

Be'er HaGolah

באר הגולה

[The Well of Exile]

(1598)

by Judah Loew ben Bezalel (יהודה בן בצלאל), the Maharal of Prague, c.
1520–1609

Translation by Scott Weisman



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Translator Version 2

Upright reason dictates that the recipients of the good, of whatever type and level of beneficence it may be, must show gratitude and blessing to the beneficent person in every way possible, commensurate with the value of the beneficence. And one who has benefited all the people of the world — for example, one who invented a new instrument for the good of the world, or a good book — it is fitting for every discerning person, out of the obligation of love of fellow beings, to at least purchase it, so that the man will profit and his heart will be encouraged thereby to invent yet more good instruments in the world. And similarly, all other wise-hearted people will likewise strive and exert themselves to invent good things and instruments needed for the repair of the world and its perfection.

And therefore, whoever says: "What do I need this new instrument for?" — he does not act well towards the world. For if not for the man who invented it, where would you be? And what would your city do? And more than this, if the man did not exert himself, what would the world do?

— R. Pinchas Eliyahu Hurwitz, *Sefer HaBris HaShalem* (1797)

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A note on the work

Maharal's defense of the Aggadah — the non-legal portions of the Talmud — against the critics of his age, who read its stories as absurd, its science as discredited, and its authors as credulous. Written in Prague in 1598 and cast as seven wells sunk toward a single spring, it argues that the Sages spoke in a deliberately figurative register about matters that plain speech cannot carry, and that reading them flatly is a failure of the reader rather than of the text. The sixth well takes up the hardest case: the passages where the Talmud discusses the structure of the heavens, including the exchange at Pesachim 94b in which Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi concedes that the gentile astronomers' account of the sun's night path is "more logical than ours."

Translated from the Hebrew text of the Machon Yerushalayim edition (ed. R. Yehoshua David Hartman, 2002) as digitized by Sefaria. R. Hartman's notes and apparatus are not part of this translation; his note anchors (5,434 of them) and edition marks (760) were removed before translation, and only Maharal's own text was rendered. Because the copy-text is a digital edition rather than a printed witness, this translation carries no folio or page references; passages are located by well and segment.

A note on the translation process

This translation was produced with the [translation-pipeline](#). See the linked repository for details on the process.

This text is the product of a highly refined automated translation process. It has undergone only cursory human review and should not be treated as an authoritative or scholarly rendering. It is offered solely as a reference and reading aid — a way to make an otherwise inaccessible work approachable — and any passage of real consequence should be checked against the original source.

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Inasmuch as man's perfection lies in knowing and apprehending the things that exist, the very first thing for him to know and apprehend is his own essence, so that he not be a fool in the apprehension of himself. In truth this apprehension is not an easy one, for not many attain wisdom in it — the apprehension, that is, of one's own level. Considered in itself the apprehension is easy enough: a man need only open his eye and he will find himself. It is not far off, nor is it in heaven (cf. Devarim 30:11–12), to recognize the worth of one's own existence, than which nothing is closer to a man. Yet most people apprehend the matter as the reverse of what it is. A man measures himself against the earlier generations and says that he too has a mind (cf. Iyov 12:3), and that the former days were no better than these (cf. Koheles 7:10) — for the wisdom that the Fashioner of all implanted comes, after all, from one place, since the individuals of a single species are one. This is the stumbling that lies in their hands (cf. Yeshayahu 3:6).

The wise, by contrast, know their own worth. They will not falsify a valuation where their money is concerned, and still less where their own persons are concerned — and this is what is meant by the wise men's estimate of themselves. So the Gemara says in tractate Eruvin (53a): R. Yochanan said: The heart of the earlier generations was like the entrance of the Ulam (the Temple's entrance hall); that of the later generations, like the entrance of the Heichal (the Sanctuary); and ours, like the eye of a fine needle. "The earlier generations" — R. Akiva; "the later generations" — R. Elazar ben Shamua. Some say: "the earlier" — R. Eliezer ben Shamua; "the later" — R. Oshaya Berabbi. And ours, like the eye of a fine needle. [Aramaic:] Abaye said, "And we are like a peg in the wall as regards Gemara — learning received from a teacher." Rava said, "And we are like a finger in wax as regards *sevara* — the reasoning a man works out on his own." Rav Ashi said, "And we are like a finger in a pit as regards forgetting." Thus far the Gemara. They acknowledged all this and were not ashamed. They assigned a measure to the earlier generations and a measure to the later ones, and they admitted to the measure of their own.

Now see how they assessed the generations. They explained that the earlier generations were wholly intellect. Man is composed of body and intellect, and in the earlier generations the intellective power prevailed over the body and had the upper hand, so that they had a broad heart to receive wisdom and nothing in the body to impede them. R. Yochanan compares this to a wide entrance, since an entrance is made in order to receive; hence he said that the heart of the earlier generations was like the entrance of the Ulam. The entrance of the Ulam was twenty cubits (Middos 3:7), and such an entrance is wider than an entrance properly requires: a proper entrance is ten, as we hold with regard to *eruv*

(Eruvin 2a), and one wider than ten cubits must be narrowed (ibid.), since beyond that it looks like a breach. When the intellect prevails over the body, the power that receives the intelligibles resembles an entrance opened wider than is proper — "proper" being the ten. And since it exceeds ten, it is set at twenty, which is twice ten. The later generations are like the entrance of the Heichal — that is, an entrance exactly as it should be, ten cubits, with nothing wanting to a proper entrance, not even slightly. So it was with those generations: their intellect was just as it should be, open to receive. The intellect did not overpower the body; rather, the proportion and relation between intellect and body remained as they should be, with nothing lacking and nothing added.

As for his comparing the heart of the earlier generations to the entrance of the Ulam and that of the later generations to the entrance of the Heichal — surely the opposite should hold, since the Heichal stands higher in excellence than the Ulam. Why, then, was the Ulam's entrance twenty and the Heichal's ten (Middos 4:1)? This is no difficulty, for the same principle governs the Heichal and the Ulam themselves. Just as we said of man — that when he is wholly intellect his intellect is called very broad — so it was with the Ulam. The holiness of the Ulam is not of the highest excellence, as the holiness of the Heichal is, which stands higher in excellence. Therefore the Ulam's entrance was more than ten: that holiness is present in the world in its full extent, in this breadth, and so the Ulam's entrance was twenty cubits. But the Heichal's entrance was exactly as it should be, ten cubits, because the holiness of the Heichal stands higher in excellence, and such holiness is found in the world only to the measure proper to what can exist among the lower beings, who possess bodies. This higher holiness did not overflow in an excessive breach, nor did the body prevail so as to diminish the holiness; it was proportioned exactly as it should be. The holiness of the Ulam, accordingly, being a lower holiness, was present in greater breadth, and its entrance was twenty cubits — for the higher holiness, which does not belong to the lower bodies, never prevails. If you probe deeply into this you will find that the human heart, which receives the separate intellect, and the reception of divine holiness are one and the same in the fullest sense, so that there is no difference at all between them.

He then said, "and ours is like the eye of a fine needle." That is: the level of men now is the third level, in which the body prevails over the intellect. The measure of their reception of intellect is like the opening of a fine needle, an aperture as small as an aperture can be, with none smaller. So it is in these generations: the body prevails over the intellect, and intellect is present only to the degree made necessary by the form of man. For man, insofar as he is man, cannot be without

intellect; otherwise he would be like the beasts that perish (cf. Tehillim 49:13). And since his intellect exists only so that the name "intellect" may be applied to him, its measure is the smallest possible — just enough for the name "intellect" to hold of him. Such is the measure of this generation, in which the body prevails over the intellect.

As for what Abaye said — "and we are like a peg in the wall as regards Gemara" — this is his meaning. There are intelligibles and branches of wisdom so deep that a man cannot attain them on his own, but only from his teacher, who in turn received them; these we can grasp only little by little. Of such deep intelligibles no more enters our heart than a peg enters hard wood: it penetrates a little, at the spot where the wood is thin and easy to receive it. So too, of those intelligibles, what enters our heart is only what is thin and easy to receive — not the substance of the matter.

Rava added, "and we are like a finger in wax as regards *sevara*." His meaning is this. Those intelligibles that a man attains of himself, which do not require reception from a teacher but are mere *sevara*, are like a finger in wax. When a man presses his finger into wax, then even though the finger is impressed in the wax he can turn the impression to whatever side he wishes. So too our *sevara* is not a clear *sevara* that a man could not incline in some other direction, wherever he pleases; a man can bend the *sevara* to whatever side he wishes, because it is not a strong *sevara* with a standing of its own that would keep it from swerving right or left.

Rav Ashi added, "and we are like a finger in a pit as regards forgetting." The wisdom we attain does not stand firm in us in such a way as not to be easily removed; it stands in us as a finger stands in a pit, where the finger adheres to nothing and is easily withdrawn. And what has been received in this way cannot be called reception at all, so easily is it removed.

