS 1; 272-73); Tanhuma, *Hukkat*, §6; Gen. R. 17:4; Num. R. 19:3.

50. R. Meir used to say: Adam—the dust out of which he was made was gathered from the entire earth.¹

51. R. Simeon ben Yohai, quoting “The Craftsman,² His work is perfect” (Deut. 32:4), said: The Craftsman who wrought the world and man, His work is perfect. In the way of the world, when a king of flesh and blood builds a palace, mortals who enter it say: Had the columns been taller, how much more beautiful the palace would have been! Had the walls been higher, how much more beautiful it would have been! Had the ceiling been loftier, how much more beautiful it would have been! But does any man come and say: If I had three eyes, three arms, three legs, how much better off I would be! If I walked on my head, or if my face were turned backward, how much better off I would be! I wonder. To assure that no one would say such a thing, the King of kings, the Holy One and His court had themselves, in a manner of speaking, polled concerning the placing of every part of your body and set you up in a way that is right for you.³

52. R. Levi bar Haita said: Were a king of flesh and blood to build a palace and place a rainspout over its entrance, it would be unseemly. But the King of kings of kings, the Holy One, created man, and placed the spout [his nose] over the entrance [his mouth], and that makes man’s beauty, man’s comeliness.⁴

53. “And God created man in His own image” (Gen. 1:27). R. Hoshai said: At the time the Holy One created the first man, the ministering angels mistook him [for God Himself] and were about to say “Holy” before him. What did the Holy One do? He put him into a deep sleep, and all the angels realized that he was no more than man. [God and man together in the world were then] like a king and a governor riding together in a state carriage. The people of the province were about to cry. “Hail, *domine!*” but did not know which one was king. What did the king do? He pushed aside the governor and put him out of the carriage, whereupon all realized that that one was no more than a governor.⁵

54. Man was created alone in order to teach you that if anyone causes a single soul to perish from Israel, Scripture imputes to him the destruction of the entire world; and if anyone saves alive a single soul in Israel,⁶ Scripture imputes to him the saving alive of the entire world. Again, [man was created alone] for the sake of peace among men, that one might not say to his fellow, “My father was greater than yours”; and that heretics might not say, “There are many ruling powers in heaven.” Another reason: To proclaim the greatness of the Holy One. For if a man strikes many coins from one die, they all resemble one another;

¹ B. Sanh 38b.

² Instead of *tzur* (“Rock” [=God]), R. Simeon ben Yohai read *tzayyar* (“Craftsman”).

³ Sif Deut., §307; Gen. R. 12:1.

⁴ Gen. R. 12:1.

⁵ Gen. R. 8:10.

⁶ Some texts omit “from Israel” and “in Israel.”

in fact, they are all exactly alike. But though the King of kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, fashioned every man from the die of the first man, not a single one of them is exactly like his fellow. Hence, each and every person should say, “The world was created for my sake.”⁷

55. The sages taught: Man was created alone. And why so? For the sake of the righteous and for the sake of the wicked. That the righteous might not say, “Ours is a righteous heredity,”⁸ and that the wicked might not say, “Ours is an evil heredity.”⁹

Another answer: For the sake of [the different] families, that they might not quarrel with one another.¹⁰ Now, if at present, though originally but one man was created, they quarrel anyway, how much more would they have quarreled had two been created?

Another answer: Because of brigands and plunderers. If at present, though originally but one man was created, people rob and plunder, how much more so had two been created?¹¹

And why are men’s faces not like one another? Lest a man see a beautiful dwelling or a beautiful woman [belonging to someone else] and say, “she is mine.”¹²

56. Man was created on the eve of Sabbath, [the last of all created beings]. And why? Lest heretics say, “The Holy One had [Adam as] partner in His work of creation.”

Another answer: Should a man’s opinion of himself become overweening, he may be reminded that the gnat preceded him in the order of creation.

Another answer: So that immediately [after his creation] he could proceed to fulfill the precept [of hallowing the Sabbath].

Another answer: So that he might at once go to the banquet.¹³ Thus, God was like the king of flesh and blood who built a palace, decorated it, and made arrangements for a banquet [so that all would be in readiness when his guests arrived].

57. The words “Man is raised aloft” (Prov. 29:4)¹⁴ refer to the first man, who was the climax of creation—lifted out, as the world’s dough offering.¹⁵

58. When the Holy One created the first man, He took him and led him around all the trees of the Garden of Eden, and said to him: Behold My works, how beautiful, how splendid they are. All that I have created, I created

⁷ B. Sanh 38a.

⁸ Therefore we have no need to shun temptation.

⁹ And therefore we cannot avoid succumbing to temptation.

¹⁰ On the superiority of their respective ancestry.

¹¹ I.e., if they had come from different stocks.

¹² B. Sanh 38a.

¹³ All nature was ready for his sustenance.

¹⁴ JV: “He that exacteth gifts.” But *terumot* (“He that exacteth gifts”) may also mean “raised aloft.”

¹⁵ After a woman pours water on the flour, she separates *hallah*, the dough offering. Similarly, after God watered the ground (Gen. 2:6), He separated *hallah*, which was man, thus making him the sacred part of creation (see P. Shab 2:6, 5b). Gen. R. 14:1.

for your sake. Take care that you do not become corrupt and thus destroy My world. For once you become corrupt, there is no one after you to repair it.¹

59. “Both last and first You made me” (Ps. 139:5).² When a man is worthy, he is told: You preceded the ministering angels.³ But if he is not, he is told: The fly preceded you, the gnat preceded you, this earthworm preceded you in the work of creation.⁴

60. R. Jeremiah ben Eleazar said: When the Holy One created Adam, He created him hermaphrodite [bisexual],⁵ as is said, “Male and female created He them⁶ . . . and called their name Adam” (Gen. 5:2).

R. Samuel bar Nahman said: When the Holy One created Adam, He made him with two fronts; then He sawed him in half⁷ and thus gave him two backs, a back for one part and a back for the other part. Someone objected: But does not Scripture say, “And He took one of his ribs (*mi-tzalotav*)” (Gen. 2:21)? R. Samuel replied: *Mi-tzalotav* may also mean “his sides,” as in the verse “And for the second side (*tzela*) of the Tabernacle” (Exod. 26:20).⁸

61. “And man became an animal being” (Gen. 2:7).⁹ R. Judah said: These words teach us that He first provided him with a tail like an animal, but then removed it from him for the sake of human dignity.¹⁰

62. “And the Lord God created man *afar*”¹¹ (Gen. 2:7). R. Judah bar Simon said: Read the word *ofer*,¹² “a young man”—Adam was created as a young man, in the fullness of vigor. R. Eleazar son of R. Simeon added: Eve also was created fully developed.

[Even more precise], R. Yohanan said: Adam and Eve were created as at the age of twenty.¹³

63. It is said in the name of R. Eleazar: As the Lord was creating Adam, He had come to the stage when Adam had the form of a *golem*, an unarticulated lump, which lay prone from one end of the world to the other. With regard

¹ Eccles. R. 7:13, §1.

² JV: “Thou hast hemmed me in behind and before.”

³ Since man’s soul, the spirit, came into being at creation’s beginning, while the angels were created on the second day or, according to some, on the fifth day. Tanhuma, *Beresheet*, §1.

⁴ Gen. R. 8:1; B. Sanh 38a.

⁵ Normally *androgynos* means one who has both male and female genitals; but here it means two bodies, male and female, joined together.

⁶ Thus Adam was originally male and female.

⁷ Thus Eve was created out of half of Adam’s body and not out of a mere rib (Leon Nemoy).

⁸ Gen. R. 8:1.

⁹ The literal meaning of *nefesh hayyah*. JV: “And man became a living soul.”

¹⁰ Gen. R. 14:10.

¹¹ JV: “out of the dust.”

¹² The word *afar* (“dust”) is superfluous, as Scripture could have stated, “Then the Lord God formed man of the ground.” By a play on words, *afar* (“dust”) is connected with *ofer* (“a youth,” “a strong man”).

¹³ Gen. R. 14:7.

to this, Scripture says, “Thine eyes did see my *golem*” (Ps. 139:16).¹⁴

“This is the book of the generations of Adam” (Gen. 5:1). R. Judah bar Simon said: While the first man lay prone as a *golem* before Him who spoke and the world came into being, He caused to pass before him each generation with its expounders of Scripture, each generation with its sages, each generation with its leaders, as is said, “O [Adam], when thou wast still a *golem*, thine eyes did see all [the worthies whose names were] inscribed in thy book” (Ps. 139:16). O *golem*, all that your eyes have seen had already been written in your book, the book of the first man.¹⁵

64. While the first man lay prone as a *golem*, the Holy One showed him each and every righteous man that was to issue from him—some hung on Adam’s head, some hung on his hair, some on his forehead, some on his eyes, some on his nose, some on his mouth, some on his ears, some on his teeth.¹⁶

The Upper Worlds and the Lower Worlds

65. “These are the generations of heaven and earth” (Gen. 2:4). R. Simeon ben Halafta said: Great is peace, for when the Holy One created His world, He made peace between the upper and lower worlds. Thus, what He created on the first day, He created out of both upper and lower worlds, as is said, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth” (Gen. 1:1). What He created on the second day, He created out of the upper worlds, as is said, “Let there be a firmament” (Gen. 1:6). What He created on the third day, He created out of the lower worlds, as is said, “Let the earth put forth grass” (Gen. 1:11). What He created on the fourth day, He created out of the upper worlds, as is said, “Let there be lights” (Gen. 1:14). On the fifth, out of the lower worlds, as is said, “Let the waters swarm” (Gen. 1:20). On the sixth, as He was about to create man, He said, If I create him out of the upper worlds, the upper worlds will outnumber the lower worlds by one; if I create him out of the lower worlds, the lower worlds will outnumber the upper worlds by one. As a result, there will be no peace in the world. I will therefore create him out of both upper and lower worlds, as is said, “Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7)—out of the lower worlds; “and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (ibid.)—out of the upper worlds.¹⁷

¹⁴ R. Eleazar construes these words as saying: So large was the *golem* that wherever You, O God, looked, You saw it.

¹⁵ Gen. R. 24:2; PR 23:2 (YJS 1: 472–73).

¹⁶ Or: “earlobes.” The different members of the body are taken to suggest the particular qualities of heart and mind that single out a righteous man. Exod. R. 40:3.

¹⁷ When Scripture speaks of the creation of animals, it does not add that God breathed into their nostrils the breath of life. But with regard to man, Scripture says that God did breathe such breath into his nostrils. Hence the commentator concludes that the breath of life refers to man’s creation out of the upper worlds. Gen. R. 12:8; Lev. R. 9:9.

CHAPTER THREE

LANGUAGE

The Sacred Tongue

1. It is taught in the name of R. Meir: Everyone who dwells permanently in the Land of Israel, recites the Shema morning and evening, and speaks the sacred tongue is assured that he will dwell in the world-to-come.¹

2. "And ye shall teach them to your children, to speak of them" (Deut. 11:19). From this verse it is inferred: When a child begins to speak, his father should speak to him in the sacred tongue and teach him Torah; if he does not speak to him in the sacred tongue and does not teach him Torah, it is as though he were burying him, for Scripture says, "Ye shall teach them to your children, to speak of them . . . that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children" (Deut. 11:19 and 11:21). If you teach them to your children, your days and the days of your children will be multiplied; if you do not, your days and the days of your children will be made fewer.

For the rule is that a negative commandment implies the corresponding positive commandment, and a positive commandment the corresponding negative commandment.²

3. Israel were redeemed from Egypt because they did not change their names. They went down there as Reuben and Simeon, and came back up as Reuben and Simeon. Reuben was not called Rufus, nor Judah Julianus, nor Joseph Justus, nor Benjamin Alexander. Also, because they did not change their language—they continued to speak the sacred tongue, for Scripture says, "When the house of Jacob [went forth] from a people of strange language" (Ps. 114:1), and Joseph also said, "It is my mouth that speaketh unto you" (Gen. 45:12)—speaks to you in the sacred tongue.³

4. "She shall be called woman (*ishah*) because she was taken out of man (*ish*)" (Gen. 2:23). It is said in the name of R. Simon: Just as the Torah was given in the sacred tongue, so was the world created with the sacred tongue. Have you even heard anyone say *gune*, *gunya*; *anthrope*, *anthropia*; *gavra*, *gavarta*?⁴ But *ish* and *ishah* are used. Why? Because [in Hebrew] the masculine form and the feminine form correspond to each other.⁵

¹ Sif Deut., §333; P. Shab 1:3, 3c.

² Sif Deut., §46.

³ Lev. R. 32:6; Song R. 4:12, §1; MTeh 114:4.

⁴ "In Greek, *gune* means 'woman'; but to reflect nature, there should be a *gune-gunya* word pair for 'man'-'woman.' Instead, *anthrope* in Greek means 'man,' with no corresponding *anthropia* to mean 'woman.' Likewise, Aramaic *gavra* ('man') has no corresponding *gavarta* for 'woman'" (Brother Caedmon Holmes).

⁵ Gen. R. 18:4.

5. It is written, "And the whole earth was of one language, even though they used *ahadim* words" (Gen. 11:1). R. Eleazar and R. Yohanan differed on the meaning of *ahadim*. According to one, it means "several," that is, the seventy languages of the world. According to the other, it means the language of the One that is unique in the world—the sacred tongue.⁶

6. R. Assi asked R. Yohanan: What is the law governing wine mixed (*mesakho*) with water⁷ by a heathen? R. Yohanan replied: The correct verb is *mezago*. R. Assi: I used the verb that occurs in Scripture, "She hath killed her beasts, she hath mingled (*masekhah*) her wine" (Prov. 9:2). R. Yohanan: For mixing wine with water, *mesakho* is still not the right word. Torah has its language, and the sages have theirs.⁸

When Assi bar Hini came up [to the Land of Israel], R. Yohanan found that, while teaching R. Yohanan's son Mishnah, Assi used the masculine plural *rehelim* for "ewes." R. Yohanan said: The correct plural is feminine: *rehelot*. Assi: But it is written, "Two hundred *rehelim*" (Gen. 32:15). R. Yohanan: Torah has its language, and the sages have theirs.⁹

7. R. Hiyya the Elder and R. Simeon bar Halafta forgot the meaning of several words in the Aramaic version of Scripture and went to a marketplace of Arabs [who spoke Nabatean] to learn from them. They heard a man who meant to say to his companion, "Place this burden on me," say instead, "Place this *yehav* on me," from which they concluded that *yehav* means "burden," as in the verse "Cast *yehavekha* (thy burden) upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee" (Ps. 55:23). Then again, they heard a man who wished to say to his companion, "Why do you tread (*mevasseh*) on me?" say instead, "Why do you *measseh* on me?" They accordingly interpreted the verse "*Ve-assotem* (Ye shall tread down) the wicked" (Mal. 3:21). They then heard a woman say to her companion, "Come and bathe," and receive the reply, "I am *galmudah*," meaning "menstruating." They accordingly interpreted the verse "Seeing I have been bereaved and *galmudah*"¹⁰ (Isa. 49:21). They then heard another woman who meant to say to her companion, "Come, raise your lament," say, "Come, raise your *livyah*." They accordingly interpreted the verse "Who are ready to raise their *livyah*" (Job 3:8). For "Lend me

⁶ The word *ahadim* may be taken as the plural of "one"—hence, seventy; or as a plural of majesty—hence, the One who is unique. P. Meg 1:9, 71b.

⁷ Wine was usually diluted with water before drinking.

⁸ In rabbinic Hebrew, *masakh* means not to mix wine with water but to mix strong wine with weaker wine.

⁹ B. AZ 58b; B. Hul 137b.

¹⁰ "Shunned" (as one unclean).

your broom," a woman said, "Lend me your *matate*." They accordingly interpreted the verse, "I will sweep it with the *matate* of destruction" (Isa. 14:23). For "Lend me your pearls," they heard a woman say, "Lend me your *cesitha*."¹ For "Take this ewe out to pasture," they heard, "Take this *kesitah* out to pasture." Hence: "A hundred *kesitah*" (Gen. 33:19).²

8. R. Honi said: The sages did not know what the words *serugin*, *haloglogot*, and *matate* meant; nor which is to be deferred to—one greater in wisdom or one greater in years. They decided: Let us go and inquire at the house of Rabbi [Judah I, the Patriarch]. When they got there, one said to the other, "Let So-and-so go in first." "No, let So-and-so go in first." A maidservant of Rabbi [Judah's] household came out and said, "Enter according to your seniority in years." They began entering at intervals. So she asked them, "Why are you entering *serugin*, *serugin*, 'in a broken line'?" Among them was a young man carrying purslane, which fell from his hand. The maidservant said to him, "Young man, your *haloglogot*, 'purslane,' has scattered all over. I will bring a *matate*." And she brought a broom [and swept it up].³

9. At the baths, secular matters may be discussed in the sacred tongue.⁴

The Sacred Tongue and Other Languages

10. "And he said: 'The Lord came from Sinai'" (Deut. 33:2). When the Holy One revealed Himself to give Torah to Israel, He revealed Himself not in one language, but in four. "And he said: 'The Lord came from Sinai'" in Hebrew; 'and rose from Seir unto them' (ibid.) in the language of Rome; 'and shined forth from Mount Paran' (ibid.) in the Arab language; 'and He came from Meribath-Kadesh'"⁵ (ibid.) in the Aramaic language.⁶

11. Ben Damah, R. Ishmael's nephew, asked R. Ishmael: May one such as I, who have studied the entire Torah, also study Greek wisdom?⁷ R. Ishmael recited to him the verse "The book of Torah shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night" (Josh. 1:8)—go and find a time that is neither day nor night, and in it you may study Greek wisdom.⁸

¹ The spelling variation may, Leon Nemoj suggests, be a scribe's error; the two words would have been pronounced the same.

² So Jacob may have bought the land either for a hundred precious pearls or for a hundred sheep. JV: "a hundred pieces of money." Gen. R. 79:7.

³ P. Meg 2:2, 73a.

⁴ B. Shab 41a.

⁵ So Meir Friedmann, Sif Deut. (Vienna, 1864). JV: "from the myriads holy." The verse itself is of course entirely in Hebrew. But the three places mentioned in addition to Sinai—Seir = Edom = Rome, Paran = Arabian desert, and Kadesh = Syria—suggests that God also revealed Himself in the languages of these countries. So Leon Nemoj.

⁶ Sif Deut., §342.

⁷ Perhaps Greek philosophy.

⁸ B. Men 99b.

12. R. Joshua was asked: May a man teach his son Greek? He replied: He may teach him at a time that is neither day nor night, for Scripture says, "Thou shalt meditate therein day and night" (Josh. 1:8). [The inquirer objected], "But according to you, one should be forbidden to teach his son a craft, because Scripture says, 'Thou shalt meditate therein day and night.' Yet R. Ishmael taught: The words 'Thou shalt choose life' (Deut. 30:19) refer to learning a craft."

R. Abba son of R. Hiyya bar Abba, citing R. Yohanan, said: [Greek should not be taught] because of informers [who might use their proficiency in Greek to curry favor with the gentile authorities by denouncing innocent persons].

R. Abbahu said in the name of R. Yohanan: A man may teach his daughter Greek, because it is an ornament for her. When Simeon bar Abba heard this, he said: Just because R. Abbahu wishes to teach Greek to his daughter, he attributes to R. Yohanan permission to do so. When R. Abbahu heard this, he said: May such-and-such befall me if I have not actually heard this permission from R. Yohanan himself.⁹

13. We have been taught that Rabbi [Judah I, the Patriarch] asked: Why should anyone speak Syriac—Aramaic—in the Land of Israel? Either the sacred tongue or the Greek tongue!

R. Yose said: Why speak Aramaic in Babylonia? Either the sacred tongue or the Persian tongue.¹⁰

14. R. Samuel bar Nahman said in the name of Yohanan: Do not think lightly of the Syriac language, for we find that the Holy One pays honor to it in the Torah, in the Prophets, and in the Writings. In the Torah: "Jegar-sahadutha" (Gen. 31:47);¹¹ in the Prophets: "Thus shall ye say unto them: 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, these shall perish from the earth'" (Jer. 10:11);¹² in the Writings: "Then spoke the Chaldeans to the king in Aramaic: 'O king, live forever!'" (Dan. 2:4).¹³

15. R. Hanina said: It was to Babylonia that the Holy One exiled Israel because their language is close to the language of Torah.¹⁴

16. R. Judah said in the name of Rav: Adam spoke Aramaic.¹⁵

17. R. Judah said: A man should never pray for his needs in Aramaic.

R. Yohanan said: When a man prays for his needs

⁹ P. Sot 19:15, 24c; P. Shab 6:1, 7d.

¹⁰ B. BK 82b–83a.

¹¹ "The heap of witness."

¹² The text is in Aramaic (Syriac).

¹³ Gen. R. 74:14; P. Sot 7:2, 21c.

¹⁴ B. Pes 87b.

¹⁵ "This may have been said in justification of the abandonment by the Babylonian Jews of the Hebrew language in favor of Aramaic" (Isidore Epstein in Sanh, Soncino, p. 243, n. 6). B. Sanh 38b.

in Aramaic, the ministering angels, who do not understand Aramaic, will not respond to him.¹

18. R. Jonathan of Beth Gubrin said: There are four beautiful languages, which all the world should use: Greek for song, Roman—Latin—for battle, Syriac—Aramaic—for lamentation, and Hebrew for conversation. Some add: Assyrian for writing.

Assyrian has a script but is no longer a spoken language. Hebrew is a spoken tongue but has no script of its own. The Hebrews chose for themselves the Assyrian script and the Hebrew tongue. Why is the Hebrew script called Assyrian? Since it is clear, easy reading of it is assured. R. Levi said: Because it came to them from Assyria.²

19. "I will . . . saith the Lord . . . cut off from Babylon name and remnant" (Isa. 14:22). "Name" refers to the script [whereby a nation's name spreads abroad and comes to be known], and "remnant" refers to the spoken tongue [whereby a nation survives as such, and so has a remnant in the world].³

20. "Thou art greatly despised" (Obad. 1:2), for Rome possesses neither script nor tongue.⁴

21. "And Balaam said: . . . Because thou hast mocked (*hit'alalt*) me" (Num. 22:29). Even when he speaks in the sacred tongue, a heathen's language is foul.⁵

22. "Come, let us go down, and there confound their language" (Gen. 11:7). He confounded their language, so

that one did not understand the language of the other. The first language they had been speaking was the sacred tongue, by which the world had been created.

So the Holy One said: In this world, because of the impulse to evil, My creatures have been separated and have become divided into seventy languages. But in the time-to-come, all of them will come as one to call upon My Name and worship Me, as is said, "Then I will make the peoples pure of speech, so that they will all invoke the Lord by name, and serve Him with one accord" (Zeph. 3:9).⁶

Exactness in the Use of Language

23. R. Judah said in the name of Rav: The Judeans, who were particular about their language, retained their learning in Torah, but the Galileans, who were not particular about their language, did not retain their learning.

The Judeans were particular about their use of language. For example, a Judean once announced that he had a cloak to sell. He was asked, "What is the color of your cloak?" He replied, "Like that of beets on the ground."

The Galileans were not particular about their use of language. For example: A certain Galilean went around asking, "Who has *amar*?"⁷ "Which do you mean, O foolish Galilean?" he was asked. "An ass for riding, wine to drink, wool for clothing, or a lamb for slaughtering?"⁸

CHAPTER FOUR

EXILE

The Hardship of Exile and the Enslavement by Kingdoms

1. Heavy is the burden of exile: it outweighs all other divine afflictions.¹

2. In the academy of Rav, it was said: There are four things the Holy One regrets having created, and one of them is exile.²

3. "And you I will scatter among the nations" (Lev. 26:33). This is a particularly severe measure against Israel. For if the people of a province, all of them, are banished to one place, they at least see one another and so are comforted. But here Scripture says, "And I will scatter you among the nations"—I will disperse you among the nations so that not one of you will be near another, in keeping with "I will scatter thee among the nations, and disperse thee through the countries" (Ezek. 22:15). Scripture says again, "I will scatter them as with a winnowing fork through the settlements of the earth" (Jer. 15:7), the way a man does who scatters barley with a winnowing fork, so that one grain will not stick to another.³

4. "Judah is gone into exile" (Lam. 1:3). Do not the peoples of the world also go into exile? They do, but inasmuch as they eat of each other's bread and drink of each other's wine, their exile is not true exile. Whereas for Israel, who do not eat other nations' bread and do not drink other nations' wine, exile is true exile.⁴

5. "Sell me the birthright, and a day as well" (Gen. 25:31).⁵ Jacob said to Esau: Sell me just one day of your many days. In this regard, R. Aha said: He who can reckon up the days in exile will find that in fact Jacob did spend one day [a short period] in peace under the shadow of Esau.⁶

6. "If they are driven hard a single day, all the flocks will die" (Gen. 33:13). R. Huna said in the name of R. Aha: But for the mercies of the Holy One, when they were

driven hard one day, all the flocks [that is to say, all Israel] would have died in Hadrian's day.⁷

7. "Put a space betwixt drove and drove" (Gen. 32:17). Jacob said to the Holy One: Master of the universe, if troubles are to befall my children, let these not come one right after the other, but let them have a breathing space between their troubles.⁸

8. "I was transpierced by the yoke of my transgressions" (Lam. 1:14). The congregation of Israel meant: I was transpierced by the kingdoms. I had supposed that He would impose them on me one by one. I had not realized that He would bring them on me in pairs: Babylon and the Chaldea, Media and Persia, Greece and Macedon, Edom and Seir.⁹

"They come in broken succession" (Lam. 1:14). The pairs of kingdoms He brought on me alternated in their treatment of me: Babylon was severe, but Media was mild; Greece severe, but Edom mild; Chaldea severe, but Persia mild; Macedon severe, but Seir mild.¹⁰ With regard to such alternation, Scripture says, "Some of the kingdoms will be fierce, and some mild" (Dan. 2:42).¹¹

9. "Behold a smoking furnace and a torch of fire" (Gen. 15:17). Simeon bar Abba said in the name of R. Yohanan: The Holy One showed four things to our father Abraham: Gehenna, [the yoke of] the kingdoms, the giving of Torah, and the Temple. And He said to him: As long as your children occupy themselves with the latter two, they will be saved from the former two. If they neglect the latter two, they will be punished by the former two. The Holy One also asked Abraham: How do you wish your children to be chastised—by Gehenna or by the kingdoms? According to R. Hanina bar Papa, Abraham chose the yoke of the kingdoms, as implied in "Their rock had given them over" (Deut. 32:30), "their rock" being Abraham, and "The Lord had delivered them up" (ibid.), meaning that the Holy One ratified Abraham's choice.

However, R. Yudan, R. Idi, and R. Hama bar Hanina maintained that Abraham chose Gehenna, but the Holy One changed his choice to the yoke of the kingdoms. This is implied in the verse "Thou hadst caused man to ride over our heads, which is as though we went through fire and water [through Gehenna]" (Ps. 66:12).

⁷ Gen. R. 78:13.

⁸ Gen. R. 75:13.

⁹ Possibly Rome and Byzantium.

¹⁰ To correct the chronological order, David Luria emends as follows: "Chaldea was severe, but Babylon mild; Persia severe, but Media mild; Greece severe, but Macedon mild; Edom severe, but Ishmael mild."

¹¹ Lam. R. 14, §42.

¹ "Angels were held to mediate between God and man, carrying the prayers of the latter to the former" (Shab, Soncino, p. 48, n. 3). B. Shab 12b.

² P. Meg 1:9, 71b; Esther R. 4:12.

³ B. Meg 10b.

⁴ "Greek remained the spoken and written language throughout the East even after the establishment of the eastern Roman Empire, to which allusion is here made" (Isidore Epstein in AZ, Soncino, p. 50, n. 2). B. AZ 10a.

⁵ The expression *hit'olel* is used in connection with acts of obscenity (see Judg. 19:25). Num. R. 20:14.

⁶ Tanhuma, *Noah*, §22.

⁷ Since he did not pronounce some sounds distinctly, it was not clear whether he meant *hamar* ("an ass"), *hamar* ("wine"), *amar* ("wool"), or *immar* ("a lamb").

⁸ B. Er 53a.

¹ Enumerated in Deut. 27–28. Sif Deut., §43 (ed. Finkelstein, p. 100).

² B. Suk 52b.

³ Sif Lev., *Be-hukkotai* 6:6 (ed. Isaac Hirsch Weiss [Vienna, 1862], p. 112a); Yalkut, *Be-hukkotai*, §675.

⁴ Lam. R. 1:3, §28.

⁵ AV: "Sell me this day (*ka-yom*) the birthright." Since *ka-yom* is deemed superfluous, R. Aha construes it as a request for something in addition to the birthright.

⁶ R. Aha may be referring to the period of the Maccabees, 160 B.C.E.; to the coming of Pompey, 66 B.C.E.; or to the time of Agrippa I, ca. 41–44 C.E. So A. A. Ha-Levi in *Bereshit R.* (Tel Aviv, 1956), p. 489. Gen. R. 63:13.

Our masters taught: At first the twelve-letter Name used to be entrusted to all people. After the indiscreet became numerous, it was entrusted only to the discreet ones in the priesthood. During the chanting [of the Tetragrammaton] by their brother priests, they pronounced it indistinctly.

We have been taught that R. Tarfon said: One time I ascended the [priests'] dais after my mother's brother, and I inclined my ear to the high priest, who pronounced that [twelve-letter] Name indistinctly during the chanting [of the Tetragrammaton] by his brother priests.

R. Judah said in the name of Rav: The forty-two-letter Name is entrusted only to one who is discreet and meek, in his middle years, free from bad temper, not given to drink, and not insistent on his rights. And he who knows it and is careful about it, taking care to utter it only when he is ritually clean, is beloved above and cherished below, is held in awe by his fellows, and inherits two worlds—this world and the world-to-come.¹

605. Our masters taught: Once, when on a journey, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai was riding an ass, with R. Eleazar ben Arakh driving the ass from behind. R. Eleazar said, "Master, teach me a chapter of the Work of the Chariot." He answered, "My son, have I not instructed you that the Work [of the Chariot] is not to be taught in the presence of even one person, unless he is a sage and able to draw inferences on his own?" R. Eleazar then said, "Master, permit me to say something before you."² He answered, "Say it!"