So they confessed the guilt of their own souls: that the soul of man falls short of what it ought to be. Now if the waters of wisdom were steadily receding (cf. Bereishis 8:5) from the generation of R. Elazar ben Shamua down to R. Yochanan — and from R. Elazar to R. Yochanan there were only some two or three generations at most, since Rabbi was the disciple of R. Elazar ben Shamua, as stated in Yevamos, in the chapter *HeArel* (84a), and R. Yochanan was the disciple of Rabbi, as stated in the chapter *Eilu Tereifos*, in the discussion of *derusah* (Chullin 54a), so that there were only two or three generations at the most — then what must the case be by now, when the whole earth has dried up and not a trace

of the moisture of wisdom is to be found? R. Yochanan has left us no way at all to assign these generations of ours any relation or value.

This very thing — the smallness of our intellect — is the reason the words of the earlier generations are to us like a sealed book (cf. Yeshayahu 29:11), and all the more so where they spoke of the sciences, whose depth of wisdom and apprehension is hidden from us. Even if we do understand something of their words, let no one imagine that we have reached the far end of them, or even the middle. Abaye already confessed, "and we are like a peg in the wall as regards Gemara," and after that he has left us no verdict to pronounce upon ourselves.

Therefore, when we find among the words of the earlier generations things remote from reason and from the intellect implanted in us, and a man entertains a hostile thought about those earlier generations, this is due to nothing but the folly of the one who thinks it — who is a fool twice over. He is a fool in that he does not know how to understand the words of the earlier sages' wisdom; and he is a fool about himself, in thinking himself wise and a man of knowledge. Were it not so, he would say that the fault lies with the last generation, which is the truth of the matter. And if he did say that all the wise of this generation are as though without knowledge, and all the discerning as though without intellect, when set against the earlier generations, then he would be a fool in one respect only: he would still fail to grasp the wisdom of the earlier generations, but he would know and apprehend his own worth, and that itself would count to him as wisdom. For we have already said that not many attain wisdom in this apprehension, easy though it is — a man being near enough to himself to recognize the truth about himself — yet he behaves as a stranger to himself and will not recognize his own true level. But the man who admits the truth about himself, and does not violate against his own soul the law of *ona'ah* — the prohibition against misrepresenting a value in a transaction — finds that his deficiency atones for him. For one who recognizes and feels the deficiency that is his thereby feels and recognizes the excellence itself; otherwise he would not feel the deficiency at all. One who has no knowledge of the excellence does not recognize the deficiency. Recognizing the deficiency is therefore, for him, a knowledge of the excellence in some measure, and knowledge of the excellence brings him nearer to it than one who does not recognize the excellence at all, who has no nearness to it whatever. And this is the utmost of the highest level in our generations: recognizing how far we fall short of that excellence. By this we have some nearness to the excellence of the intellect — not by thinking ourselves perfect in intellect, which is utterly remote from us. Living flesh feels the scalpel, but dead flesh does not feel the scalpel (Shabbos 13b): that which has no life feels no deficiency at all. It emerges

that the recognition of our deficiency is the level we do possess. But when we neither know nor feel it at all, [that] is on account of the sheer magnitude of the deficiency in wisdom that is ours.

There is no need to caution the sages of Israel in this generation about this, for they all stand cautioned to the utmost. The words of the earlier generations are Sinai, and whoever touches them "shall surely be shot through or stoned" (after Shemos 19:13). If something lies beyond his own reason, a man lays the guilt on his own soul — unless the leprosy of *minus* (sectarian heresy) has broken out on his forehead, and of that it is forbidden to speak. But of late men have come into the gates of the Talmud, gates that are in truth locked before any man who knows their approaches. They passed from gate to gate, supposing that they had mastered the whole of its treasure-house and had seen all its hidden stores; and they found within it things they judged fit to be cast aside, and on that account brought out an evil report of the Talmud they had spied out (cf. Bamidbar 13:32). They did not call to mind what they ought to have said: that these are the sages of antiquity, with whom wisdom departed, understanding failed, and knowledge was lost from mankind.

And now, if we keep silent, sin and guilt will be found upon us. We would be listening to words of contempt spoken against the sages of the world, and repaying evil for good — for they meant to bring us merit, this last generation, empty of wisdom and destitute of intellect, while we keep silent and do not remove the disgrace cast upon them. To explain everything that calls for explanation, everything that is hard for a man who does not understand their words, is impossible — all the more so when a man is looking for a pretext. We shall therefore explain some part of their words, and that will serve as testimony and proof concerning the rest of what they said. Moreover, with the help of the One who gives life to the living, these matters will be explained each in its own place and setting, following the order of the Talmud. So if a man seeks more, he will find it in its place — for what they said, they said in faithfulness.

These are the charges they have devised in wicked thought against the sages of the world. **The first:** they say that the Mishnah and the Talmud contain things that are an addition to the Torah of Moshe — as when the Sages instituted *netilas yadayim*, the ritual washing of the hands (Eruvin 21b), and *eruv tavshilin* (Beitzah 15b), and the like. They also detracted from the Torah of Moshe: the commandment says "forty shall he strike him" (Devarim 25:3), while they say that he is struck a count of thirty-nine (Makkos 22a). **The second:** they say that it is not only that the Sages added and detracted; they also transgressed statute and

law in many matters that do not accord with reason and intellect, drawing near to doing what ought not to be done and keeping far from doing what ought to be done. **The third:** they say that the Sages derived things from the Torah that reason cannot bear to have expounded so, and included in this charge that they departed from the precision of the language and its usage. **The fourth:** they say that passages are found in the Aggadah of the Talmud in which the Sages spoke, Heaven forbid, disparagingly of the Master of all. At these they shake their heads and point with their fingers, making the words of the Sages out to be a forgery. **The fifth:** they say that the Aggadah of the Talmud contains extravagant talk with nothing substantial in it. **The sixth:** they say that the Sages were remote from the sciences, such as the science of the course of the heavens, and natural science. **The seventh:** they say that the Sages perverted justice and judgment against those who are not scholars, in order to take revenge on them and put them to shame; and that they likewise perverted justice regarding those who are not of the children of Israel, speaking of them as they pleased. Such a thing, they say, is neither fitting nor right to do, and all the more so for sages, who love the truth.

And so, having explained in the work *Tiferes Yisrael* what needed explaining concerning the Written Torah and the commandments it contains, until their righteousness went forth like brightness (cf. Yeshayahu 62:1), we now come in this work to explain the ways of the Oral Torah, and to remove the slander of lips (cf. Mishlei 4:24) from the sages of the world — for one who despises the Sages is included among those who say that the Torah is not from Heaven. We come, further, to clarify their words: those passages in the holy Talmud that seemed strange to these men.

And so: a well of water, dug by the servants of the God of Avraham, the disciples of Moshe, by their wisdom. A spring flowing out of Eden to water the whole face of the earth; from it live all in whom there is spirit and soul. Princes hollowed it out with the staff of their understanding (cf. Bamidbar 21:18); over it men quarreled, and in their envy they stopped it up. They ruined its pure spring and trampled it with their feet. They spoiled its clear waters, laid its spring waste and drained it dry, and rolled the stone over the mouth of the well, so that the shepherds could not water the scattered flock — for it is from this well that the shepherds water, and from it that their spirit finds rest. But now Hashem has made room for us (cf. Bereishis 26:22) to remove the stone from the mouth of the well and to clear away every pebble from it, until its waters rise higher and higher and cover every lofty hill, and become an overflowing stream that sweeps all before it. **And therefore the name** of this work is called *Be'er HaGolah*, the Well of the Exile. For a man of understanding will surely draw from it (cf. Mishlei

20:5); it is divided into seven wells, and its springs spread abroad into the distance. Praise to Him who rides the heavens (cf. Devarim 33:26), for with His help we have found living water. And thanks to the Master of thanksgivings, for we have found water in Be'er Sheva, which belongs to Yehudah — *liYehudah* (ליהודה), which is also the author's own name.

The First Well — holy waters, dug by princes, by masters of craft. Its waters set a man apart from every abomination, guard him from grievous sicknesses, heal and remove the afflictions of men, strengthen the weak and renew their strength. And from there it parts and becomes four heads (Bereishis 2:10).

The First Complaint is what they say: that the Sages added to the Torah — namely the decrees they decreed and added, until they had heaped the measure to overflowing. These are the waters of strife over which they contended, saying that the Torah writes (Devarim 4:2), "You shall not add." Furthermore, they say, there are two Torahs here: the Torah given from the mouth of Hashem, blessed be He, through Moshe, peace be upon him, and the Torah of the Sages, which is a Torah in its own right — so that there is not one Torah, as there ought to be. Furthermore, the Torah of Moshe is thereby deficient, since it must be completed by the commandments of the Sages. They also said that the Sages detracted from the Torah, while Scripture says (ibid.), "you shall not diminish." Such are their words.