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai dismounted from the ass, wrapped himself in his robe, and sat down on a stone beneath an olive tree. R. Eleazar said to him, "Master, why did you dismount from the ass?" Rabban Yohanan answered, "Since you are about to expound the Work of the Chariot, the Divine Presence will be with us, and the ministering angels may be accompanying us—is it proper that I should continue riding the ass?" As R. Eleazar ben Arakh began his exposition of the Work of the Chariot,

fire came down from heaven and lapped all the trees of the field, and they all began to utter song. What was the song they uttered? "Praise the Lord from the earth, ye sea monsters, and all deeps . . . fruitful trees and all cedars. . . . Hallelujah" (Ps. 148:7, 148:9, and 148:14).

An angel also was heard from the fire saying, "Of a certainty, this is the very Work of the Chariot."

Then Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai rose, kissed R. Eleazar on his head, and said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, that has given to Abraham our father a son who knows how to speculate upon, to examine, and to expound the Work of the Chariot. There are some who expound well but do not practice well, and some who practice well but do not expound well; but you both expound well and practice well. Happy are you, O Abraham our father, that Eleazar ben Arakh has come forth from your loins."

When these things were told to R. Joshua, while he and R. Yose the Priest were on a journey, the two sages said: Let us also engage in speculations about the Work of the Chariot. After R. Joshua had begun his discourse, even though that day was the summer solstice, the heavens nevertheless became overcast with clouds, a kind of rainbow appeared in the cloud (Ezek. 1:28), and the ministering angels assembled as they came to listen, like people who assemble and come to watch the entertainment for a groom and a bride.

R. Yose the Priest went and told Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai what had happened. Rabban Yohanan said: "Blessed are you, and blessed are the mothers who bore you. Blessed are my eyes, which saw that it was so. Moreover, in my dream the two of you and I were reclining on Mount Sinai, and a divine voice from heaven was vouchsafed to us: 'Ascend hither! Ascent hither! Here large banqueting chambers are prepared for you, and beautiful dining couches are laid out for you. You, your disciples, and the disciples of your disciples are designated to the third company of the upright.'³"

CHAPTER EIGHT

WISDOM, PROPHECY, AND SONG

Wisdom

1. The spirit conceived and gave birth to wisdom.¹

2. R. Ammi said: So great is knowledge [of Torah] that the prayer for it was placed at the beginning of the weekday blessings.²

R. Ammi also said: So great is knowledge [of Torah] that it was placed between two of God's Names: "For a God of knowledge is the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:3).

R. Eleazar said: When a man has [Torah] knowledge, it is as though the Sanctuary were built in his days. For just as knowledge was placed between two of God's Names, so the Sanctuary was placed between two of God's Names: "Thou hast made, O LORD, the Sanctuary, O LORD" (Exod. 15:17).

R. Eleazar also said: A man who has [Torah] knowledge will eventually become wealthy, for it is said, "By knowledge are all chambers filled with precious and pleasant riches" (Prov. 24:4).

R. Eleazar also said: When a man lacks [Torah] knowledge, one may have no mercy on him, for it is said, "It is a people that have no understanding [of Torah], therefore He that made them will not have mercy upon them" (Isa. 27:11).

R. Eleazar also said: He who gives his bread to one who has no [Torah] knowledge will be assailed by suffering, for it is said, "They in whom there is no understanding that eat thy bread lay a wound³ under thee" (Obad. 1:7).

R. Eleazar also said: A man who has no [Torah] knowledge will eventually be exiled, as is said, "Therefore My people are gone into exile, for want of knowledge" (Isa. 5:13).⁴

3. If a disciple of the wise lacks a sense [of propriety], an animal is better than he is.

If a disciple of the wise lacks a sense [of propriety], a carcass is better than he is.⁵

4. The adornment of knowledge is wisdom, the adornment of wisdom is humility.⁶

5. The Torah was not given to fools.⁷

6. "In want of all things" (Deut. 28:48). R. Nahman said: This means: without knowledge.

¹ Exod. R. 15:22.

² See Hertz *APB*, p. 137.

³ JV: "snare."

⁴ B. Ber 33a; B. Sanh 92a and En Yakov, ad loc.

⁵ TdE, ed. Friedmann, p. 33; Lev. R. 1:15.

⁶ DEZ 5.

⁷ Lekah Tov on Gen. 49:4 (ed. Buber, p. 232).

Abbaye said: We have a tradition that "poor" means poor in [Torah] knowledge. In the west [the Land of Israel], there is a proverb: He who has this has everything; he who lacks this—what has he?⁸

7. R. Tanhuma began his discourse with the verse "There is gold, and a multitude of rubies; but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel" (Prov. 20:15). It is the way of the world that if a man has gold and silver, priceless gems and pearls, and all kinds of precious vessels in the world, but lacks knowledge, of what worth is what he owns? The proverb says, "If it's knowledge you've got, what do you lack? If it's knowledge you lack, what have you got?"⁹

8. "Ask what I shall give thee" (1 Kings 3:5, 2 Chron. 1:7). R. Simon said in the name of R. Simeon ben Halafta: Solomon at that time was like a counselor who was held in great esteem at the king's court. When the king said to him, "Ask for what I shall give you," the counselor thought: If I ask for silver and gold, that is all I shall be given. If I ask for precious stones and pearls, that is all I shall be given. So he decided: I will ask for the king's daughter, and that will include everything else. So, too, Solomon said: If I ask for silver and gold, precious stones and pearls, that is all I shall be given. What I will ask for is wisdom, and that will include everything else.¹⁰

9. R. Isaac said: He who desires to become wise, let him turn to the south [when praying]; and he who desires to become rich, let him turn to the north [when praying]. The mnemonic [by which this may be remembered] is that the table [in the Tabernacle] was to the north of the altar and the lampstand to the south (Exod. 26:35).¹¹

R. Joshua ben Levi, however, said: One should always turn south, because by obtaining wisdom, he will obtain wealth, as it says, "Length of days are in [wisdom's] right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor" (Prov. 3:16).¹²

10. R. Yohanan said: The Holy One grants wisdom only to one who already has wisdom, for Scripture says, "He giveth wisdom to the wise, and intelligence to the intelligent" (Deut. 2:21). When R. Tahalifa of the West heard it and repeated it to R. Abbahu. R. Abbahu said to him: You infer it from that verse, while we infer it from this one: "In the heart of all that are wise-hearted I have put wisdom" (Exod. 31:6).¹³

⁸ B. Ned 41a.

⁹ Lev. R. 1:6; Yalkut, *Va-yikra*, §428.

¹⁰ Song R. 1:1, §9.

¹¹ The table symbolizing plenty, and the lampstand wisdom—"the commandment is a lamp" (Prov. 6:23).

¹² B. BB 25b.

¹³ B. Ber 55a.

¹ B. Kid 71a.

² The words "that you taught me" are omitted, as in parallels in the Palestinian Talmud.

³ Seven such companies are admitted after death into God's presence (see MTeh 11:6). B. Hag 14b and En Yaakov, ad loc.

11. "And beyond wisdom, I have filled him with the spirit of God" (Exod. 31:3). Take the shopkeeper as an example. When a man comes to buy wine from him, or honey, or oil, or fish brine, the shopkeeper, if he is knowledgeable, first smells the buyer's vessel. If it had been used for wine, he puts wine into it; so, too, if the vessel had been used for oil, for honey, or for fish brine. Likewise the Holy One, when He sees that there is the aroma of wisdom in a man fills him with more. Hence, "I have filled him with the spirit," implying that the spirit of wisdom had already been in him.¹

12. A [Roman] noblewoman challenged R. Yose ben Halafta, saying to him, "What sense is conveyed by 'He giveth wisdom to the wise' [Dan. 2:21]? Should the verse not have read, 'He giveth wisdom to fools?'" R. Yose replied, "Have you any jewelry?" She said, "Yes." R. Yose: "If two persons, one rich and the other poor, should come to you to borrow your jewelry, to which would you lend it?" The noblewoman: "To the one who is rich." "Why?" "Because the one who is rich has the means to repay should he lose it; but the one who is poor—how is he to repay?" R. Yose: "Let your ears hear what your mouth is saying. You would lend your jewelry only to a person who is rich. Shall the Holy One, then, give wisdom to fools?"²

13. "But wisdom, where shall it be found?" (Job 28:12). The verse implies that Solomon was endeavoring to determine where in man's body wisdom is to be found. R. Eliezer said: [Solomon concluded that it was] in the head. But R. Joshua said: In the heart, for Scripture says, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart" (Ps. 4:8), and with regard to gladness, Scripture says elsewhere, "My son, be wise, and make my heart glad" (Prov. 27:11).³

14. "All the streams run into the sea" (Eccles. 1:7). All of man's wisdom is nowhere other than in the heart. "Yet the sea is not full" (ibid.)—the heart is never filled to capacity. You might suppose that when a man lets his wisdom go forth from his heart,⁴ it will never flow back to him. Hence Scripture says, "Yet the streams flow back again" (ibid.).⁵

15. The Alexandrians asked R. Joshua ben Hananiah: What should a man do to become wise? He replied: Let him sit long in the academy and engage very little in business. They objected: But many did so, and it did not avail them. [So he suggested]: Let him beseech mercy of Him to whom wisdom belongs, as is said, "For the Lord giveth wisdom, out of His mouth cometh knowledge and discernment" (Prov. 2:6).

R. Hiyya taught: What God does may be understood by the parable of a king who prepared a public feast, but he sent [choice tidbits] to his favorites from what was set before his own person.

R. Isaac taught: The verse may be understood by the

¹ Tanhuma, *Va-yak'hel*, §2.

² Tanhuma B, *Mi-ketz*, §9; Yalkut, Job, §919.

³ Midrash Prov., ed. Buber, p. 41.

⁴ When he teaches.

⁵ Eccles. R. 1:7, §4.

parable of a king who was sucking a lozenge. When his son came in, he took the lozenge out of his own mouth and gave it to his son. Thus "the Lord giveth wisdom" to all; but "out of His mouth cometh knowledge and discernment" for Israel.⁶

16. A [Roman] noblewoman said to R. Judah: A teacher and a drunkard?⁷ He replied: By my faith! I taste no wine but that of Kiddush, *Havdalah*,⁸ and the four obligatory cups on Passover. The latter make me feel as though I had a tight cord around my head from Passover to Pentecost. No; rather, "a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine" (Eccles. 8:1).⁹

17. If there is [no Torah] knowledge, whence the capacity to make distinctions?¹⁰

18. Who is wise? He who foresees what is about to happen.¹¹

19. "A wise man has his eyes in his head" (Eccles. 2:14). Are then a fool's eyes in his feet? No; what the verse means is that when the wise man is at the "head" of a thing, he already foresees what the end will be.

R. Meir used to call the end of a matter its "head."¹²

20. Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? He who learns from everyone, as is said, "Because everyone has been my teacher, I have gained understanding" (Ps. 119:99).¹³

21. "Understanding in matters" (1 Sam. 16:18)—understanding how to infer one matter from another.¹⁴

22. R. Eleazar ben Azariah said: If there is no wisdom, there is no fear [of God]; if there is no fear [of God], there is no wisdom. If there is no knowledge, there is no understanding; if there is no understanding, there is no knowledge.¹⁵

23. What is the difference between a man whose understanding is deep and a man who is merely clever? The man who is merely clever is like a small-time money-changer—when a [gold] denar is brought to him to be examined [for genuineness], he examines it; when no denar is brought to him, he sits in idleness. The man whose understanding is deep is like a prosperous money-changer—when a [gold] denar is brought to him to be examined [for genuineness], he examines it; when no denar is brought to him, he takes out one of his own and examines it, [thus continuing] to refine his knowledge.¹⁶

⁶ B. Nid 70b; Yalkut, Prov., §932; Yalkut, Song, §981; Exod. R. 41:3.

⁷ Since his face was always shining, he gave that impression.

⁸ For the blessing at the outgoing of Sabbath.

⁹ B. Ned 49b.

¹⁰ P. Ber 5:2, 9b.

¹¹ B. Tam 32a.

¹² P. Sot 8:10, 23a; Eccles. R. 2:14, §1.

¹³ Avot 4:1.

¹⁴ B. Sanh 93b.

¹⁵ Avot 3:17.

¹⁶ Sif Deut., §13; Yalkut, *Devarim*, §802.

24. "Get wisdom, get understanding" (Prov. 4:5). He who has wisdom but no understanding is like a man with bread in his hand but nothing to eat with it. And he who has understanding but no wisdom is like a man with a savory dish in his hand but no bread to eat with it. But he who has both wisdom and understanding is like a man who has in his hand bread and a savory dish—he eats both and is fed full.¹

25. Silence is a [protective] fence for wisdom.²

26. R. Hanina ben Dosa said: He whose fear of sin takes precedence over his wisdom—his wisdom will endure. But he whose wisdom takes precedence over his fear of sin—his wisdom will not endure.

He used to say: He whose [good] works exceed his wisdom—his wisdom will endure; but he whose wisdom exceeds his [good] works—his wisdom will not endure.³

27. "To understand wisdom and self-restraint" (Prov. 1:2). If wisdom, why self-restraint? And if self-restraint, why wisdom? If a man has wisdom, he will learn self-restraint. But if he has no wisdom, he is incapable of learning self-restraint.⁴

28. Ben Azzai said: If one's mind is serene because of his learning, it is a good sign for him. But if his mind is not serene because of his learning, it is a bad sign for him.⁵

29. He used to say: It is a good sign for a man when his body suffers because of [his concern for] his knowledge [of Torah]. It is a bad sign for a man when his knowledge of Torah suffers because of [his concern for] his body.

He also used to say: It is a good sign for a man when his mind is upset out of concern for his knowledge of Torah. But it is a bad sign for a man when his knowledge of Torah is upset out of concern for his mind.⁶

30. Hillel used to say: The more schooling, the more wisdom; the more counsel, the more understanding.⁷

31. R. Ishmael said: He who would become wise should engage in the study of civil laws, for there is no branch of the Torah more extensive than civil laws; they are like a welling fountain.⁸

32. Rabban Gamaliel, the son R. Judah the Patriarch, used to say: Not everyone who is engaged overmuch in commerce gains wisdom.⁹

¹ MTeh 119:24.

² Avot 3:13.

³ Avot 3:9.

⁴ Midrash Prov., ed. Buber, p. 42.

⁵ ARN 25.

⁶ Tos Ber 3:4.

⁷ Avot 2:7.

⁸ B. BB 175b.

⁹ Avot 2:5.

33. "Surely business¹⁰ turneth a wise man into a fool" (Eccles. 7:7). When a wise man busies himself with many matters, his wisdom becomes confused.¹¹

34. R. Joshua ben Levi said in the name of Bar Kappara: When a man knows how to calculate the cycles and planetary courses but does not calculate them, Scripture says of those like him, "They regard not the work of the Lord, nor take note of His designs" (Isa. 5:12).

R. Samuel bar Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: What is the proof that to calculate the cycles and the courses of the planets is a religious duty? The verse "This is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples" (Deut. 4:6). What wisdom and understanding are plainly in the sight of the peoples? It is the calculating of cycles and the courses of the planets.¹²

35. Our masters taught: He who sees sages of Israel should say: Blessed be He who has imparted His wisdom to those who fear Him. He who sees sages of the peoples of the world should say: Blessed be He who has imparted of His wisdom to His creatures.¹³

36. Should someone tell you, "There is wisdom among the nations," believe him. Should he say to you, "There is Torah among the nations," do not believe him.¹⁴

37. "And he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all the sages thereof" (Gen. 41:8). The verse informs you that every nation that exists in the world appoints five¹⁵ wise counselors to serve it. More: the Holy One endows each nation with wisdom, understanding, and strength. And when the Holy One punishes the world, He takes each of these capacities away from each nation, as is said, "In that day I will destroy the sages of Edom and understanding out of Mount Esau; thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed" (Obad. 1:8–9).¹⁶

38. A sage has precedence over a king of Israel. For when a sage dies, we have none like him; but when a king of Israel dies—all Jews are worthy of kingship.¹⁷

¹⁰ Reading not *oshek* ("oppression") but *osek* ("business").

¹¹ Exod. R. 6:2.

¹² The reckoning of cycles and planetary courses, which show order and regularity in the universe, would, it was hoped, undermine belief in astrology (Samuel Edels).

Or, the scientific expertise shown in connection with the Jewish calendar would impress the people of the world with the logic of Jewish thought and belief (Josiah Pinto, as quoted by Adin Steinsaltz in his edition of Shab [Jerusalem, 1968], 1:314). B. Shab 75a; Yalkut, Isa., §402.

¹³ B. Ber 58a.

¹⁴ Lam. R. 2:13.

¹⁵ The number five may be derived in the following manner: the plural "sages" is taken to denote two; the repetition of the word "all," two more; and the repetition of the particle *et* before "magicians" and "sages," one more.

¹⁶ Gen. R. 89:6.

¹⁷ B. Hor 13a.

39. "I, wisdom, have made subtlety my dwelling" (Prov. 8:12). When wisdom enters a man, subtlety enters with it.¹

40. The rivalry of scribes increases wisdom.²

41. No man loves a rival in his craft, but a sage loves a rival.³

42. "Even during a walk, the fool shows lack of sense, for he calls everyone else a fool (Eccles. 10:3)⁴—the fool thinks that all men are fools.⁵

43. For a wise man, a gentle hint; for a fool, a fist.⁶

44. One must not take leave of a friend in the midst of chitchat, in the midst of joking, in the midst of trivial talk, or in midst of irreverent discussion, but only while in the midst of words of *Halakhah*.⁷

45. When a sage dies, all are his kin [and should mourn for him].⁸

46. "Wisdom is good with an inheritance" (Eccles. 7:11). Wisdom is good when it is joined with an inheritance.

Another version: Wisdom is good when the merit of ancestors accompanies it. Happy is the man whose fathers' merit continually lights the way for him.⁹

47. R. Ammi said: At a study session, give precedence to wisdom; at a feast, give precedence to age.¹⁰

48. R. Avdimi of Haifa said: Though prophecy has been taken from the prophets since the day the Temple was destroyed, it has not been taken from the sages.

Amemar said: A sage is superior to a prophet, for Scripture says, "And a prophet¹¹ hath a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). Who is generally compared with whom? Is it not the smaller with the greater?¹²

49. "And Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the Lord commanded Moses" (Exod. 38:22). Here Scripture says not, "What the Lord commanded Moses," but, "All that the Lord commanded Moses," implying that even in matters he had not heard

¹ B. Sot 21b and En Yaakov, ad loc.

² B. BB 21a.

³ Gen. R. 32:2.

⁴ JV: "Yea, also, when a fool walketh by the way, his understanding faileth him, and he saith to everyone that he is a fool."

⁵ Eccles R. 10:3, §1.

⁶ Midrash Prov. 22 (ed. Buber, p. 91).

⁷ B. Ber 31a.

⁸ B. Shab 105b.

⁹ Eccles R. 7:11, §1.

¹⁰ B. BB 120a.

¹¹ The word *navi* ("that we may get us") is taken in the sense of "prophet."

¹² B. BB 12a. "When A is compared with B, A is usually smaller than B. Since, in the verse just cited, *prophet* is first (A) and *wisdom* is second (B), the former must be smaller than the latter" (Leon Nemoy).

from his master, his mind coincided with what had been told to Moses on Sinai.¹³

50. R. Huna said in the name of Rav: "The law of truth was in his mouth" (Mal. 2:6) refers to matters he heard from his master. "And nothing untoward was found on his lips" (ibid.) refers to matters [he did not utter] because he had not heard them from his master.

The sages said: "The Lord will be with thy folly"¹⁴ (Prov. 3:26). Even in matters wherein you are foolish, God "will keep thy foot from being caught" (ibid.).¹⁵

51. "According to the law which they shall teach thee" (Deut. 17:11). A prophet and a sage—by what parable may their functions be illustrated? By the parable of a king who sent two of his emissaries to a province. About one, he wrote [to its inhabitants]: "If he does not show you my ring and seal, do not believe him." About the second, he wrote: "Even if he does not show you my ring, believe him without ring and without seal." So, too, of the prophet, Scripture says, "And he give thee a sign or a wonder" (Deut. 13:2). But concerning the sage, Scripture says, "According to the law which they shall teach thee."¹⁶

Prophecy and the Holy Spirit

52. R. Phinehas ben Yair used to say: Torah leads to strictness, strictness to zeal [in avoiding sin], zeal [in avoiding sin] to cleanliness, cleanliness to purity, purity to abstinence, abstinence to holiness, holiness to humility, humility to fear of sin, fear of sin to saintliness, saintliness to [possession of] the holy spirit, and the holy spirit to ability to revive the dead.¹⁷

53. The Presence rests only on one who is wise, strong, wealthy, tall in stature, yet unassuming.¹⁸

54. R. Yohanan said: All the prophets were wealthy. And the proof? From Moses and Samuel, from Amos and Jonah [as will be shown in what follows].

Moses, because he is quoted as saying, "I have not taken one ass from them" (Num. 16:15)—even as a fee.¹⁹ But perhaps it was because of his poverty?²⁰ On the contrary, that Moses was wealthy is inferred from the verse "Hew for thyself" (Exod. 34:1)—the chips of the broken Tablets are to be yours [and will make you rich].

Samuel, because he is quoted as saying, "Here I am; witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed; whose ox have I taken, or whose ass have I

¹³ P. Pe 1:1, 15b.

¹⁴ The word *kislekha* ("thy confidence") is here taken to mean "thy folly."

¹⁵ P. Pe 1:1, 15b; Yalkut, Mal, §588.

¹⁶ P. Ber 1:7, 3b; Song R. 1:2, §2.

¹⁷ JV: "I will put My spirit in you, and ye shall live" (Ezek. 37:14). Sot 9:9; B. AZ 20b. See Adolf Büchler, *Types of Jewish Palestinian Piety* (London, 1922), pp. 42–67.

¹⁸ B. Shab 92a; B. Ned 38a.

¹⁹ He had so many asses that he had no need to hire one.

²⁰ He had so few possessions that he had no need for an ass.

taken?" (1 Sam. 12:2)—even as a fee. But perhaps it was because of his poverty? On the contrary, that Samuel was wealthy is inferred from the verse "And his return was to Ramah [even though, wherever he went there was his home]" (1 Sam. 7:17), which Rava interpreted as meaning that he had his household with him wherever he went.

Amos, because he is quoted as saying, "I am no prophet, neither am I a prophet's son, but I am the owner of herds, and a tender of sycamore figs" (Amos 7:14).

Jonah, because it is written, "[He found a ship going to Tarshish], and he paid the hire thereof" (Jon. 1:3)—the hire of the whole ship, said R. Yohanan, which, according to R. Romanus, came to four thousand gold denars.¹

55. Wherever "To David, a Psalm"² occurs, it denotes that the Presence first rested on him, and then he uttered that psalm. Wherever "A Psalm of David"³ occurs, it denotes that he first uttered that psalm, and then the Presence rested on him. This is to teach you that the Presence does not come to rest on a man in the midst of idleness or despair or laughter or frivolity or chitchat or idle talk, but only in the midst of joyous obedience to [divine] commands. [Thus, after Elisha became angry at the king of Israel (2 Kings 3:13–14), his power of prophecy left him. But when he overcame anger, he found joy] "in the playing of the instrument. It was only then that the hand of the Lord [the power of prophecy] came back to him" (2 Kings 3:15).⁴

56. Elijah [the Prophet] said: I call heaven and earth to witness that whether it be a Jew or a heathen, whether it be a man or a woman, a manservant or a maidservant, the holy spirit will suffuse each of them in keeping with the deeds he [or she] performs.⁵

57. R. Hanina bar Isi said: At times the world and its fullness cannot contain the glory of His Godhead, and at other times He speaks to a man out of [a space as tiny as] that between the hairs of his head.⁶

58. R. Yudan said: Very wise in the power of language are the prophets, who [in order to make the children of Israel aware of God's Presence] speak of the form of the Almighty as though it were like the form of a man.⁷

59. R. Isaac ben Eleazar said: The prophets, knowing that their God was truthful, did not wish to flatter Him.⁸

60. R. Yose ben Zimra said: Just as a woman is not ashamed to demand the requirements of her household from her husband, so prophets are not ashamed to demand bluntly the requirements of Israel from the Holy One.⁹

¹ B. Ned 38a.

² E.g., Ps. 24:1, in the Hebrew.

³ E.g., Ps. 23:1.

⁴ See Kimhi, ad loc. B. Pes 117a; B. Shab 30b.

⁵ TdE, ed. Friedmann, p. 48.

⁶ Gen. R. 4:4.

⁷ Gen. R. 27:1.

⁸ P. Ber 7:4, 11c.

⁹ PRKM 12:1.

61. There were three types of prophets. One insisted on the honor due the Father as well as the honor due the son;¹⁰ one insisted upon the honor due the Father without insisting upon the honor due the son; and one insisted upon the honor due the son without insisting upon the honor due the Father. Jeremiah insisted upon both the honor due the Father and the honor due the son, for he said, "We have transgressed and rebelled; and Thou hast not pardoned [as Thou shouldst have done]" (Lam. 3:42). Therefore his prophecy was doubled, as is said, "And there were added besides unto them many like words" (Jer. 36:32). Elijah insisted upon the honor due the Father but did not insist upon the honor due the son, as is said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts" (1 Kings 19:10). Consequently, what was he told? "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus . . . and Elisha the son of Shaphat . . . shalt thou anoint to succeed thee as prophet" (1 Kings 19:15–16)—because I am displeased with your prophecy. Jonah insisted upon the honor due the son but did not insist upon the honor due the Father, as is said, "But Jonah rose up to flee into Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (Jon. 1:3). What is written about him? "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time" (Jon. 3:1)—He spoke to him a second time, but not a third.¹¹

R. Jonathan said: Jonah embarked upon his voyage only in order to drown himself in the sea, for Scripture says, "And he said unto them: 'Take me up and cast me forth into the sea'" (Jon. 1:12).

And so you find that the patriarchs as well as the prophets offered their lives in behalf of Israel. As to Moses, what is he quoted as saying? "And yet, if Thou wouldst only forgive their sin! If not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of the book which Thou hast written" (Exod. 32:32) And David,¹² what did he say? "Lo, I have sinned, and I have done iniquitously; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Thy hand, I pray Thee, be against me, and against my father's house" (2 Sam. 24:17). Thus you see that everywhere patriarchs as well as prophets offered their lives for Israel.¹³

62. "And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant" (1 Kings 19:14). The Holy one replied to Elijah: "This is My covenant. Is it yours?" Elijah: "Thrown down Thine altars." The Holy One: "These are My altars. Are they yours?" (ibid.). Elijah: "And slain Thy prophets with the sword" (ibid.). The Holy One: "They are My prophets. What concern is it of yours?" Elijah: "And I, even I only am left, and they seek my life, to take it away" (ibid.). See what is written in that context: "And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on the hot stones (*retzaphim*)" (1 Kings, 19:6). What is meant by *retzaphim*? R. Samuel bar Nahman said: *Retz peh*,

¹⁰ God is the Father and Israel the son.

¹¹ Since Scripture does not say "again," the phrase "a second time" is taken to exclude a third time.

¹² In MTeh 18:8, David is likened to Abraham, a patriarch.

¹³ Mek, *Bo*, *Pis'ha*, 1.

“silence¹ the mouth”—silence the mouth of him who spoke calumny of My children.

“Look not upon me that I am swarthy” (Song 1:6). R. Simon began his discourse with the verse “Slander not a servant unto his Master” (Prov. 30:10). Israel are called servants, as Scripture says, “For unto Me the children of Israel are servants” (Lev. 25:55). The prophets are also called servants, as Scripture says, “But He revealeth His counsel unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). Hence Israel responded to the prophets: Do not look [contemptuously] upon me because of my swarthy. There was no one who cherished us more than Moses, yet because he said, “Hear now, ye rebels” (Num. 20:10), it was decreed against him that he should not enter the Promised Land.

Another version of Israel’s response to the prophets: No one rejoiced in us more than Isaiah, yet because he said, “And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5), the Holy One said to him, “Isaiah, of your own self you may say, ‘Because I am a man of unclean lips’ [ibid.]. That I will abide. But will you dare say, ‘I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips?’” Come see what is written in that passage: “Then flew unto me one of the seraphim, with a glowing stone (*ritzpah*) in his hand” (Isa. 6:6). R. Samuel said: The word *ritzpah* means *rotz peh*, silence the mouth” of him who spoke calumny of My children.²

63. “A voice! my Beloved knocketh” (Song 5:2)—by means of the prophets.³

64. “I will bring them into the land of their enemies” (Lev. 26:41). This is a good dispensation for Israel, so that they would not say, “Inasmuch as we are exiled among the peoples of the world, we may as well act like them.” I will see to it that they do not act that way; I will raise prophets over them who will lead them back to the right place under My wings. And the proof? The verse “And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all; in that ye say: We will be as the nations, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone” (Ezek. 20:32). But “as I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, will I be King over you” (Ezek. 20:33). Against your will, like it or not, I will impose My kingship over you.⁴

65. “And the Lord spoke unto Moses . . . that he say” (Exod. 12:1). R. Akiva taught: “That he say” means: “[Moses], go say to them that it was only because of their merit that He spoke with me.” For during all the thirty-eight years in which He was angry with Israel, He did not speak with Moses, as is said, “So it came to pass, when all the men of war were consumed and dead from among the people, that the Lord spoke unto me, to say” (Deut. 2:16–17). R. Simeon ben Azzai stated: I am not arguing against the words of my teacher, but would merely add to

¹ Literally, “break” or “smash.” See Rashi on Isa. 6:6.

² Song R. 1:6, §1.

³ Yalkut, Song, §988.