There is no doubt that these things were said without study, for any man of study — even with only a slight grasp — would recognize their refutation. If we were to say that it is forbidden to add any commandment to what is written in the Torah, then Mordechai and Esther, who added the fourteenth and the fifteenth [of Adar], the days of Purim, upon Israel, added to the Torah and transgressed the "you shall not add" written in the Torah. Moreover, the error is refuted from the verse's own place. For if "you shall not add" meant that they may not add any decree upon Israel, then "you shall not diminish," written alongside it, would likewise mean that they may not remove anything from the Torah so as to nullify it. But does such a thing require a warning — that one not nullify something of the Torah — when the Torah has warned in many places against nullifying its commandments? And further: is that even called "diminishing"? It is not called diminishing at all, but nullifying the Torah, as Scripture says everywhere (Vayikra 26:14), "and if you will not listen and will not do." How does "diminishing" apply to one who nullifies the Torah? Rather, "you shall not diminish" means that within the commandment itself one may not diminish anything from it: one must perform the commandment as it ought to be

performed, with no diminution whatever. One may not say that although the commandment is to make four tzitzis upon four corners, if a garment has three corners he will make three tzitzis upon its three corners. And so too, certainly, "you shall not add" means that one may not add anything to the commandment itself, but must perform it exactly as it is to be performed, with no addition. For example: "you shall not add" means that one may not add a day to the festival of Sukkos or to the festival of Matzos. This is where he does so not out of doubt, and not as a fence and safeguard, but for the sake of the mitzvah of the festival of Sukkos or the festival of Matzos — and that is forbidden, since only seven days are to be kept, and no more. Likewise, one who adds to the four passages of tefillin and makes five, or adds to the two passages of the mezuzah and makes three, falls under "you shall not add." And so with "you shall not diminish": if he reduces the four compartments, making three compartments in the tefillin instead of four and placing two passages in a single compartment — so that all the passages are in fact in the tefillin, except that he made three compartments. And likewise if he makes five tzitzis on a garment that has five corners.

And this is worse than not performing the commandment at all and leaving it entirely undone. For if he leaves the commandment undone, there is nothing here but that he sits idle from the commandment. But one who diminishes from the commandment is one [who] alters the commandment by an act, and he therefore falls under a negative commandment. Thus one who made three tzitzis on his garment transgresses "you shall not diminish," whereas if he made no tzitzis at all, he has merely failed a commandment of "arise and do." It has now been explained that "you shall not diminish" means that one may not diminish from the commandment, and that "you shall not add" means the same — there is no doubt about it at all, and this is how our Sages received the interpretation of the commandment.

And when you investigate the site of this well, you will find it divided into four heads. The first is what the Sages explained of the commandment in the Torah, and this is what is called *divrei sofrim*, the words of the Scribes. The intent is not in the least that such a thing is merely of their own words, for it is Torah in the fullest sense, and one is liable for it just as one is liable for a matter set out explicitly in the Torah. It is called *divrei sofrim* because the interpretation of the commandment comes from the words of the Scribes, as will be explained.

The second consists of the commandments that are themselves *divrei sofrim*, for which the Sages brought a proof and an exposition from the Torah. Of these they said that the commandment is of their own words, and the verse is a mere

asmachta, a scriptural support. Many go wrong here, supposing that such a commandment truly has no connection whatever to the Torah, and that the Sages merely fashioned an exposition from the Torah for it, as though it were nothing but a turn of phrase. Those who say this are mistaken and have not understood the Sages' words. Heaven forbid that a single thing they said was said for the expansion of language and the ornament of expression — rather, all their words are truth. When they asked "whence is this?" and brought a proof from Scripture, there truly is a proof from Scripture for their words. This will be explained through a few instances, and these testify for the rest.

In the chapter *Kol HaBasar* (Chullin 106a): "Whomever the zav touches, and he has not rinsed his hands in water" (Vayikra 15:11) — R. Elazar ben Arach said: from here the Sages found support for *netilas yadayim*, the washing of the hands, from the Torah. [Aramaic: Rava said to Rav Nachman: What is the implication? He said to him: Because it is written "and he has not rinsed his hands in water," implying that had he rinsed he would be pure — yet he requires immersion! Rather, this is what it says: and another who has not rinsed is impure.] Thus far the Gemara. Now, to expound "and another who has not rinsed in water" appears to be an exceedingly remote exposition.

The explanation of this is as follows. You must know that *netilas yadayim* is a rabbinic prohibition, and that from the verse the Sages bring a proof that the hands receive impurity more than the other limbs do. The reason is that they are the instrument of touch and handle everything on the outside, and a thing of that kind is disposed to impurity. Just as contact within a concealed part of the body (*bais hasesarim*) does not receive impurity, since it is not fit for touching, so a thing that is the instrument of handling on the outside is more fit for impurity than anything else. The verse's principal exposition they gave in tractate Niddah (43a): just as his hands are external, so all is external — excluding contact within a concealed part of the body, which does not receive impurity. Even so, since Scripture writes "and his hands" and does not write "and his head he has not rinsed" — for the head too is external — it must be that "and his hands" is written to teach that the hands are more fit for impurity. For this reason the Sages derived from the verse and instituted *netilas yadayim*: because the hands are more fit for impurity than the rest of the body, for the reason we have given, namely that they are set apart for touching on the outside. And therefore the Sages instituted for them a distinct impurity with respect to *chullin*, ordinary unconsecrated food. This is what they expounded, "and another who has not rinsed in water is impure" — that is, because Scripture mentioned the hands in particular, they have a distinct impurity with respect to *chullin* even when they

have touched nothing, since they are set apart for touching on the outside, as though they had touched something impure. This is plain, and it is known to the wise of heart, that the hands are more prone to impurity than anything else. So although the commandment is of the Sages' own words, this commandment has support and warrant from Scripture — that the hands are the most prone to impurity of all. It is not that their attaching it to a verse is idle; rather they learned the rabbinic decree from the verse, as we have said. It is only that the derivation is exceedingly remote, and therefore the commandment is not Torah law. Nonetheless it does issue from the Torah — only remotely, and it is therefore rabbinic.

And so too in the chapter *Ein Ma'amidin* (Avodah Zarah 37b): boiled foods and pickled foods are forbidden. Whence these words? For the verse says (Devarim 2:28), "Food shall you sell me for money, that I may eat, and water... that I may drink" — just as the water is such as has not been altered by fire, so the boiled foods are such as have not been altered by fire. And the Gemara objects: is "fire" written at all? Rather, the prohibition is rabbinic, and the verse is a mere *asmachta*. Thus far the Gemara. The meaning is not that the verse is a mere allusion and turn of phrase; rather, the Sages learned the rabbinic decree from Scripture. For this is why it is written, "Food shall you sell me for money... and water... that I may drink": this food resembles water — fruits and vegetables that have not been altered, like water that has not been altered. Scripture is speaking of the ordinary way of things: a nation set apart from another nation — as Israel is set apart from all the nations — has no way of entering into connection and partnership with the nation from which it is separated, and they buy from one another only what has not been altered. Scripture therefore mentioned water, which is not altered, and food is like it. Certainly Scripture is speaking of the ordinary way of things and not of a commandment; nevertheless the Sages learned from it that it is the way of a nation to be set apart from another in the preparation of food. From this they derived this decree — that they decreed against *bishulei goyim*, food cooked by gentiles — so that there should be a separation of one nation from another. And this holds especially of food, which requires man's preparation, for food is the very life of man, since food sustains the man himself. This nation is set apart in its own essence from the other nation. Therefore food that has been made into food by someone of another nation, Israel must keep at a distance, since food is what sustains the man himself. Certainly, if it was not made into food by another nation, the food does not belong to them, since they did not make it food. But food made by another nation Israel must keep at a distance; and if he does not keep it at a distance, there is closeness and connection between them. So this matter has great support from Scripture —

only that Scripture is speaking of the ordinary way [of things]. And this is a support for the prohibition of *bishulei goyim*, which is forbidden because it constitutes closeness to them.

In the second chapter of Beitzah (15b), concerning *eruv tavshilin*: Whence these words? And it says there: as it is written (Shemos 16:23), "That which you would bake, bake, and that which you would cook, cook." R. Eliezer said: from here we learn that one bakes only upon what is already baked, and cooks only upon what is already cooked — from here, *eruv tavshilin* from the Torah. Thus far the Gemara. The explanation of this too is that the plain sense of the verse lies in its doubling of the language, "that which you would bake, bake," rather than writing "bake today," "cook today." It means: whatever you wish to bake, bake all of it today — the whole work of baking. Do not say: we will begin baking today, and if anything remains unbaked it will be baked tomorrow. It is not so; rather, all that you wish to bake, bake today, for tomorrow you will not be able to bake. Even if you have already begun the baking today, you will not complete it tomorrow. From this the Sages learned that there is a distinction between beginning the work and completing the baking and the cooking, and that one may not begin while it is still day and complete the work on Shabbos, for there is no baking or cooking on Shabbos at all. That is the case on Shabbos; but on another day of rest, such as Yom Tov, when one begins while it is still day and completes the work on Yom Tov for the needs of Shabbos, this is not reckoned as baking and cooking on Yom Tov, even though Yom Tov too is a day of rest. And this is not a remote derivation. Nevertheless, that it should be Torah law is not so; it is an *asmachta* to the Torah — meaning that it is remote from the Torah, to the point that one is not obligated in it by Torah law under a negative commandment. It stands rather at the level of a rabbinic decree, only that it has some proof and some hint from the Torah. If you examine these matters, the words of the Sages will not be light in your eyes. And wherever the Sages derived an *asmachta* from Scripture, when you examine it you will know that these things issue and branch out from the Torah. These matters are clear; none will be foolish in this except one who will not concede words of truth and rectitude. This will be explained further.

The third consists of the commandments the Sages decreed as a fence and a safeguard for the Torah. Of these commandments too there is no doubt that they join to the Torah itself. For you find that the positive commandments of the Torah are 248, the number of a man's limbs, as the Sages said (Makkos 23b). And since the commandments correspond in number to the limbs, the commandments must bear a relation to the limbs. Now nature has wisely given the limbs protection so that the limb should not be damaged — as you see that the eyes

have a covering, so that no damage should come to the eye. There are many other limbs that likewise have a protection against damage. How, then, should there be no protection for divine commandments? For wisdom decreed a greater protection in proportion to the magnitude of the harm, just as nature wisely made a protection for the eye, namely the covering over it: the eye is a very important limb, and it needs protection. So too nature made the nails for the fingers of the hand and the toes of the feet, so that they should not be battered as a man moves, and the hair of the head as a protection for the head. Every limb, according to its importance, has a protection from without.

And this — the thing that serves as a limb's protection — is other than the limb itself. Certainly the limbs and their form are the work of Hashem, blessed be He, and this act is to be ascribed to Hashem rather than to the action of nature; but the covering of the eye, which is the eye's protection, is to be ascribed rather to nature. So it is here: the body of the commandment Hashem, blessed be He, ordained, while the protection of the commandment — that is, a rabbinic commandment — the Sages decreed and effected. They are human beings, and their work is to be ascribed to nature, since Hashem, blessed be He, appointed them to this work.

Just as the protection of the eye and of the other limbs falls within the category of the creation, so too the decrees the Sages decreed to protect the commandments fall within the category of the Torah. That is why one is obligated to recite over them the blessing "who has sanctified us...", just as over the commandments of the Torah. And everything in the world likewise has its protection and its remedy, which Hashem, blessed be He, in His wisdom ordained for it so that it should be guarded from harm; this is known to anyone who knows this subject. How, then, should there be no protection for the commandments of the Torah? The commandments need protection all the more, since "the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Bereishis 8:21) and there is reason to fear that they will be damaged. They therefore require fences and safeguards and protection, like a man's limbs. Everything under the sun has a protection by which it is guarded from coming to damage, and just so the commandments of the Torah need protection and a fence.

And just as, with the protection of a limb, there ought not to be a guard for the guard — because a thing cannot be subordinate to something that is itself subordinate, but only to what is primary — so too the Sages said everywhere that we do not decree a decree upon a decree. The single decree, which is a protection to the commandment, joins with the commandment itself and is subordinate to

what is primary. But a decree upon a decree may not be decreed, since a thing is subordinate only to what is primary. This is a matter of the greatest depth.

Thus has been explained the character of these commandments: they join to the Torah in complete union inasmuch as they are the Torah's protection, just as the guard joins with the limb until it enters into the limb's own category and the name "limb" is applied to it. So too with these commandments, which are a fence for the Torah: there is no doubt that they enter into one category with the Torah, so that the name "Torah" is said of them all as one. This is entirely clear.

The fourth consists of commandments that are not for a safeguard and a fence. Included in this are the commandments instituted at one time or another, such as the Chanukah lamp and the like. Here the question presses harder: in what way are these commandments bound up with the commandments of the Torah, such that they are not a Torah in their own right — so that there are not two Torahs here, but one Torah? Yet when you examine the matter, here too there is no difficulty. For inasmuch as all the commandments that are of the Sages' own words direct a man aright, until he is made complete in all the deeds that ought to be done and is kept far from the deeds one ought to keep far from, all of them together are for this reason a single work of direction.

Nor should you ask: if so, why were they not given by Hashem, blessed be He? The answer is as it is written (cf. Bereishis 2:7), "and He breathed into his nostrils the spirit of the breath of life" — while all natural things come from nature. Nature acts, for Hashem, blessed be He, so ordained nature to produce natural things. And precisely so here: it is not fitting that everything be alike. Things that are supernal, and that possess a supernal intellect — as the commandments of the Torah are — come from Hashem, blessed be He. Things that are not so much a supernal divine intellect, namely the commandments of the Sages' own words, come from the intellect of the Sages. For just as Hashem, blessed be He, ordained nature so that nature produces what is corporeal by the will of Hashem, blessed be He, while what is separate and incorporeal comes from Hashem, blessed be He, Himself — and both together bring man to completion — so precisely here: what is wholly divine intellect, it is fitting that Hashem, blessed be He, should effect; and what is not divine intellect in that way, Hashem, blessed be He, appointed the Sages to effect, just as He appointed nature to produce what belongs to nature to produce. Through the two together the Torah is the perfection of man.

That Hashem, blessed be He, appointed the Sages to institute what ought to be instituted is already set out in Scripture, as it is written (Devarim 17:11), "You

shall not turn aside from the thing that they tell you." Hashem, blessed be He, thus appointed the Sages to institute what is fitting according to their apprehension. No one would say that what nature does is not from Hashem, blessed be He, for He, blessed be He, ordained nature. And precisely so here: everything the Sages instituted is from Hashem, blessed be He, who appointed the Sages to effect with their intellect what ought to be instituted. This is why we recite over these commandments instituted by the Sages the blessing "who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us," as it appears in the second chapter of Shabbos (23a) — to say that Hashem, blessed be He, ordained it all. So when you examine these matters, it is clear that everything is as it ought to be.

And in the second chapter of Yevamos (21a) the Gemara says: Rav said — there is an allusion to the *shniyos* (the secondary degrees of forbidden relations, prohibited by the Sages) in the Torah, as it says (Vayikra 18:27), "for all these abominations the people of the land did." [Aramaic: "These" implies severe ones, from which it follows that there are mild ones; and what are those? The *shniyos*.] Rav Yehudah said [from here]: (Koheles 12:9) "He weighed (*izen*, זין — of the same root as *ozen*, a handle) and searched out and set in order many proverbs." Ulla said: before Shlomo came, the Torah was like a basket that had no handles, until Shlomo came and made handles for it. R. Oshaya said: from here — (Mishlei 4:15) "Avoid it, do not pass by it, turn away from it." Rav Ashi said: R. Oshaya's parable — to what may the matter be compared? To a man guarding an orchard. If he guards it from outside, the whole of it is guarded; from inside, only what lies before him is guarded. But this statement of Rav Ashi is an error, for there at least what lies before him is guarded, whereas here, were it not for the *shniyos*, a man would come upon the forbidden relation itself. Rav Kahana said: from here — (Vayikra 18:30) "And you shall keep My charge": make a safeguard for My charge. Abaye said to Rav Yosef: But that is Torah law! He said to him: It is rabbinic, and the verse is a mere *asmachta*. Thus far the Gemara.

When you examine these words, you will find that each of them gave a distinct reason for the commandments the Sages decreed. It is fitting to keep far from things that are themselves also sin. Even if such a thing is not so grave a sin as a forbidden relation by Torah law, it is nonetheless a sin as well. That is why they decreed the *shniyos*: the forbidden relation is prohibited because it is a grave abomination, and accordingly the *shniyah*, which is less than this, is not "severe" — but it is "mild" — in sin. For what is close to what is severe is milder than it; yet it is impossible that the one should be a severe sin while what is near to it counts as no sin whatever. That is not so. Rather, the one is severe and grave, and what

they decreed is close to it. So with the prohibition of Shabbos: the forbidden labor is grave, and the *shevus* — the rabbinically restricted activity — is also a sin, though not so grave. This is the sense of what the Sages decreed.

According to Rav Yehudah, the decrees the Sages decreed upon the words of Torah are a completion of the commandments. Had there been no *shniyos* to guard the forbidden relations, the commandments would not have held fast to Israel; Israel would simply have transgressed them. It is like the basket: when it has no handles, the basket does not take hold of the one who carries it, and only by the handles does the basket take hold. So too, through the rabbinic commandments the Torah has a hold, and it does not fall but stands.

In R. Oshaya's view, what the Sages decreed is withdrawal and complete distancing from sin, and this is a great excellence for a man — that he keep himself far from sin. That is the sense of "Avoid it, do not pass by it, turn away from it" (Mishlei 4:15): that a man keep entirely far from sin. It is nothing other than a complete distancing and withdrawal from sin.