⁴ Sif Lev., ed. Weiss, p. 112b.

what he taught: It was not with Moses alone that God spoke solely because of Israel’s merit, but also with the other prophets—all of them—He spoke solely because of Israel’s merit, as is said, “And I remained there appalled⁵ among them seven days” (Ezek. 3:15). And after that it is written, “And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the Lord came unto me, to say” (Ezek. 3:16).⁶ And similarly, “And it came to pass after ten days, that the word of the Lord came again unto Jeremiah” (Jer. 42:7).⁷ In the account of Baruch the son of Neriah, you will also find that he was complaining to Him who is everywhere, so that God had to tell Baruch, “Thou didst say: Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added sorrow to my pain” (Jer. 45:3). [You said], “Why was I treated differently from other disciples of the prophets? Joshua ministered to Moses, and the holy spirit rested upon him. Elisha ministered to Elijah, and the holy spirit rested upon him. Why then was I treated differently from other disciples of the prophets? ‘I am weary with my groaning and I find no rest’” (ibid.). The word “rest” here must mean “prophecy,” as in the verse “And the spirit rested upon them . . . and they prophesied in the camp” (Num. 11:26) and in the verse “And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him” (Isa. 11:2). Note how He who is everywhere told Jeremiah to answer Baruch: “Thus shalt thou say unto him: ‘Thus saith the Lord: Behold, that which I have built I am about to break down. . . . And seekest thou great things for thyself?’” (Jer. 45:4–5). “Great things” here must mean “prophecy,” as in the verse “Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done” (2 Kings 8:4) and in the verse “Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and will tell thee great things, and hidden, which thou knowest not” (Jer. 33:3). God went on, “Baruch son of Neriah! If there is no vineyard, what need for a fence? If there is no flock, what need for a shepherd?”⁸ Why should there be? “Hence, when I bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord, in all places whither thou goest, thy life will be granted thee [but not prophecy]” (Jer. 45:5).

Thus, in each of the foregoing instances you see that the prophets prophesy only because of Israel’s merit.⁹

66. Ulla said: Wherever a man’s name is given along with that of his father as the author of a prophecy, we know that he was a prophet as well as the son of a prophet. Where his own name is given alone, without that of his father, we know that he was a prophet but not the son of a prophet. Where his name and the name of his hometown are stated, we know that he came from that town. Where

⁵ “Desolate” or “appalled” is taken to mean being without divine communication (see Zeh Yenahemenu and Malbim).

⁶ “The passage is interpreted to mean that Ezekiel had been without communication from God. But after he dwelled among the people for seven days, the word of God came to him for the sake of the people” (Mek, *Bo Pis’ha* 1 [La’s note, ad loc.]).

⁷ The passage is understood to mean that the word of God came to Jeremiah only because the people, led by Yohanan and Jezaniah, asked for a divine message (Jer. 42:1–3) (Mek, *Bo Pis’ha* 1 [La’s note, ad loc.]).

⁸ Synonym for prophet.

⁹ Mek, *Bo, Pis’ha* 1 (La 1:13–15).

his name is given but not the name of his town, we know that he was from Jerusalem.¹

67. If a prophet’s father’s name is stated, we know that the father also was a prophet. But if a prophet’s father’s name is not stated, he was definitely not a prophet, except for Amos, whose father was a prophet, even though his name is not stated. For Scripture says, “Amos answered Amaziah: ‘I am not a prophet, and I am not a prophet’s son’” (Amos 7:14). Even as Amos was a prophet, though he said, “I am not a prophet,” so Amos’s father was a prophet, though he said, “I am not a prophet’s son.”

If a prophet’s home city is stated, we know he came from that city. If a prophet’s city is not stated, we know he came from Jerusalem, for the majority of both prophets and sages came from Jerusalem, which Scripture describes as [a city] “full of justice, righteousness lodgeth in her” (Isa. 1:21), implying that they who lodge in her are “sovereigns [prophets, sages] of righteousness.”²

68. Prophets were called by ten names: envoy, man of faith, servant, messenger, visionary, sentinel, seer, angel, prophet, man of God.³

The holy spirit is known by ten names: parable, metaphor, riddle, speech, saying, call, command, pronouncement, prophecy, vision.⁴

69. Prophecy is known by ten names, six gentle and four stern: prophecy, seeing, watching, parable, metaphor, and holy spirit⁵ are gentle; vision, pronouncement, preaching,⁶ and riddle are stern.

God spoke with the patriarchs through seeing, prophecy, and vision. With Moses our teacher, through prophecy, seeing, and the holy spirit. With the other prophets, He communicated through most or some of these means.

Note: Instruction, speech, command, and saying are no more than explanatory terms for prophecy. In only one instance—“A deep sleep fell upon Abram” (Gen. 15:12)—does deep sleep mean prophecy.

Prophetic speech is to be understood as relevant to the immediate need as well as beyond the immediate need, as in the verse “Walk before Me, and be thou perfect” (Gen. 17:1) and in “Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad . . . [for in Isaac shall seed be called unto thee]” (Gen. 21:12). On the other hand, speech that is not prophetic is to be understood as bearing only on the immediate need, as in the verse “Behold, thou shalt die, because of the woman” (Gen. 20:3) and in “Take heed to thyself that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad” (Gen. 31:29).

¹ B. Meg 15a.

² Mishnat R. Eliezer 6 (ed. Hyman Enelow [New York, 1933], pp. 118–19).

³ The sources in Scripture: Obad. 1:1, Num. 12:7, Isa. 49:5, Isa. 6:8, Amos 7:12, Ezek. 3:17, 1 Sam. 9:9, Hag. 1:13, Jer. 1:5, Ps. 90:1.

⁴ The sources: Mic. 2:4; Hab. 2:6; Ezek. 17:2; Jer. 5:13, Gen. R. 5:1; Sif Lev., ed. Weiss, p. 3a; Gen. R. 20:2; Isa. 17:1; 2 Chron. 15:8; Joel 3:1. See ARN 34; Gen. R. 44:6.

⁵ Ps. 51:13.

⁶ Amos 7:16.

A dream that is not prophetic—he who had it has to ask for its interpretation, as with Pharaoh’s dream, Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, and the Midianite’s dream.⁷ But a dream that is prophetic, even if its matter is enigmatic—he who had it need not ask for its interpretation, as with Daniel and his companions.⁸

As for the patriarchs, when the Holy One appeared to them to speak with them, He did not reveal Himself through the celestial creatures, through the chariot, or through other aspects of [God’s] glory. For the Presence rested directly upon the patriarchs.

R. Simeon said: The patriarchs themselves are the chariot, for it is said of Jacob, “And God [Himself] went up from him” (Gen. 35:13). But as for the other prophets, God revealed Himself to each of them through aspects of His glory, in keeping with each one’s capacity.

When the Holy One spoke to the patriarchs, He revealed Himself to them neither through lightning nor through thunder, neither through terrifying sounds nor through quakes, because they knew full well His strength, His might, His greatness, and His majesty. As for the other prophets—He had to reveal Himself to them in terrifying sounds, in thunderclaps, and in flashes of fire, in keeping with the needs of the people of their generation. Why? Because without such terrifying sounds and lightnings, the people of their generation would not have become aware of the overwhelming might of the Holy One, and even then the other prophets hoped against hope that the people of their generation would submit.

When the Holy One revealed Himself to the patriarchs to give them commands, He did not make stipulations with them, such as “if you walk in My statutes” or “if you spurn My statutes.” Why not? Because they knew the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked, and therefore there was no need to make stipulations with them. But with the other prophets, He had no choice but to make the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked explicit for them time after time, in the hope that the people of their generation would submit.

When the Holy One spoke to the patriarchs, His voice did not shake the world, but [He spoke] in a whisper, because there was no need to make the people of their generations hear. As for the other prophets, when the Holy One spoke to them, He shook the world, as is said, “The voice of the Lord breaketh cedars” (Ps. 29:5). When was it so? Until the Tabernacle was set up. But after the Tabernacle was set up, there was a place set aside for God’s speech, and He no longer shook the world.

When the Holy One told the patriarchs to move from land to land, He gave no assurances about what He would do for them. Why not? Because they were men of faith. As for the other prophets, how many assurances he had to give in the hope that the people of their generation would believe them! How much did He promise our forebears in Egypt—“unto a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. 33:3)! And likewise in the wilderness. Neverthe-

⁷ Gen. 41, Dan. 2, and Judg. 7:13.

⁸ Dan. 7.

less, they remained in doubt. How much did He promise us also! "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear" (Isa. 54:1); "Arise, shine, for thy light is come" (Isa. 60:1); "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" (Isa. 40:1); "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion" (Zech. 9:9); "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh" (Zech. 14:1); and "Behold, I send My messenger" (Mal. 3:1). Nevertheless, we are dissolved in doubt.

There was no need to make the Name explicit for the patriarchs. As for the other prophets, God's Name had to be made explicit for them, for the people of their generation required it. Proof for this assertion is that Moses our teacher said, "When they shall say to me: What is His Name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses: 'I am that I am'" (Exod. 3:13-14). [As for His not having previously made the Name explicit], the Holy One said to Moses, "I appeared unto Abraham . . . but by My Name YHVH I did not need to make Myself known to them" (Exod. 6:3) as I had to make Myself known to you.

For five hundred and two years the Holy One communicated with the patriarchs, and in all those years He voiced to the three of them no more than fifteen utterances, since for them there was no need to keep setting down matters at all times. But as for the other prophets, how very many utterances at all times—because of the people of their generation! And Moses our teacher had the greatest number of such communications. You can see for yourself that it was so. In a single day the Holy One spoke to him fifteen times. What day was it? The day the Tabernacle was set up.¹

70. "He maketh [specific] weight for the spirit" (Job 28:25). R. Aha said: Even the holy spirit, which rests on the prophets, does so by specific weight—one prophet uttering one book of prophecy; and another, two.

R. Simon said: Beeri uttered two verses as a prophet, and because there was not enough to make a book, they were included in the book of Isaiah. The two verses are "And when they shall say unto you: 'Seek unto the ghosts and the familiar spirits'" (Isa. 8:19) and its companion verse.

"He maketh [specific] weight for the spirit." Each and every prophet had the holy spirit set within him, each according to his capacity.²

71. R. Isaac said: Several prophets treated the same theme, yet no two prophets prophesied on that theme [in identical language].³

72. "When I spoke unto the prophets, I multiplied visions" (Hos. 12:11). The Holy One said: It is true that "I spoke unto the prophets," but "I multiplied visions," for among all of them, the experience in prophecy of one is not like the experience in prophecy of another. Amos saw Me standing.⁴ Micaiah saw Me seated.⁵ Moses saw Me

as a mighty man.⁶ Daniel saw Me as an ancient of days. Therefore it is written, "By the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes" (ibid.).⁷

73. Some, such as Ezekiel, prophesied through seeing; "I saw visions of God" (Ezek. 1:1); Habakkuk, through hearing; "I have heard that which Thou hast made heard" (Hab. 3:2); Jeremiah, through the mouth: "The Lord touched my mouth. . . . 'Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth'" (Jer. 1:9). Some, through the nose; "And spirit entered into me" (Ezek. 2:2). Some, through the hand: "By the hand of the prophets have I used similitudes" (Hos. 12:11). Some prophesied in enigmas, and some in enigmas within enigmas.⁸

74. "Behold, this I have found, saith (*amerah*) Koheleth" (Eccles. 7:27); the verb *amerah* is feminine. Elsewhere it is written, "Saith (*amar*) Koheleth" (Eccles. 1:2); the verb *amar* is masculine. R. Jeremiah explained: The two forms of the verb allude to the holy spirit, which sometimes speaks using a masculine form and at other times a feminine form. Thus one verse reads, "Thou art my help [*ezri*, masculine] and my deliverer" (Ps. 70:6), while another verse reads, "Thou art my help [*ezrati*, feminine] and my deliverer" (Ps. 40:18). One verse reads, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger of good tidings [*mevasser*, masculine]" (Isa. 52:7), while another verse reads, "O thou that tellest good tidings [*mevasseret*, feminine] to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain" (Isa. 40:9).⁹

75. R. Eleazar taught in the name of R. Yose ben Zimra: As they uttered their prophecies, none of the prophets knew what they were prophesying, except Moses and Joshua, who did know. R. Joshua bar Nehemiah maintained that Elijah also prophesied and knew what he was prophesying.

R. Eleazar further taught in the name of R. Yose ben Zimra: Samuel, the master of prophets, did not know what he was prophesying while uttering his prophecy, as is said, "And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel" (1 Sam. 12:11). Samuel did not say, "The Lord sent . . . me," but, "The Lord sent . . . Samuel," for he did not know what he was prophesying.¹⁰

76. "And there hath not arisen a prophet in Israel since like unto Moses" (Deut. 34:10). What is the difference between Moses and all the other prophets? R. Judah son of R. Ilai and the sages differed in their explanations. R. Judah said: The prophets beheld prophetic visions through nine lenses. This is intimated in the verse "And the appearance of the vision which I saw was like the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city; and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I

fell upon my face" (Ezek. 43:3)—thus nine visions. Likewise, it is said of Daniel, "And he gave heed to the word, and had understanding of the vision. . . . I lifted up mine eyes and saw . . . his face as the appearance of lightning. . . . And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision; for the men that were with me saw not the vision. . . . So I was left alone, and saw this great vision" (Dan. 10:1 and 10:5-8)—thus again nine visions. But Moses our teacher saw through only one lens, as is said, "With him do I speak in one vision, not in riddles" (Num. 12:8).

However, the sages said: All other prophets saw [prophetic visions] through a blurred lens, as is said, "I have multiplied visions; and by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes" (Hos. 12:11). But Moses saw [prophetic visions] through a polished lens, as is said, "The similitude of the Lord doth he behold" (Num. 12:8). All the other prophets heard the voice only in keeping with their capacity, as is said, "The voice of the Lord, according to a man's capacity" (Ps. 29:4). But Moses our teacher heard it in full, as is said, "And he heard the voice" (Num. 7:89)—the voice as it is.²

77. R. Jonah said in the name of R. Samuel bar Nahman: Every prophet who arose repeated the prophecy of his predecessor. Why did he repeat the prophecy of his predecessor? To make the predecessor's prophecy quite clear.