Rav Kahana derives it from what is written (Vayikra 18:30), "And you shall keep My charge" — make a safeguard for My charge. This is as we said above: Hashem, blessed be He, gave the Torah to man, and it is a protection for man against destruction, to give him life. That much is from Hashem, blessed be He — and you, make a safeguard for it. It is as you find with the important limbs, where Hashem, blessed be He, ordained a protection for those limbs by means of nature, and it is by this that the creation of the limb is a complete creation. So too, when there is a safeguard for the commandment, the commandment stands in its completeness; and if there is no safeguard for the charge, the commandment is not in its completeness. In any case, from the words of all of them we learn a clear reason why it is impossible to do without the commandments of the Sages.

And in the chapter *Osin Pasin* (Eruvin 21b) the Gemara expounds the verse "And more than these, my son, take heed" (Koheles 12:12): "[Take heed] with *divrei sofrim* — the words of the Scribes — more than with the words of Torah. For the words of Torah contain positive and negative commandments, whereas with *divrei sofrim*, one who transgresses them is liable to death. And should you say: since there is substance in them, why were they not written down? — 'Of making many books there is no end' (ibid.)." Thus far.

On this point too the critics have multiplied their complaint: how can it possibly be that a man should take more care with *divrei sofrim* than he takes with the words of Torah? But there is nothing astonishing in this at all. We have already

said that a decree the Sages decreed is precisely what is fitting according to their wisdom; and since man is himself likewise human, there is no doubt that his punishment comes upon him the more swiftly. Consider: man is a natural being, and if he sins in a natural matter — if he draws near to fire — he is burned at once, more than if he had sinned in divine matters. If he eats *terumah*, the priestly portion, in a state of impurity, then although he has sinned in a holy and divine matter, since *terumah* is holy, this is still not like one who sins in natural matters: the moment a man puts his finger into the fire, the finger is burned. That is because man is himself natural, and therefore in this world, which is natural, if he acts against nature his punishment comes upon him swiftly. But one who eats *terumah* in impurity, sinning in matters that are wholly divine, is punished rather in the World to Come, which is not natural; and if punishment does come upon him in this world, it does not come so swiftly.

The very same holds here. When a man sins against a decree of the Sages — which is the human intellect — the punishment comes upon him immediately, because that intellect is close to him in this world by force of the Sages' decree. But one who sins against the commandments of the Torah, which are divine, is punished rather in the World to Come, for the World [to Come] is divine and is not close to him. Even though, as regards the sin in the World to Come, the punishment for a commandment of the Torah is certainly the greater, still, on this particular point — that the punishment comes swiftly in this world — the rabbinic decree is the more severe, since what he sins against is a level of intellect that belongs to this world. That is why he receives death and is removed from this world. Examine this closely and you will find it entirely clear. Because the commandments of the Torah belong to a very lofty level, the punishment for them is severe and harsh indeed; yet on this one point — that the punishment comes swiftly — the rabbinic commandments are more severe. Because it is the Rabbis who decreed them, death comes swiftly, and a man is scorched by their decree and by their coals, for he has transgressed something that is closest of all to man, as a rabbinic decree is.

There is a further point here, and a profound one: the statement that one who transgresses their words is liable to death. As we said, rabbinic decrees are called a fence (*gader*) for the Torah; and just as a fence divides and interposes between one thing and another, so the rabbinic commandments divide and separate a man from sin. Were there no rabbinic commandments, a man would come to sin far more; through them he is kept separate from sin. Something of this kind counts as the form and the completion of a thing, since the form of a thing is what marks it off from another thing. The rabbinic commandments, which separate

him from sin, therefore count as it were as the form and completion of the body of the commandment, since it is by them that the separation from sin is effected. And when he sins and breaks down the fence, that is the nullification of the form and of the completion — and there is no privation (*he'eder*) like it, nullifying what counts as the form and completion of a thing. Therefore privation and death come upon him in turn, since he has brought privation and nullification upon something that serves as form and completion. This is the sense of the verse (Koheles 10:8), "He who breaches a fence, a snake will bite him." That is: one who breaches something that is a fence — something that divides between one thing [and another], which is what a fence is — nullifies something that serves as form, form being the marking off of one thing from another. Such an act certainly counts as privation, and therefore the snake bites him: the snake is privation itself, for it was the snake that brought privation and death into the world. This matter is well explained in wisdom. Accordingly, wherever the Sages mention a fence set so that a man not come to sin, they say that one who transgresses their fence incurs death.

In tractate Berachos (4b) they teach: "A man should not come in from the field and say, 'I will eat a little and drink a little, and afterward I will recite krias Shema and pray' — for if he does so, sleep will seize him and he will sleep the whole night. Rather, when a man comes in from the field, let him go into the bais medrash: if he is accustomed to read Scripture, let him read; if he is accustomed to study Mishnah, let him study; and afterward let him recite krias Shema and pray. And whoever transgresses the words of the Sages is liable to death." Thus far. Note that here too they attached the words "whoever transgresses the words of the Sages is liable to death" — because the Sages set a fence here, so that a man should not come to neglect krias Shema and the prayer, and therefore should not eat beforehand. One who transgresses a fence they set to keep him from falling into a prohibition is bitten by a snake, as we said. For through the Sages' fence there is a distinction between one thing and another, as has been explained; and where there is such a distinction, that counts as the thing's form, since every form is the distinction between one thing and another. When the distinction is removed, that counts as the nullification of the form, since he nullifies what is form. It is fitting, then, that his own form be nullified as well, and that he receive death. This was explained above: if there is no prohibition of the *shniyos*, he comes to transgress the forbidden relations themselves. One who transgresses the prohibition of the *shniyos* therefore brings privation and nullification upon the commandment, and so he himself is fit for privation.

The Gemara then said: "And should you say — if there is substance in them, why were they not written down?" That is: granted that it is not fitting for them to be written together with the Torah, because of the difference between them, as we have said — but why were they not written down on their own, like all the holy books? To this it answers (Koheles 12:12), "Of making many books there is no end." The meaning is that the words of the Sages are not comparable to the words of Torah. The words of Torah are the foundation of the commandment, while the words of the Sages are the particulars that belong to the commandment. Particulars run on without limit, and because they have no end, they were not written down at all. Had a portion of them been written, the thing would be deficient, since it is impossible to write all of it. That is why they were not written down at all, not even in part. This is clear.

Now as to the reward for keeping them: in the chapter *Osin Pasin* (Eruvin 21b) they expound the verse "Both new and old, my beloved, I have stored away for you" (Shir HaShirim 7:14) — "Knesses Yisrael, the Community of Israel, said before HaKadosh Baruch Hu: 'Many decrees have I decreed upon myself, more than You decreed upon me, and I have kept them.'" Thus far. The explanation is this. Knesses Yisrael takes the greater pride in the decrees they decreed upon themselves — that is, the rabbinic decrees — which they took upon themselves without HaMakom, the Omnipresent, having decreed them, as will be explained. This shows their own holiness, in that they do this without compulsion, and it shows service out of love. One who serves out of fear adds nothing to the service, since he is not obligated in the matter; but one who does add to the service shows that he serves out of love. That is why they say, "Both new and old, my beloved, I have stored away for you": the word *dodi* (דודי, "my beloved") denotes love, as in "Your loves are good" (Shir HaShirim 1:2). The meaning, then, is that the "new" commandments, which are the rabbinic commandments, show that they serve out of love. And the verse places the "new" — the rabbinic decrees — before the "old," on account of their excellence, since they are what indicates complete love.

And in the chapter *Mi Shemeiso* (Berachos 20b): R. Avira expounded — sometimes he said it in the name of Rav Asi — [Aramaic:] "The ministering angels said before HaKadosh Baruch Hu: 'It is written in Your Torah (Devarim 10:17), "who shows no favor" — yet do You not show favor to Israel, as it is written (Bamidbar 6:26), "May Hashem lift His countenance toward you"?' He said to them: 'And shall I not show them favor? I wrote in My Torah (Devarim 8:10), "And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless," and they are exacting with themselves down to a *kezayis*, an olive's bulk, and down to a *kebeitzah*, an egg's bulk.'" It is therefore not fitting that He deal with them by strict law, but rather beyond the

letter of the law — corresponding to the measure by which Israel cleave to Him, may He be blessed, which is a measure beyond the letter of the law. And so Hashem, blessed be He, deals with Israel by this very measure.

In the second chapter of Yevamos (20a): Abaye said, whoever fulfills the words of the Sages is called "holy." Rava said to him, "And one who does not fulfill the words of the Rabbis — is it merely that he is not called 'holy'? Surely he is not called 'wicked' either!" Rather, said Rava, sanctify yourself with what is permitted to you. The explanation is this. The rabbinic commandments are a withdrawal from sin, in that a man withdraws from sin of himself, entirely — for Hashem, blessed be He, did not decree it upon him. And when he withdraws of his own accord, as with the rabbinic commandments, that is holiness for him: everything holy is separated from what is not holy, and so one who takes upon himself commandments that are not from the Torah is called "holy." Rava then objects: on this account it would follow that one who does not fulfill the words of the Rabbis is merely not called "holy," but is not called "wicked" — whereas in truth one who does not fulfill the words of the Rabbis is called "wicked" as well, since the rabbinic commandments are obligatory upon a man; the Torah itself says (Devarim 17:11), "You shall not turn aside," and so on. Although we told you above that the rabbinic commandments indicate service of Hashem, blessed be He, out of love, that applies to the very acceptance of them at the time the Sages decreed the commandment; but once they have decreed, whoever transgresses their commandment is certainly wicked. Moreover, for the community of Israel as a whole, who take the Sages' decree upon themselves, the acceptance is certainly out of love — but the individual who transgresses a rabbinic commandment is called "wicked." And what Rava said, "and you shall be holy," means that a man should sanctify himself with what is permitted to him. This refers to the many matters the Sages did not decree, which are abstentions belonging to holiness; concerning these the Torah said that a man should sanctify himself through abstinence and additional holiness. But one who transgresses the words of the Sages is called "wicked." Once you understand these matters, you will know the greatness of their excellence and of their reward.

And in the first chapter of Chagigah (3b): "The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails well planted are the masters of assemblies; they were given from one shepherd" (Koheles 12:11). Why were the words of the Sages compared to goads? To tell you: just as the goad directs the cow into its furrow, so words of Torah direct those who study them from the ways of death to the ways of life. Might one say: just as this goad is movable, so words of Torah are movable? Scripture therefore says, "and like nails well planted." Might one say: just as this

nail diminishes and does not increase, so words of Torah diminish and do not increase? Scripture therefore says "planted" — just as what is planted is fruitful and multiplies, so words of Torah are fruitful and multiply. "The masters of assemblies" — these are the *talmidei chachamim*, the Torah scholars, who sit in assemblies [assemblies] and occupy themselves with Torah. These declare impure and those declare pure; these forbid and those permit; these disqualify and those declare fit. And if you should say, "How, then, am I to learn Torah?" — Scripture therefore says, "they were given from one shepherd": one God gave them, one leader spoke them, from the mouth of the Master of all deeds, blessed be He, as it says (Shemos 20:1), "And God spoke all these words, saying." Thus far the passage.

They came here to explain that when the Sages expound the Torah — and likewise in their disputes — one must not suppose that even where they have expounded the Torah their words are not necessarily so, and might be altered. Their words are binding, and no one may shift them. And so with everything else the Sages have expounded in the Torah, as stated. There is a further way to explain it as well: in this passage they came to make clear to you the excellence of the words of the Sages in themselves. They are compared to a goad because the goad straightens the cow into its furrow until it walks evenly. So too the words of the Sages straighten a man onto the even path, and in that path is life. Now the conventional law (*das nimusis*), which men laid down in order to hold human society together, also straightens men out, so that a man does not swallow his fellow alive — and one might therefore think that the words of the Sages are the same, that they are nothing more than conventional law, meant only to hold human society together, and that society might be set right in some other way instead. Against this the passage says, "Might one say: just as the goad is movable, so words of Torah are movable?" That is: do not say that words of Torah need not be precisely as they are, and that they are like conventional law, which does not follow the intellect but serves only to preserve society — so that things could stand otherwise and still preserve society, in which case the words of the Sages would be movable from place to place, since they could be shifted to some other arrangement that would be equally good for man. Against this the passage says that words of Torah are like nails well planted: as the nail is driven firmly into its place, so are words of Torah. Because they follow the intellect, and the intellect requires them, they are firm, and nothing dislodges them from their place.

There is a further way to explain the statement that words of Torah are not movable. It means that through words of Torah a man cleaves to the supernal beings, so that even if all the winds come they do not move him from his place —

as it is written (Tehillim 1:2–3), "But his desire is in the Torah of Hashem, and in His Torah he meditates day and night; and he shall be like a tree planted beside streams of water." That is the sense of "like nails well planted."

It further says that words of Torah are fruitful and multiply, because the Torah is the supernal blessing, as the verse writes (Tehillim 1:3), "which yields its fruit in its season, and everything he does prospers." It is for this reason that they said (Avodah Zarah 19b): whoever occupies himself with words of Torah, his possessions prosper. Three things are mentioned here. First, that words of Torah direct a man from the ways of death to the ways of life. Second, that they are like nails well planted and are not movable. Third, that they are fruitful and multiply. Understand these three things said here about the Torah; they are known to those who understand.

In this he also hinted that through the Torah a man acquires eternal life, as he said that words of Torah direct a man from the ways of death to the ways of life. And lest you say that although the Torah stands eternal and life is in it, it is nevertheless subject to some change — against this he said that words of Torah are not movable at all, but stand fixed. And lest you then say that they therefore admit of no change whatever, and that words of Torah are not fruitful and multiplying but remain just as they are — against this he said that words of Torah are fruitful and multiply, by virtue of the blessing that is in the Torah.

And it says, "the masters of assemblies." The explanation is this. It is impossible for the Sages' understanding to run along a single way, and impossible that there be no division among them corresponding to the divisions in their intellects. For with every single matter, it is impossible that a thing have only one aspect. Even if a thing is impure, it cannot be that it has no side of some aspect toward purity; and likewise if a thing is pure, it cannot be that it has no aspect of impurity. Men are divided in intellect, and it is impossible that the intellects of all men run along a single way, as will be explained. Therefore each one receives one aspect, according to the division among their intellects. That is why he called them "masters of assemblies," meaning that they sit in assemblies and occupy themselves with Torah: though they are divided in their intellects, they nevertheless gather together — and when they are gathered, all the divided opinions are present among them.

It then says: should you ask, "How, then, am I to learn Torah?" — to this it says (Koheles 12:11), "all of them were given from one shepherd." One God gave them, one leader spoke them, from the mouth of the Master of all deeds. The explanation is this. When Hashem, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Israel, He

gave every single matter in the Torah according to what that matter is. He said that a given ruling has an aspect toward acquittal and an aspect toward liability; and in a ruling of prohibition and permission, there is an aspect toward permission and an aspect toward prohibition; and so with fit and unfit, one aspect is the opposite of the other. It is as it is in the world, where a thing is found composed of opposites. You can say of the tree that it is related to the element of water, and this is true — there is water in it. And you can say that it has something of the element of air, and this too is true, for the element of air is in it. You will not find anything that is entirely simple. So too in the Torah: there is no single thing so entirely impure that it has no side of purity in it, and it has a side of impurity as well. So when one Sage teaches concerning some matter that it is pure, and gives his reason and his reasoning for purity, he has stated one aspect according to what the thing is; and the one who says it is impure and states his reason has likewise stated one aspect.

And this is why it says that they are all from the mouth of the Master of deeds. Why was it necessary to say here "from the mouth of the Master of all deeds," and what has that to do with the matter? Rather, it means this: just as Hashem, blessed be He, is Master of all deeds, and from Him comes the composite world, which contains things that differ, one the opposite of the other — so it is here. Every thing has differing aspects, for the world is not simple, without any variation of aspects. If so, the one who declares impure and the one who declares pure — this one has learned Torah just as the other has, for each of them has an aspect of his own; and Hashem, blessed be He, created everything, and it is He who created the thing that has two aspects. Only with respect to halacha in practice there is no doubt that one aspect is more primary than the other. It is as with the work of Hashem: although a thing is composite, still the one component is not like the other, but one is more primary. For the tree is composed of the four elements, yet the primary element, which predominates in it, is the element of air, as is known. So too, although a single matter has differing aspects, all of them were given by Hashem, blessed be He; only that one of them is more primary, and it is decisive, and it is the halacha. Even so, do not say that what is not primary counts for nothing. That is not so: one who hears all the opinions has grasped the matter according to the differing aspects the matter has, and has learned Torah according to what the matter itself is, namely a thing with differing aspects. It is only with respect to halacha that one aspect prevails over the other.

Sometimes the aspects are entirely equal in themselves; then both are from Hashem, blessed be He, in equal measure, and there is nothing to decide between them. Such was the dispute of Hillel and Shammai, concerning which a heavenly

voice went out [and said], "These and these are the words of the living God" (Eruvin 13b). That is to say, the two are equal in their aspects, the one just like the other; and since the aspects are equal, both are the words of the living God. For Hashem, blessed be He, gave the Torah and commanded everything according to its aspect: if the aspect is toward purity, He commanded that it be pure; and conversely, if the aspect is toward impurity, He commanded that it be impure. When the aspects are equal, of that it says, "These and these are the words of the living God." The one who declares it pure — his words are the words of God, since He, blessed be He, declares it pure from the side of this aspect of purity. And the one who declares it impure — his words too are the words of God, since He, blessed be He, declares it impure according to the aspect of impurity.