But R. Joshua ben Levi said: Every prophet was fully engaged with his own prophecy, except for Moses, who uttered all the prophecies of the other prophets as well as his own, with the result that whoever prophesied later drew from the prophecy of Moses.³

78. Rav and Samuel both said: Fifty gates of understanding were created in the world, and all of them but one were opened for Moses at Sinai, as is said, "Thou hast made him [Moses] but little lower than God" (Ps. 8:6).⁴

79. R. Yose bar Hanina said: Our teacher Moses pronounced four adverse decrees against Israel, but four [subsequent] prophets came and nullified them. Moses said, "Israel dwelleth in safety, alone,⁵ in Jacob's abode" (Deut. 33:28). But Amos came and nullified it when he prayed to God, "Refrain! How will Jacob survive [alone]? He is so small" (Amos 7:5). We are told in the next verse, "The Lord relented concerning this" (Amos 7:6). Moses said, "Among those nations you shall find no peace" (Deut. 28:65). But Jeremiah came and said, "The people that were left of the sword . . . Israel . . . I go to give him peace" (Jer. 31:1). Moses said, "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children" (Exod. 34:7). But Ezekiel came and nullified it: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20). Moses said, "Ye shall be lost [perish] among the

nations" (Lev. 26:38). But Isaiah came and said, "It shall come to pass on that day, that a great horn shall be blown, and they shall come that were lost," etc. (Isa. 27:13).⁶

80. R. Simon said: The face of Phinehas, when the holy spirit rested on him, glowed like torches.⁷

81. "The spirit of the Lord began to ring within him" (Judg. 13:25). R. Nahman said: Samson—when the spirit of the Lord rested upon him, the hairs on his head stood up and clanged against one another as in a bell.⁸

82. "He wakeneth me morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear to hear what a disciple should hear" (Isa. 50:4). Isaiah said: As I walked about in my house of study, "I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' etc. [Isa. 6:8]. When I sent Micaiah,⁹ they smote him on the cheek.¹⁰ When I sent Amos,¹¹ they mockingly called him 'tongue-heavy.' Now 'whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'"

[Isaiah replied], "Here am I; send me" (Isa. 6:8). The Holy One warned him: "Isaiah, My children are obstinate, troublesome. If you are willing to suffer insults and be smitten by them, you may go on My mission, but if not, you may not go." Isaiah replied, "Even if such be my portion, 'I am ready to give my body to the smiters, and my cheek to them that pluck off the hair' [Isa. 50:6]. But I am unworthy of going to Your children on a mission of Yours." The Holy One answered, "Isaiah, 'thou hast loved righteousness' [Ps. 45:8], you have loved to make out My children to be righteous; 'and hated wickedness' [ibid.], hated to make them out wicked. 'Therefore [I], God, thy God, have Myself anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows'" (ibid.). What is meant by "above thy fellows"? In using these words, the Holy One meant: As you live, each of the prophets [who prophesied before you] received his prophetic mission from another prophet. As Scripture relates, [the spirit of Moses rested on the seventy elders]: "The Lord . . . took of the spirit that was on him, and put it upon the seventy elders" (Num. 11:25); "The spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha" (2 Kings 2:15). But you alone will prophesy directly from the mouth of the Divine Power, so that you can say, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me" (Isa. 61:1). More: By your life, all the other prophets who prophesied used single terms in their prophecies. But you will prophesy in double terms [revealing that you prophesy with a double portion of the Divine Power]: "Awake, awake" (Isa. 51:9); "Rouse thee, rouse thee" (Isa. 51:17); "Rejoicing, I will rejoice" (Isa. 61:10); "I, even I, am He that comforteth you" (Isa. 51:12); "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people" (Isa. 40:1).¹²

¹ Mishnat R. Eliezer 6.

² Lev. R. 15:2; Yalkut, Job, §916.

³ B. Sanh 89a.

⁴ Amos 9:1.

⁵ 2 Chron. 18:18.

⁶ Exod. 15:3.

⁷ Dan. 7:9 Aggadat Bereshit 14 (ed. Buber [Cracow, 1902], p. 30).

⁸ Yalkut Hadash (Warsaw, 1879), *Noah*.

⁹ Eccles. R. 7:27, §1; Yalkut, Eccles., §977.

¹⁰ MTeh 90:4; Yalkut, Ps., §841.

¹ "Eight derivations [i.e., forms] of the verb *ra'ah* (to see) occur in this verse, one of these, 'visions,' being plural, so that it stands for at least two; hence altogether nine *specularia*" (Lev. R., Soncino, p. 17, n. 2).

² Lev. R. 1:14; Mishnat R. Eliezer 6.

³ Exod. R. 42:8.

⁴ B. Ned 38a.

⁵ In isolation, not among the nations.

⁶ B. Mak 24a.

⁷ Lev. R. 1:1.

⁸ Lev. R. 8:2.

⁹ See 1 Kings 22:24.

¹⁰ Apparently the commentator construes Micaiah as Muccaiah [*mukkeh*] ("one who is smitten on the cheek").

¹¹ "Amos" [*amus*] can mean "tongue-heavy."

¹² Lev. R. 10:2.

83. Rava said: All that Ezekiel saw, Isaiah saw.¹ Whom does Ezekiel resemble? A villager who saw the king.² Whom does Isaiah resemble? A city dweller who saw the king.³

84. "Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee" (Jer. 1:5). That is, even before I formed you in the belly of your mother, I designated you to prophesy to My people. In answer, Jeremiah spoke right up to the Holy One: Master of the universe, I cannot prophesy to them. What prophet ever came before them whom they did not seek to slay? When You set up Moses and Aaron over them to act in their behalf, did they not wish to stone them? When You set up the curly-haired Elijah over them to act in their behalf, they mocked and ridiculed him, saying, "Look how he frizzes his locks, this fancy-haired fellow." And when You set up Elisha over them to act in their behalf, they said derisively to him, "Go away, baldhead! go away, baldhead!" (2 Kings 2:23). Besides, I cannot venture forth in Israel's behalf, because "I don't know how to speak, for I am still a child" (Jer. 1:6). The divine spirit replied, "Is it not because you are a child that I love you?" For Jeremiah had not as yet tasted the savor of sin.⁴

85. "Take this cup of wine—of wrath—from My hand" (Jer. 25:15). Take this cup of wrath and make the nations drink. Jeremiah took the cup and asked, "Whom shall I make drink first?" God replied, "Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah" (Jer. 25:18), for they are the chief of all [earthly] kingdoms." When Jeremiah heard this command, he opened his mouth and cursed the day he was born.

Jeremiah then said, "With whom may I be compared? With a priest who was chosen by lot to give [a woman suspected of adultery] 'the water of bitterness' to drink." They brought the woman to the priest. He bared her head, disarrayed her hair, held out the cup for her to drink—and as he looked closely at her, he saw that she was his mother! Then he began to cry out, saying, "Woe is me! Mother, I sought ever to honor you, but now behold me abasing you!" Even so, Jeremiah said, "Woe unto me because of you, Mother Zion! I thought I was to prophesy good things and consolations for you, and lo, I prophesy for you inflictions of punishment!"⁵

86. "Who would not fear Thee, O King of the nations?" (Jer. 10:7). The Holy One asked Jeremiah: [You call Me King of the nations], but I am not King of Israel? Jeremiah replied: Because You said to me, "I have appointed thee a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5), therefore I call You also King of the nations.⁶

¹ Even though Isaiah, unlike Ezekiel, gave no elaborate description of what he had seen.

² To convince his audience that he has actually beheld such marvels, he is constrained to give a detailed description of them. So Tosafot, ad loc.

³ To him, the king is a familiar sight. So Rashi. B. Hag 13b.

⁴ PR 26:1/2 (YJS 2:526–27).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ MTeh 93:1.

87. "Who would not fear Thee, O King of the nations?" (Jer. 10:7). The other prophets asked Jeremiah: Why do you see fit to call Him King of the nations? All the other prophets call Him King of Israel, yet you call Him King of the nations. Jeremiah replied: I heard Him say to me, "I have appointed thee a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5), and therefore I say, King of the nations.⁷

88. Jeremiah was one of three prophets who prophesied in that generation—Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and the prophetess Huldah. Jeremiah prophesied in the city squares, Zephaniah [in the Temple and] in synagogues, and Huldah among the women.⁸

89. But if Jeremiah was there, how could Huldah prophesy? In the school of Rav, sages said in Rav's name: Huldah was a kinswoman of Jeremiah, and so he did not object.⁹

90. Although all the prophets begin their books with recitals of Israel's guilt, they end them with words of comfort.¹⁰

91. "And this is the blessing" (Deut. 33:1). Because at the beginning Moses spoke harsh words to Israel, he then changed and spoke words of comfort to them. And the other prophets learned from him, for at the beginning they spoke harsh words to Israel, but then they changed and spoke words of comfort to them.¹¹

92. "And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel" (Deut. 34:10). There had not arisen one like him in Israel; but among the nations of the world, one like him did arise. This was done in order that the nations of the world might have no excuse to say, "If we had had a prophet like Moses, we would have worshiped the Holy One." Who was the prophet like Moses they had? Balaam son of Beor. However, there was a difference between the prophecy of Moses and the prophecy of Balaam, in that Moses had three qualities Balaam did not have: when God spoke with Moses, Moses was able to stand on his feet, whereas when God spoke with Balaam, he fell prone on the ground; He spoke with Moses mouth to mouth, whereas He did not speak mouth to mouth with Balaam; He spoke with Moses in plain terms, whereas He spoke with Balaam only in parables. On the other hand, there were three qualities Balaam had that Moses did not have: Moses did not know who was speaking to him, whereas Balaam knew who was speaking to him; Moses did not know when the Holy One would speak to him, whereas Balaam knew when the Holy One would speak to him (Balaam's knowledge in these two respects may be explained by the parable of a king's cook, who knew what fare the king would have on his table and how much money would be spent by the king for this

⁷ Exod. R. 29:9.

⁸ PR 26:1/2 (YJS 2:528).

⁹ B. Meg 14b.

¹⁰ MTeh 4:12; P. Ber 5:1, 8d.

¹¹ Sif Deut., §342.

purpose); Moses could not speak with God whenever he wished, whereas Balaam spoke with Him whenever he pleased, as Scripture says, "Fallen down—his eyes are opened" (Num. 24:4), which implies that whenever he prostrated himself on his face, at once his eyes were opened [to anything that he inquired about].¹

93. "Balaam also the son of Beor, the soothsayer" (Josh. 13:22). A soothsayer? But he was a prophet! At first, said R. Yohanan, he was a prophet, but subsequently [he became] a mere soothsayer.²

94. The Holy One raised up Moses for Israel and raised up Balaam for the nations of the world. Observe the difference between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the nations of the world! The prophets of Israel warn Israel against transgressions. Thus Ezekiel: "I have appointed thee a watchman unto the House of Israel . . . and thou shalt give them warning" (Ezek. 3:17). But the one prophet who rose up among the nations made a breach in the moral order through his desire to cause human beings to perish from the world.³ More! All the prophets had a measure of compassion for Israel as well as for the nations of the world. Thus Isaiah said, "Wherefore my heart moaneth for Moab like a harp" (Isa. 16:11). Likewise, Ezekiel said, "Take up a lamentation for Tyre" (Ezek. 27:2). But this one, a cruel man, rose up to root out an entire people for no fault whatsoever.⁴

95. R. Isaac said: Until the Tabernacle was set up, prophecy was also found among the nations of the world; after the Tabernacle was set up, it departed from among them, as Israel said, "I held it [the holy spirit] and will not let it go" (Song 3:4). The sages retorted to R. Isaac: But Balaam did prophesy [after the Tabernacle was set up]! He replied: Yes, but he prophesied for the good of Israel, e.g., "Who hath counted the dust of Jacob?" (Num. 23:10); "None hath beheld iniquity in Jacob" (Num. 23:21); "There is no augury in Jacob" (Num. 23:23); "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob" (Num. 24:5); "There shall step forth a star out of Jacob" (Num. 24:17); and "Out of Jacob shall one have dominion" (Num. 24:19).⁵

96. Seven prophets prophesied to the peoples of the world: Balaam and his father, and Job, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite, and Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite.⁶

97. What is the difference between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the nations of the world? R. Hama the son of R. Hanina said: To the prophets of the nations of the world, the Holy One appears with half-speech only; but to the prophets of Israel, with complete speech, clear

¹ Num. R. 14:20; Yalkut, *Berakhah*, §966; Sif Deut., §357.

² B. Sanh 106a.

³ Israel's giving themselves to fornication, set forth in Num. 25, is attributed to Balaam's devising.

⁴ Tanhuma B, *Balak*, §1; Num. R. 20:1.

⁵ Lev. R. 1:12.

⁶ B. BB 15b.

speech, affectionate speech, in the language of purity, in the language of holiness, in the same language in which the ministering angels chant praise to Him.

R. Yose said: The Holy One appears to the prophets of the nations of the world only [at night] when human beings generally take leave from one another, as Eliphaz said: "A word was secretly brought to me . . . at the time of leave-taking,⁷ from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men" (Job 4:12–13).

R. Hanina bar Papa said: The matter may be illustrated by the parable of a king placed with his friend in a chamber where a curtain was between them. Whenever the king wished to speak to his friend, he would raise the curtain by folding it upward until he saw his friend face to face and then speak to him. But for the nations of the world, God does not fold up the curtain—He speaks to them from behind the curtain.

R. Simon said: The matter may be illustrated by the parable of a king who has a wife and a concubine. To his wife he goes openly, but to his concubine he goes secretly. So, too, the Holy One reveals Himself to the nations of the world only at night, but to the prophets of Israel by day.⁸

98. The prophets of Israel do not know when the Holy One will speak to them, but the prophets of the nations of the world do know when the Holy One will speak to them. Thus it is said of Balaam, "The saying of him who [knows when he is about to] hear the words of God" (Num. 24:4). The prophets of Israel do not know how many utterances He will articulate for them. But the prophets of the nations of the world do know how many utterances He will articulate for them. Thus it is said of Balaam, "Who knoweth the knowledge of the Most High" (Num. 24:16).

Are the prophets of the nations of the world then greater than the prophets of Israel? Not at all. In fact, the prophets of Israel are greater than the prophets of the nations of the world. A parable will explain what the matter resembles. The king's cooks know in advance exactly what expenditures they have to make, what ingredients they have to prepare, because their charge has definite limits. But the king's governors do not know in advance what expenditures they have to make and what items they have to prepare, because their charge has no definite limit.

R. Issachar said: With the prophets of the nations of the world, God speaks only in half-speech. Thus Scripture says, "The Lord called [*va-yikkar*, without the letter *alef* at the end] unto Balaam" (Num. 23:4). But with the prophets of Israel, [He speaks] in full speech, as for example, "The Lord called [*va-yikra*, with the letter *alef* at the end] unto Moses" (Exod. 19:20), a mode of locution the ministering angels use to praise Him, as is said, "And one called (*kara*) unto another, and said" (Isa. 6:6).⁹

99. R. Levi said: The prophecy of the nations of the world is ambiguous, so that they do not know whether they

⁷ "Lit. 'at the divisions'—when people separate from each other. This derives *se'ippim* from *se'if*, a branch—when people branch away. EV: 'in thoughts'" (Gen. R., Soncino, p. 454, n. 3).

⁸ Gen. R. 52:5 and 74:7; Lev. R. 1:13; Yalkut, Job, §897.

⁹ Mishnat R. Eliezer 6.

are told to slay or told to be slain. A parable of one who, while on a journey, grew tired toward evening. So he said: O that I had just one ass! A Roman, whose she-ass had just then foaled, passed by and said to him: Take this [newborn] foal and carry it on your back. So he said: I see that my prayer has been answered, but I did not put it properly—whether to ride or be ridden upon.