This is why the Gemara asks there (Eruvin 13b): since "these and these are the words of the living God" in equal measure, why then was it said that the halacha follows Beis Hillel? And it answered: because they were gentle and forbearing, and so on. The matter is this. The reason Beis Shammai gave, out of intellectual acuity — for they were exceedingly sharp — carries the same weight as the reason Beis Hillel gave; only that of those who are insulted and do not insult in return, and so on, Scripture says (Shoftim 5:31), "and those who love Him are like the sun going forth in its might." We have explained this elsewhere at length: this quality is the quality of complete simplicity. Their words are therefore fit to be the halacha, for the halacha is simple intellect. The intellect follows the quality a man possesses; and when a man bears insult, he possesses the quality of simplicity, and he follows the simple intellect, which is what is fit to be halacha — as you will grasp when you understand words of wisdom. Hence the halacha follows Beis Hillel, for their words join with the wholly simple intellect.

Know further that gentleness and forbearance is a quality fit for halacha, because the halacha is the straight path, which does not swerve from uprightness and which goes wholly to Hashem, blessed be He. That is why this is called *halacha*, and we have already explained this at length. Gentleness and forbearance is the quality most suited to this. All forcefulness and power goes out, by the strength of its force, toward some other side, outside of uprightness; but of a man who is gentle [and] bears insult, one cannot say that he goes out forcefully toward some other side, outward. For this reason the words of Beis Hillel are fit to be the halacha. Although in point of wisdom it was Beis Shammai who were the sages (Yevamos 14a), attaining so much that their words too were the words of the living God, nevertheless in terms of what Beis Hillel were in themselves — gentle and forbearing — they were the ones suited to uprightness. Their words

were therefore established as the halacha. This too is quite correct; but the first explanation is the primary and clear one, as you will understand.

You should know that it was specifically of the dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel that they said (Eruvin 13b), "These and these are the words of the living God." For they were the first to be in dispute over the Torah: before the dispute of Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel there was no dispute in the Torah at all. And when Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel came, their dispute was of such a kind that the words of both were "the words of the living God," as explained above. It would not be fitting for Israel to descend from the higher level, in which they had no dispute in Torah, to this level, in which there is dispute among them and one side's words are void. Therefore that dispute was one in which "these and these are the words of the living God," and only afterward did the other disputes arise. Understand this well. We have explained elsewhere, further, the expression "the words of the living God," and this is not the place to expand.

As for their claim that the Sages diminished the Torah — that the Torah said (Devarim 25:3), "forty shall he strike him," while they said (Makkos 22a) that the number of lashes is thirty-nine — their thinking so is exactly as has been explained: it is the difference in the excellence of wisdom that produces it. The Sages in particular had received a divine wisdom in hand, on the authority of the master of all the prophets, as they said (Avos 1:1), "Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it," and so on. In this way they received the divine wisdom one from another, generation after generation, down to the latest generations. You will already find this in the work *Gur Aryeh*, on Parshas Ki Seitzei (Devarim ch. 25, note 3): what they had received is that the number forty for the lashes corresponds to the formation of man, who is formed in forty days — as is well known — the completion of his formation falling on the fortieth day. Now the sin a man commits comes to him from the side of matter alone; from the side of form there is no sin whatever. Had there been no matter, man would have been holy and pure of sin; it is only that privation is something belonging to matter. This is plain to everyone, since the first sin came by way of the woman, who is material in relation to the man, and he is reckoned as form. And it is known that form takes hold last. Accordingly, the form takes hold in man on the fortieth day, in keeping with the rule of form, which takes hold last.

And when a man is in a state of sin, the form too — which subsists in matter — is in sin. That is why it said, "forty shall he strike him." The rationale for lashes, that he is to be struck forty, corresponds to the formation of the child: that is, this formation, which came to be over forty days, is an evil formation, and so he is to

be struck according to the number of the formation that has gone bad. When he is in sin, then, the sentence of forty lashes lies upon him, corresponding to the formation of the matter together with its form, which took hold on the fortieth day. But once he has been struck thirty-nine and has received the punishment that falls on the side of matter, there is no longer sin in the form, and he returns to being pure. In sum: the striking pertains to the form as well, so long as the form is joined to matter — and what is joined to what is impure is itself impure. In respect of the essence of the form itself, however, there is no sin in it. This is why, when it said "forty shall he strike him," that applies to the form too, inasmuch as the form has a connection to matter. But that striking should pertain to the form alone, in respect of itself, does not apply at all. And when one counts each lash singly on its own, the last of them corresponds to the form, which takes hold on the fortieth day; and in the essence of the form there is neither sin nor deficiency. Therefore they lash him only thirty-nine. Here, then, is wisdom of the highest and most wondrous order.

And the verse proves this explicitly, for the verse separates "by number" from "forty." Had "by number" been joined to "forty," I would have said that when the count is made one by one as they lash him, he is to be struck forty — for the term "number" denotes a counting of one after another. But that is not the case: when he lashes him and counts one after another, the lashes are not forty. Therefore it divides the word "by number" from "forty" and says "forty shall he strike him" — meaning that the penalty upon him is "forty shall he strike him." But when he is actually struck and the count is made one by one, the lashes are only thirty-nine.

And in the Gemara it says (Makkos 22b): [Aramaic: "What is the reasoning of the *tanna kamma* (the first Tanna), who holds that they lash him thirty-nine? Had it been written 'forty shall he strike him by number,' it would be as you say; but now that it is written 'by number, forty' — a number that sums up and completes to forty."] That is to say: the word "by number" is not attached to "forty," for if it were, it should have written "forty shall he strike him by number." Rather, the sense of "by number" is a number that sums up and completes to "forty." This too is an exceedingly wondrous precision of wisdom. Rashi, of blessed memory, explained (Devarim 25:2): "Had it been vocalized *bammispar* (בַּמִּסְפָּר) with a patach," and so on. He means: had it written *bammispar* with a patach, I would have explained it as "by the known number," namely "forty shall he strike him." But since it is written with a sheva, it cannot be explained as the known number, for then it would have been vocalized *bammispar* with a patach. And when Rashi explains that it stands in the construct, he does not mean that it is construct on account of the sheva — we do not find that the prefixed *bes* with a sheva marks

the construct, and still less that a word should stand construct with the verse that follows it. He means only that its sense is not "the known number," which would make the verse read "and he shall strike him according to his wickedness" by the known number, namely the "forty shall he strike him" written after it. Nor is it possible to explain "and he shall strike him according to his wickedness" as "by a number of forty" indefinitely, for saying "by a number of forty" carries no sense at all; it should then have written "a number of forty." Its meaning is therefore: "by a number that sums up and completes forty shall he strike him."

And when you understand, there are further reliable matters to grasp concerning the number of thirty-nine lashes — that the Sages fell one short — and this runs deeper still. It is this. Whatever measure the Torah has fixed undoubtedly has a reason. Take this case: the Torah said "forty shall he strike him," the reason being that it corresponds to the formation of the child, who is formed in forty days. So the Torah said "forty shall he strike him," as though to say that he is to be struck corresponding to that formation, which takes forty days. Yet it is impossible to strike him forty by count, since the last of them is not subject to counting: counting is of particulars, and the last of the days of formation — the one that finishes and completes — is not subject to a particular count. Therefore, where the verse speaks of the lashes in general terms and not by way of particulars, it said "forty shall he strike him," since the law is to strike him forty, corresponding to the formation of the child. But in counting one after another, there is no particular count for the last, and so it reaches only thirty-nine. This is likewise the secret of the verse (Vayikra 23:16), "you shall count fifty," when in fact the counting was only forty-nine (Rashi there). For the fiftieth is what completes, and what completes is not a particular and is not subject to counting. Therefore it can only be explained as the number that sums up and completes the number fifty. Even so, when Scripture states the matter in general terms it said, "you shall count fifty days." And when you understand this, you will know that this is the first explanation. These are the ways of wisdom and the secrets of the Torah, which are deeper than the sea.

Now that these matters have been made clear to you, you will drink in thirstily all the words of the Sages together — the forbidden and the permitted, the invalid and the valid, the impure and the pure alike. Their words are no addition to the Torah of Moshe and no subtraction from it, God forbid; they join and unite with the Torah of Moshe. They are a crown of glory upon her head, disclosing the goodness of her sense and her interpretation. They are a safeguard for restraint and for holiness, and for those who keep them the World to Come is an inheritance, while in this world such a man receives blessing and holiness. We

have already said that for a man who is looking for pretexts no answer will ever suffice, since he will go searching for still other matters. But what we found them asking, we have answered. "If it is with scoffers, He scoffs" — while upon the humble, who acknowledges the truth, may Hashem, blessed be He, bestow His favor and His kindness. With this, the present complaint is settled.

The Second Well — pure waters. They look like the turbid waves of the sea, and yet they are clear, limpid and lucid; separate and guarded from every admixture; no stranger has ever gone down into their depths. They give knowledge to the simple and the brutish; they are lovely to the heart and give light to the eyes.