Another parable, of a man who set sail on the Great [Mediterranean] Sea. When a violent storm blew up and was about to sink his vessel, he said: If this crushing wind will moderate, I will bring a calf. When the wind did moderate, he said: I promised nothing.¹

Such is the prophetic utterance of the nations of the world: "That they should be ready against that day" (Esther 3:14), whether to slay or to be slain. As for Israel, their prophetic utterance is clear: "Should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies" (Esther 8:13).²

100. R. Yohanan said: "The poor useth entreaties" (Prov. 18:23)—the prophets of Israel [when pleading to God]. "But the rich speak out impudently" (ibid.)—the prophets of the nations of the world [when they address God].³

101. The Holy One said to the prophets: What do you suppose—if you refuse to go on a mission of Mine, I have no other emissary? "With the superfluities of the earth, with all" (Eccles. 5:8)—I can have My mission carried out with all, even by means of a serpent, even by means of a scorpion, even by means of a frog.⁴

102. Before the Land of Israel had been chosen, all lands were suitable for divine revelations; after the Land of Israel had been chosen, all other lands were eliminated. Before the Temple had been singled out, all of Jerusalem was suitable for the abiding of the Presence; after the Temple had been singled out, the rest of Jerusalem was eliminated.

You might say, "I can cite instances of prophets with whom God spoke outside the Land." True, He did speak to them outside the Land, but only because of the merit of the fathers did He speak with them. And even though, because of the merit of the fathers, He did speak with them outside the Land, He spoke with them only at a spot that was pure, being near water, as Daniel said, "I was by the stream Ulai" (Dan. 8:2); and again, "I was by the side of the great river, which is Tigris" (Dan. 10:4); and elsewhere, Scripture says, "The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the Priest the son of Buzi . . . by the river Chebar" (Ezek. 1:3).

R. Eleazar ben Zadok added: Note that Scripture says, "Arise, go forth into the plain" (Ezek. 3:22), asserting that a plain was suitable for divine revelation.⁵

¹ Since I did not specify whether I would bring a calf as an offering or to my table.

² Midrash Panim Aherim A, pp. 50–51.

³ Deut. R. 2:4.

⁴ Exod. R. 10:1; Lev. R. 22:3.

⁵ Since a plain is uninhabited and therefore undefiled by human or animal uncleanness,

You can see for yourself that the Presence does not reveal itself outside the Land. Scripture says, "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the Presence of the Lord" (Jon. 1:3). Could he really have thought that it was possible to flee from the Lord? Had it not been already said, "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy Presence?" (Ps. 139:7)? But Jonah thought: In order not to incriminate the Jews, for Gentiles are more prone to repent, I will go outside the Land, where the Presence does not reveal itself. A parable will illustrate his folly. A priest's servant who fled from his master said: I will go to the cemetery, a place where my master cannot follow me.⁶ His master told him, "I have other flunkys just like you." So, too, when Jonah said, "I will go outside the Land to a place where the Presence does not reveal itself," the Holy One replied, "I have other emissaries like you, as is said, 'The Lord hurled a great wind into the sea'" (Jon. 1:4).⁷

103. When R. Huna died, R. Abba began the eulogy by saying: Our master was worthy of having the Presence rest on him, but his residing in Babylonia prevented it.⁸

104. Many prophets rose up for Israel, twice as many as the number of Israelites who went out of Egypt. But only prophecy required by subsequent generations was set down in writing, while prophecy not required by subsequent generations was not set down.⁹

105. R. Derosa said in the name of R. Samuel bar Isaac: Sixty myriads of prophets rose up for Israel in the days of Elijah. Why was their prophecy not made public? Because it was not required for subsequent generations. Hence you may conclude that any prophecy that had meaning for the time and was also required for subsequent generations was made public, while any prophecy that had meaning for the time but was not required for subsequent generations was not made public. In the time-to-come, however, the Holy One will bring these prophets back and make public their prophecies, as is said, "The Lord my God shall come, and all the holy ones with thee" (Zech. 14:5).

R. Berekhiah said in the name of R. Helbo: Even as sixty myriads of prophets rose up for Israel, so sixty myriads of prophetesses rose up for them, and Solomon came along and made the fact public when he said, "Thy lips also, O My bride, drop honey" (Song 4:11).¹⁰

106. Our masters taught: After the early prophets died, the Urim and Tummim¹¹ ceased.¹²

107. After the last prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—died, the holy spirit departed from Israel, who

⁶ A priest is not allowed to enter a cemetery.

⁷ Mek, Bo, Pis'ha 1 (La 1:4–8); Yalkut, Ezek., §336.

⁸ B. MK 25a.

⁹ B. Meg 14a and En Yaakov, ad loc.

¹⁰ The verb *tittofnah* ("drop") is taken to mean "preach in prophecy" (cf. Mic. 2:6). Song R. 4:11, §1; Ruth R., proem 2.

¹¹ See Exod. 28:30.

¹² Ceased to have power to indicate God's will. Sot 9:12.

nevertheless were able to avail themselves of the divine voice.¹

108. R. Avdimi of Haifa said: Ever since the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to the sages.

R. Yohanan said: Ever since the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to fools and children.²

109. The dream is an unripe form of prophecy.³

110. R. Yohanan said: When a man rises early and a verse comes to his mouth,⁴ it is a kind of minor prophecy.⁵

111. R. Judah said in the name of Rav: Whoever is boastful—if he is a sage, his wisdom departs from him; if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him.

Resh Lakish said: Whoever is prone to anger—if he is a sage, his wisdom departs from him; if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him.⁶

112. "These are the commandments" (Lev. 27:34) implies that henceforth no prophet may introduce innovations.⁷

113. Our masters taught: Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses prophesied to Israel, but they neither diminished from nor added to anything that is written in the Torah, other than the reading of the Megillah.⁸

How did they [who introduced the reading of the Megillah] infer it [from the Torah]? R. Hiyya bar Avin said in the name of R. Joshua ben Korhah: If we hymn praise for being delivered from slavery into freedom, should we not do so all the more for being delivered from death to life?⁹

114. The false prophet who prophesies what he has not heard or what he has not been told—his death shall be at the hands of man. But he who suppresses his prophecy¹⁰ or disregards the words of another prophet¹¹ or the prophet who transgresses his own words¹²—his death shall be at the hands of Heaven.

He who prophesies in the name of an alien god and says, "Thus saith the alien god," is liable to death by strangling, even if he follows the *Halakhah* in declaring unclean what is unclean and clean what is clean.¹³

¹ B. Sanh 11a.

² B. BB 12a–b.

³ Gen. R. 17:5.

⁴ Either he utters it spontaneously or hears a child recite it.

⁵ B. Ber 55b.

⁶ B. Pes 66b.

⁷ B. Shab 104a.

⁸ The Scroll of Esther on Purim.

⁹ B. Meg 14a.

¹⁰ Jon. 1:3.

¹¹ 1 Kings 20:35.

¹² 1 Kings 13:26.

¹³ Sanh 11:6.

115. R. Abbahu said in the name of R. Yohanan: In every matter, if a prophet tells you, "Transgress the commands of Torah,"¹⁴ listen to him, except in the matter of idolatry: then, even if the prophet should cause the sun to stand still in midheaven [as proof of divine inspiration], do not listen to him.

We have been taught that R. Yose the Galilean said: Because the Torah understood thoroughly the power of idolatry, it gave as an example:¹⁵ If he [who would lure you to idolatry] should have the sun stand still in midheaven,¹⁶ even then you must not listen to him.

R. Akiva said: Far be it from the Holy One to have the sun stand still at the behest of those who transgress His will! But [the Torah refers here to such] as Hananiah son of Azur, who at first was a true prophet and only subsequently became a false prophet.¹⁷

116. He who shouts loudly during the *Tefillah* is among the false prophets.¹⁸

Song

117. Rav said: The world was created only for the sake of David.¹⁹ Samuel said: For the sake of Moses. And R. Yohanan said: For the sake of the Messiah.²⁰

118. The Holy One said: I will open the tongue of all flesh and blood, that they may hymn praise before Me every day and proclaim Me King in the four corners of the world, because I would not have created my world but for the song and music that they intone for Me daily. And the proof that the Holy One created the world only for the sake of song and music? The verse "Glory and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His Sanctuary" (Ps. 96:6). "Glory and majesty before Him" in heaven, and "strength and beauty in His Sanctuary" on earth. The precise meaning of these words is spelled out in "His glory covereth the heavens, even as the earth is full of his praise" (Hab. 3:3). And the proof that the Holy One created heaven to have it engage in song? The verse "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). And the proof that ever since the Holy One created the earth, it hymns song to Him? The verse "From the uttermost parts of the earth have we heard songs: 'Glory to the Righteous'" (Isa. 24:16), the Righteous here being the Holy One, of whom it is said, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways" (Ps. 145:17). And the proof

¹⁴ As did Elijah, who ordered that sacrifices be brought on Mount Carmel (see 1 Kings 18).

¹⁵ Reading *mashelah* ("example") instead of *memshalah* ("power"). So Goldschmidt.

¹⁶ "Since Scripture says, 'And giveth thee a sign and a wonder' [Deut. 13:2–3], it follows that the false prophet must have been endowed with such powers" (Sanh, Soncino, p. 599, n. 4).

¹⁷ "The 'sign' being given during his first phase, and he supported himself thereon in his second" (Sanh, Soncino, p. 599, n. 5). B. Sanh 90a.

¹⁸ Who, it is said, "shouted louder" (1 Kings 18:28). B. Ber 24b.

¹⁹ That he might sing the praises of God.

²⁰ That he might bring redemption. B. Sanh 98b.

that seas and rivers also intone song? The verse "Above the voices of many waters" (Ps. 93:4). And the proof that mountains and hills also intone song? The verse "Mountains and all hills . . . let them praise the Name of the Lord, for His Name alone is exalted" (Ps. 148:9, 13). And the proof that all orders of creation intone song? The verse "From the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof, the Lord's Name is to be praised" (Ps. 113:3). And the proof that Adam also opened his mouth with song? The verse "A Psalm. A Song. For the Sabbath day. It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy Name, O Most High" (Ps. 92:1-2). "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord" on the earth, in the midst of mankind, "and to sing praises to Thy Name, O Most High" in the heights of heaven, among the ministering angels.¹

119. "Thine is the day, Thine also the night" (Ps. 74:16). The day praises You and the night praises You. It is right to sing praise to You during the day and right to sing praise to You during the night.²

120. At the beginning of the world's creation, the praise of the Holy One ascended only from the water, as is said, "From the voices of many waters" (Ps. 93:4). And what did they proclaim? "The Lord on high is mighty" (ibid.). The Holy One said: If these, which have neither mouth nor the capacity of utterance or speech, praise Me, how much more and more when Adam will be created!³

121. "From the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof, the Lord's Name is praised" (Ps. 113:3). From the time the sun begins to rise until it sets, the praise of the Holy One does not cease from its mouth. Thus you find that when Joshua rose up in Gibeon and sought to silence the sun, he did not say, "Sun in Gibeon, stop," but "Sun in Gibeon, be still" (Josh. 10:12). For as long as the sun moves, it praises the Holy One, and as long as it praises Him thus, it has the strength to move. Once it grows silent, it stops. Therefore Joshua said to the sun, "Be still."

The sun replied, "Do you presume to tell me to be still?" Joshua: "Yes." The sun: "But if I grow still, who will hymn the praise of the Holy One?" Joshua: "Be still, and I will hymn song, as is said, 'Then spoke Joshua to the Lord'" (Josh. 10:12). Here the word "then," as in "Then sang Moses" (Exod. 15:1), suggests song.⁴

122. R. Judah said in the name of Samuel: How do we know that the indispensability of song is to be inferred from the Torah? From the verse "Then shall he minister with the Name of the Lord his God" (Deut. 18:7). Now, which ministry is performed with the Lord's Name? You must admit that it is in the ministry of song.

R. Mattenah said: It is inferred from the verse "Because thou didst not serve the Lord thy God with joyful-

ness, and with gladness of heart" (Deut. 28:47). Now, which service is "with joyfulness and with gladness of heart"? You must admit that it is song.⁵

123. We have been taught: Until the Israelites entered the Land of Israel, all lands were deemed fit places to chant a hymn of praise [for miracles done in them]. After they had entered the Land, other lands were not deemed fit places to chant a hymn of praise [for miracles done in them]. After Israel went into exile, other lands were again deemed fit as at first.⁶

124. R. Simon said: Not everyone who wishes to hymn a song may hymn it. But he for whom a miracle has been performed and who does hymn a song—it is well known that all his iniquities are forgiven him and he becomes a new creature.⁷

125. R. Samuel bar Nahmani said in the name of R. Yohanan: How do we know that a song of praise is sung only over wine? Because Scripture says, "And the vine said unto them: Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man?" (Judg. 9:13). If wine cheers man, how does it cheer God? [By the song that accompanies it.] From this we learn that a song of praise is sung only over wine.⁸

126. Ten songs are mentioned in Scripture. The first, which was sung in Egypt; "Ye shall have a song, as in the night [of the first Passover] when a feast was hallowed" (Isa. 30:29). The second, which was sung at the Red Sea: "Then sang Moses" (Exod. 15:1). The third, which was chanted at the well: "Then sang Israel" (Num. 21:17). The fourth, which Moses uttered: "So Moses wrote this song" (Deut. 31:22). The fifth, which Joshua recited: "Then spoke Joshua to the Lord" (Josh. 10:12). The sixth, which Deborah and Barak uttered: "Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam" (Judg. 5:1). The seventh, which David recited: "And David spoke unto the Lord the words of this song" (2 Sam. 22:1). The eighth, which Solomon recited: "Then spoke Solomon" (2 Chron. 6:1). The ninth, which Jehoshaphat uttered: "And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed them that should sing unto the Lord, and praise to the beauty of holiness," etc. (2 Chron. 20:21). The tenth song will be recited in the time-to-come: "Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth" (Isa. 42:10).⁹

127. "Thine ointments have a goodly fragrance" (Song 1:3). R. Yannai ben R. Simeon son of R. Yannai said: The former generations uttered only the fragrance of song before You, but when we came to the Red Sea we did not leave out one song of praise with which to praise Your Name. ["Thy Name is as ointment poured forth" (ibid.).]¹⁰

⁵ B. Ar 11a and En Yaakov, ad loc.

⁶ B. Meg 14a.

⁷ See Rashi on Judg. 6:1. Yalkut, *Be-shallah*, §254.

⁸ B. Ber 35a.

⁹ Mek, *Be-shallah*, *Shirata*, 1; Yalkut, *Be-shallah*, §242.

¹⁰ Tanhuma, *Yitro*, §3.

128. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel" (Exod. 15:1). When uttering this song, Moses was equal to all of Israel, and Israel equal to Moses.¹

Another interpretation: "Moses and the children of Israel." This declares that Moses led the song before Israel [which responded in antiphony].²

129. R. Akiva expounded: When Israel came up from the Red Sea, the holy spirit rested on them, and they sought to utter song. How did they utter their song? In the manner of an adult who leads in reciting the *Hallel* in the synagogue, while the congregation responds by repeating each verse of each psalm. Thus Moses said, "I will sing unto the Lord." (Exod. 15:1), and Israel responded, "I will sing unto the Lord." Moses said, "The Lord is my strength and song" (Exod. 15:2), and Israel responded, "I will sing unto the Lord."

R. Eliezer son of R. Yose the Galilean said: They uttered their song in the manner of a child who chants the *Hallel* in his school. Moses said, "I will sing unto the Lord," and they repeated, "I will sing unto the Lord." Moses said, "The Lord is my strength and song," and they repeated, "The Lord is my strength and song."

R. Nehemiah said: They uttered their song in the manner of people who recite the Shema in the synagogue. Moses opened with a verse of praise, and Israel completed it in response. Moses said, "Then sang Israel" (Exod. 5:1), and Israel responded, "I will sing unto the Lord, for He is highly exalted" (ibid.). Moses said, "The Lord is my strength and song" (Exod. 15:2), and Israel responded, "This is my God, and I will glorify Him" (ibid.).³

130. R. Avin the Levite said: When Israel stood up to utter the song of the Red Sea, Moses did not allow them to say it by themselves, but even as when a disciple is young, his teacher recites his lesson with him, so also Moses recited it with them: "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel," just like a disciple responding after his teacher. Forty years later, when Israel had mastered their lesson, they proceeded to sing the Song of the Well by themselves, as is said, "Then sang Israel" (Num. 21:17). For they said: Master of the universe, it is up to You to perform miracles in our behalf, and it is up to us to utter song, as is said, "It is for the Lord to deliver us, and for us to sing songs with stringed instruments" (Isa. 38:20).⁴

131. "And one approached not the other all night" (Exod. 14:20).⁵ In that instant, when the ministering an-

¹ Otherwise, why should Moses have been singled out?

² Hence the name of Moses was put first. Mek, *Be-shallah*, *Shirata*, 1.

³ Tos Sot 6:1; Yalkut, *Be-shallah*, §241.

⁴ Yalkut, *Hukkat*, §764.

⁵ These words are usually taken to mean that neither army could approach the other during that night. However, the Hebrew *zeh el zeh* ("one to the other") need not necessarily refer to armies. Moreover, the only other instance where this phrase occurs is Isa. 6:3, where we are told that "one seraphim called unto another and said: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." Hence, in the comment that follows, *krb* ("approach") is understood as "to sing, to hymn" and the phrase "one to the other" is taken to mean "one angel to another."

gels sought to utter song before the Holy One, He rebuked them, saying, "The works of My hands are drowning in the sea, and you would utter song in My presence!"⁶

132. "Barak said unto her: 'If thou wilt join me, then I will go'" (Judg. 4:8). According to R. Nehemiah, this means that Barak said to Deborah: If you are willing to join me [in a lesser role] in song [praising God], I will go with you [as a subordinate] into battle, but if you are unwilling to join me [in a lesser role] in song, I will not go with you into battle. "She replied, 'I will certainly go with thee, but desist [from setting conditions]. The glory [of the song] shall not be thine'" (Judg. 4:9),⁷ by which, according to R. Reuben, she meant: "What do you suppose—that [the major role in] the song will be given to you for your glory alone?" [As it turned out], "Deborah sang, and [in a lesser role], Barak the son of Abinoam" (Judg. 5:1).⁸

133. King David dwelled in five worlds and composed a song for each one of them. When he abode in his mother's womb, he uttered the song "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all within which I am, bless His holy Name" (Ps. 103:1). When he came out into the air of the world and beheld the stars and planets, he uttered a song, "Bless the Lord, ye His angels. . . . Bless the Lord, all ye His hosts" (Ps. 103:20-21). When, as he sucked milk from his mother's breasts and beheld her nipples, he uttered a song, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all those weaned [from their mother's milk]" (Ps. 103:2). When he saw the downfall of the wicked, he uttered a song, "The sinners are consumed out of the earth, and the wicked are no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Hallelujah" (Ps. 104:35). When he reflected on the day of death, he uttered a song, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; O Lord my God, Thou art very great; Thou art clothed with glory and majesty. . . . Thou hidest Thy face, they vanish; Thou withdrawest their breath, they perish" (Ps. 104:1 and 104:29).¹⁰

134. "At midnight I will rise to give praise unto Thee" (Ps. 119:62). R. Aha bar Bizna said in the name of R. Simeon Hasida: A harp used to hang above David's bed. When midnight arrived, a wind would come up from the north and blow across the strings of the harp, so that it played of itself. He would immediately arise and occupy himself with Torah.

R. Ashi said: Up to midnight he used to occupy himself with Torah. From then on, with songs and praises.¹¹

135. It is reported of King David that when he finished the book of Psalms, he became boastful, saying to the

⁶ B. Sanh 39b.

⁷ JV: "notwithstanding, [it] shall not be for thine honor." But R. Reuben construes *efes* ("notwithstanding") as the Greek *efes* ("let go, desist").

⁸ Gen. R. 40:4.

⁹ JV: "His benefits." But another meaning of *gml* ("benefit") is "wean."

¹⁰ B. Ber 10a.

¹¹ B. Ber 3b.

¹ Alphabet of R. Akiva (BhM 3: 12-13).

² Gen. R. 6:2.

³ Gen. R. 5:1.

⁴ Tanhuma, *Ahare Mot*, §9; Yalkut, Josh., §22.

Holy One: Master of the universe, is there any [other] creature You created in Your world that utters more songs and paeans of praise than I? In that instant a frog happened to meet him and said: David, don't be so boastful. I utter more songs and paeans of praise than you.¹

136. "Behold, thou art fair, My love, behold, thou art fair" (Song 4:1). R. Akiva said: The entire world, all of it, is not equal in worth to the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel. Why? Because all other books in the Writings are holy, whereas the Song of Songs is holy of holies.

In illustration, R. Eleazar ben Azariah told the parable of a man who took a *seah* of wheat and gave it to a baker, to whom he said: Try to get out of it so much [coarse] flour, so much bran, so much coarse bran, and so much fine flour. And sift out of the fine flour enough for me to bake a cake, elegant, dainty, and savory. So, too, from all of Solomon's wisdom there was sifted out for Israel only the Song of Songs, the most beautiful of songs, the most sublime of songs. See how the Holy One praises Israel in it: "Behold, thou art fair, My love, behold, thou art fair."²

137. He who sings selections from the Song of Songs with a tremulous voice in a tavern, turning it into a kind of drinking song, has no portion in the world-to-come.³

138. "And the kine took the straight way (*va-yisharnah*)" (1 Sam. 6:12). Their visages looked straight toward the Ark, and they sang a beautiful song.⁴ What song did they sing? Elijah taught:

Sing, sing, O Ark of acacia!
Exalted in all your radiance,
You who are overlaid with woven gold,
Extolled in God's holiest place,
Made resplendent with delicate traceries,
Sheltered between the two cherubim.

R. Samuel bar Nahman said: How much toil did [Moses] the son of Amram expend until he succeeded in teaching song to the Levites, and you [kine carrying the Ark] on your own utter song! All strength (*yeyasher*) to you.⁵

139. "Of the increase (*le-marbeh*) of [Hezekiah's] government and of peace there shall be no end" (Isa. 9:6). R. Tanhum related that Bar Kappara expounded this verse in Sepphoris as follows: Why is every *mem* in the middle of a word open, while the one in this verse is closed?⁶ Because the Holy One was about to designate Hezekiah

as the Messiah and Sennacherib as Gog and Magog.⁷ But the attribute of justice⁸ spoke up to the Holy One, "Master of the universe, David, king of Israel, who uttered so many hymns and praises before You—You did not make him Messiah. Yet Hezekiah, for whom You performed all manner of miracles and who uttered no hymn in praise of You—him you are about to make the Messiah?" Following the argument by the attribute of justice, the letter *mem* was closed.⁹ Immediately the earth exclaimed, "Master of the universe, as proxy for this righteous man, I will utter song before You. Designate him the Messiah." And so the earth broke into song before Him, as is written, "From the uttermost ends of the earth have we heard song: 'Glory to the Righteous'" (Isa. 24:16). Then the [angelic] prince of the world spoke up before the Holy One, "Master of the universe, as proxy for this righteous man, the earth has just now fulfilled Your desire [for a song of praise]."¹⁰ But a divine voice cried out and said, "[The delay in the Messiah's coming] 'is My secret, My secret'" (Isa. 24:16). To which the prophet replied, "'Woe is me' [ibid.], woe is me, how long [must we wait]?" In response, a divine voice cried out, "Until 'the faithless who acted faithlessly will themselves have been betrayed'" (ibid.).¹¹

The sages taught in the name of R. Pappias: It is a reproach to Hezekiah and his retinue that they uttered no song [to God] until the earth broke into song.¹²

140. R. Berekhiah said in the name of R. Eleazar: By rights, Hezekiah should have sung a song of thanks over the fall of Sennacherib. "But Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done unto him" (2 Chron. 32:25). Why not? "For his heart was lifted up" (ibid.). But consider the matter. Hezekiah, though a king, was righteous. Yet you say, "For his heart was lifted up." What it means, however, is that he was too puffed up with pride to chant a song.

When Isaiah came to Hezekiah and his retinue, and said to them, "Sing unto the Lord" (Isa. 12:5), they asked, "Why should we?" Isaiah replied, "For He hath done gloriously" (ibid.). They said, "This is already made known in all the earth" (ibid.).

Finally, so said Abba bar Kahana, Hezekiah declared, "The Torah with which I am occupied atones for the absence of song."¹³

⁷ It is believed that Gog and Magog will lead all the nations in a powerful attack on Israel. Their defeat will usher in the days of the Messiah.

⁸ "The attributes of justice and mercy are often hypostatized and represented as interceding with the Almighty" (Isidore Epstein in Sanh, Soncino, p. 630, n. 8).

⁹ Therefore the word *le-marbeh* appears in the text with the closed *mem* to indicate that the matter of Hezekiah's designation as Messiah (a word that begins with the letter *mem*) was closed.

¹⁰ So Samuel Edels. BR take it to mean: "Fulfill the desire of this righteous man," i.e., "Make him the Messiah." The two comments are based on different readings of the phrase *tzevi la-izaddik* ("glory to the righteous").

¹¹ So NJV. That is, until Israel's enemies and the enemies of their enemies have been destroyed.

¹² B. Sanh 94a and En Yaakov, ad loc; Yalkut, Isa., §415.

¹³ Song R. 4:8, §3.

141. There were four kings—David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah—and not one asked of God what each of the others was to ask. David requested, "Let me pursue mine enemies and overtake them, and not turn back till they are consumed" (Ps. 18:38; 2 Sam. 22:38). The Holy One replied, "I will [help you] do so." So "David smote them from dawn until evening and into the morrow of the next day" (1 Sam. 30:17)—on two nights the Holy One gave him light by shooting stars and lightning flashes. Hence David said, "Thou dost light my lamp; the Lord my God doth lighten my darkness" (Ps. 18:29; 2 Sam. 22:29).

Then Asa rose up and requested, "There is no strength in me to slay them. All that I can do is pursue them. You slay them." The Holy One replied, "I will do so." Hence it is said, "Asa and the people that were with him pursued them. . . . None remained alive: for they were shattered before the Lord" (2 Chron. 14:12)—not "before Asa," but "before the Lord."

Then Jehoshaphat rose up and requested, "I have not the strength either to slay or to pursue, but I will utter a song, and You do [the pursuing and the slaying]." The Holy One replied, "I will do so." Accordingly, "when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set an ambush against the Ammonites . . . and they were smitten" (2 Chron. 20:22).

Finally, Hezekiah rose up and requested, "I have not the strength to slay, to pursue, or to utter song, but I will sleep in my bed, and You do what is required." The Holy One replied, "I will do so." Hence, "it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians" (2 Kings 19:35).¹

142. R. Hananel said in the name of Rav: The ministering angels do not utter song above until Israel utter it below, for it is said, "When [they who are like] the morning stars sing together" (Job 38:7), and after that, "All divine beings shout for joy" (Job 38:7).²

143. "As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there: all my springs are in Thee" (Ps. 87:7). R. Yuda said in the name of R. Meir: Like the spring from which fresh water pours out at every moment, so will the children of Israel sing a new song at every moment.

But the sages expounded: Even as the men will sing songs, so also will the women, as is said, "All my springs are in Thee." Here the word "springs" implies women, as in the verse "A garden shut up is my sister, my bride, a fountain sealed, a spring shut up" (Song 4:12).³

¹ At a time when, it is assumed, Hezekiah was in bed. Lam R., proem 30; Yalkut, 2 Sam., §163.

² B. Hul 91b.

³ MTeh 87:7.

144. R. Joshua ben Levi said: He who utters song [in praise of God] in this world will merit uttering it in the world-to-come, as is said, "Happy are they that dwell in Thy house now; they will be praising Thee forever. Selah" (Ps. 84:5).

R. Hiyya bar Abba said in the name of R. Yohanan: All the prophets are destined to utter song with one voice, as is said, "Hark, Thy watchmen raise their voices; as one they shout for joy" (Isa. 52:8).⁴

145. "I am the rose of Sharon" (Song 2:1). I am she, I am the beloved, I am the one who has been both covered and trampled down while in the shadow of the [heathen] kingdoms, but tomorrow, when the Holy One delivers me from the shadow of those kingdoms, I shall freshen like a rose and sing a new song unto Him, as is said, "O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvelous things; His right hand, and His holy arm, hath wrought salvation for Him" (Ps. 98:1).

R. Abba bar Kahana taught that the congregation of Israel said to the Holy One: I am she, I am the beloved, deep in the depths of trouble, but when the Holy One lifts me up out of my troubles, I shall freshen like a rose with good deeds and shall sing a song [to Him], as is said, "A Song of Ascents. Out of the depths have I called Thee, O Lord" (Ps. 130:1).⁵

146. "Look (*tashuri*) from the top of Amana" (Song 4:8). R. Yusta said: There is a mountain called Amana which marks the extreme boundary of the Land of Israel. From there and beyond is outside the Land.

R. Eleazar son of R. Yose said: ["Look (*tashuri*)" means that] as soon as the returning exiles reach it, they will utter song (*shirah*). Hence Scripture: "Sing (*tashuri*) from the top of Amana."⁶

147. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song (*shirah*)" (Exod. 15:1). All the songs recited throughout the past by Israel are designated "*song*" in its feminine form, as if to say: [Just as a woman conceives and gives birth again and again, so troubles keep coming]. Observe that the deliverances of the past were followed by servitude, for Babylon, Media, Greece, and Rome were to rise against Israel. But the deliverance destined to come will not be followed by another servitude, as is said, "O Israel, that art saved by the Lord with an everlasting deliverance" (Isa. 45:17). At that time they will sing a song in its masculine form, as is said, "Sing unto the Lord a new song (*shir*)" (Ps. 98:1).⁸

⁴ B. Sanh 91b.

⁵ Song R. 2:1, §1 and §3.

⁶ Exod. R. 23:5.

⁷ A feminine form of *shir* ("song").

⁸ Exod. R. 23:11; Yalkut, *Be-shallah*, §242.

¹ Yalkut, Ps., §889, citing Perek Shirah.

² Tanhuma, *Tetzaveh*, §5; Song R. 1:11; Rashi on Song 1:1.

³ Tos Sanh 12:10.

⁴ The word *va-yisharnah* may mean "looked straight" as well as "sang a song."

⁵ B. AZ 24b; Gen. R. 54:4.

⁶ "There are two forms of *mem*: medial, which is open (), and final, which is closed (). In this sentence, however, the final form occurs in the middle of a word" (Sanh, Soncino, p. 630, n. 6).