The Second Complaint is what they said: that in some places the Sages brought near matters that are not fit to be brought near. This too they had no business supposing. We see the rest of what is found in the Sages' words, and all of it is righteous speech and true judgment; so one ought rather to suppose that the remainder of their words — those that look remote in these critics' eyes — go along with all the rest. They should have set their minds to look closely into those words, and then they would have found the truth in them. For there is no doubt that what makes the words of the Sages appear remote is the difference in the level of the wisdom. The Sages, of blessed memory, held by tradition words of wisdom — divine wisdom — and their ways are founded upon that wisdom. Therefore a man who has no access to those ways, but only to natural ways and to human intellect, finds their words remote from him. And so the same difference is found between the Sages' understanding and the understanding of other men as is found in the Torah itself: many things in the Torah are remote from human apprehension, because the words of the Torah are divine and are utterly separate from human apprehension. The words of the Sages are of the same order, for their words too are supremely divine. That is why some of their words are hard to grasp the reason of — because their words are divine matters, just as they received them.

On this basis the Sages said in the second chapter of Eruvin (21b): [Aramaic: "Rav Papa the son of Rav Acha bar Ada said in the name of Rava bar Ulla: Anyone who mocks the words of the Sages is judged in boiling excrement, as it is written (Koheles 12:12), 'and much *lahag* (לֹהַג — 'prattling,' and also 'poring over') is a weariness of the flesh.' He said to him: Is it written 'and much *la'ag* (לֹאֵג, 'mocking') is a weariness of the flesh'? Rather — anyone who pores over them tastes the taste of flesh."] Thus far the Gemara. Rava came to disagree with Rav Papa only about the interpretation of the verse; as to the primary point of the matter — that anyone who mocks the words of the Sages is judged in boiling

excrement — he certainly concedes it, as is stated in a number of places. The explanation is as we have said. The words of the Sages are built upon the divine intellect, which is entirely separate from natural man. The divine intellect is not joined to man; there is only the bond of existence — it is found together with him, but it is not embedded in his nature. And one who mocks the words of the Sages puts distance between himself and this divine intellect, which is separate from corporeal man, stands at a higher excellence than natural man, and is separate from him. The philosophers have already dealt at length with the level of the intellect that is entirely separate. One who mocks this intellect, separate from man as it is, cleaves to its opposite. For there are two things separate from man. The first is the divine intellect, which is separate from man by reason of its excellence. The second is what issues out of man, which is separate from man by reason of the depth of its baseness — like waste matter, which is expelled from man. So when a man mocks the one that is separate from man by excellence, and puts distance between himself and it, he is judged by its opposite: by what is separate from man by reason of its baseness, which is boiling excrement. That is to say, he is judged in Gehinnom, which is separate from mankind at large by reason of the baseness of that level. For Gehinnom comprises a great many levels, and there is a level within Gehinnom that corresponds to that base and distant level, and it is called "boiling excrement." The relation of this level, in which the mockers are judged, to the level the righteous attain after death is like the relation of a man's excrement to the man himself. Just as excrement is entirely separate from a man, so is this level, in which the mockers are judged, entirely separate from the level of the righteous as a whole. The mockers are far off, wholly separate from mankind at large, at the very furthest remove — as far off as excrement, which is separate from man. Since they distanced themselves from the intellect that is separate from man by excellence, a man of that sort is judged by its opposite, as has been explained. On this reading, the verse (Koheles 12:12) means the following. "And much *lahag*" — one who talks much and mocks; his end is "a weariness of the flesh," which is the excrement expelled from the flesh by straining, since everything is expelled by straining. Because he distances himself from the intellect, which is separate from man by excellence, he becomes joined to the opposite of it: the baseness that is separate from man.

Rava, however (Eruvin 21b), explains the verse (Koheles 12:12) this way: "and much *lahag* is a weariness of the flesh" — one who pores over the Sages' words much tastes in them the taste of flesh. The explanation of this is that the divine intellect requires much poring over and much study, since at first the matter appears remote to a man. But when he pores over their words much, he tastes in them the taste of flesh: through much study he comes to stand upon the matter,

and there is in their words the taste of flesh. For flesh is the very body of the living creature, and when a man studies the matter he finds that their words are the body of the thing, the essence of things themselves. They are not like matters of convention, which were merely posited to be so and could have been otherwise, and are not the essence of the thing or the body of the thing. The words of the Sages, by contrast, are the body and the essence of the thing: it is fitting that it be so of itself, and not by mere positing — the way a conventional law-code posits that a thing shall be so, which is not the essence of the thing, since there is no necessity that it be precisely so. This is why he said "and much *lahag* is a weariness of the flesh": when a man studies them and labors over them, that is "a weariness of the flesh," for he arrives at matters that are the body of the thing. This is what is called "a weariness of the flesh" — namely, the body of the thing. For all things, the grasses and the fruits, were created for the sake of the living creature, which is flesh; He gave them everything for food, as the verse states (Bereishis 1:29), "Behold, I have given you..." From this you can see that the other existents were created for the sake of the living creatures, whereas the living creatures were created in the world to exist in their own essence. And although the living creatures serve as food for man, this was not so when the world was created: man was not permitted to kill a living creature and eat it until Noach came (Rashi there). The reason for this is explained elsewhere. This, then, is what they meant here by "one who pores over them tastes the taste of flesh" — that these are essential matters, matters that are the essential nature of the thing itself. Furthermore, flesh is the finest sustenance there is for the soul; and just so, the words of the Sages are the finest sustenance there is for the intellect — there is nothing higher than they are for sustaining the intellect. So the reason has now been made clear to you why there are those who dispute the Sages' words.

And in the first chapter of Makkos (5b), on what the Sages said concerning *eidim zomemim* — witnesses whose testimony has been overturned by the proof that they schemed against the accused: "if [the accused] was not put to death, they are put to death," since it is written (Devarim 19:19), "as he schemed" — and not as he did (Rashi there). At this the critics point the finger, saying that the ruling is "like vinegar to the teeth and like smoke to the eyes" (Mishlei 10:26): it treats the man who did nothing more severely than the man who acted. Now strictly there was no need to answer this at all. The Torah's laws are not a human convention; they are a divine command, as has been explained. The mitzvos were received one man from another, and in such matters we do not follow human sevara. This would then be like any other commandment of the Torah, which are likewise hidden from human beings. Even so, for the sake of the truth I will not keep silent until I set forth their righteousness as light, so that all the peoples of the earth

may know that the thoughts of the early Sages are not like the thoughts of ordinary men. And although Rabbeinu Moshe ben Nachman — the Ramban — of blessed memory already gave a commendable reason for this in his commentary on the Torah, in Parshas Shoftim (Devarim 19:19), we shall add further weighty considerations to it, so that words of truth may be seen and recognized.

First, you must know that in this law — which involves execution by the *bais din*, the rabbinical court — the tradition has come down that witnesses who have testified in a capital case are to be examined with seven examinations and seven inquiries; and each sage, according to the depth of his wisdom, would add further inquiries, since whoever adds to the examination of the witnesses is praiseworthy (Sanhedrin 40a). All of this is because the shedding of the blood of a human being, who was created in the image of God, is an exceedingly grave matter unless the law that imposes liability absolutely compels it. And if someone objects that murderers would only multiply on this account — that a man would rely on it and shed blood freely — that is not so. These rules are stated for a time when there is no emergency need of the hour, and when all Israel are righteous, as it is fitting that they be righteous and upright; and even if one man sins, no one is drawn after him. But if the generation is unrestrained, and there is reason to fear that sinners will multiply in Israel, the Sages have already said (Sanhedrin 46a) that the court flogs and punishes and even puts to death outside the strict law — all according to the need of the time and the circumstances of the case. This has already been discussed in its place. But when there is no concern about a breach in the generation, and the people are righteous, one must judge as is proper, by a judgment of righteousness.

And if you object that on this account the sinner will not receive his punishment — that is no difficulty. Who would call a man to account for his sin if he kills in secret, or commits forbidden sexual acts, or steals? Surely the One who knows everything, before whom "the darkness is as the light" (cf. Tehillim 139:12): He is the Judge and He is the Witness (Avos 4:22). This case too will be like a man who acted in secret, who is certainly called to account for his sin, in general and in detail. Therefore a man is not put to death unless the attribute of strict justice requires that he be put to death by the *bais din*; only then does the court sentence him to death.

And therefore the ruling they stated (Makkos 5b) — "if the accused was put to death, the witnesses are not put to death; if he was not put to death, they are put to death" — is a true ruling. For although, measured by the magnitude of the transgression, it would be more fitting that they be liable to death when the

accused was in fact executed, nevertheless, measured by the essence of the law, it is more fitting that they be put to death when he was not executed and they merely schemed to have him killed. *Eidim zomemim* have performed no deed; they only thought to act, as it is written (Devarim 19:19), "you shall do to him as he schemed to do to his brother." The word denotes thought alone, as it is written (cf. Eichah 2:17), "Hashem has accomplished what He purposed," and likewise (Tehillim 140:9), "his scheme — do not let it succeed," and many more like these. Since the *eid zomem* is punished because he "schemed to do to his brother," it follows that so long as the thought is still in existence — that is, before the accused has been put to death, when the thought is still present and is discernible while the *bais din* is occupied with this testimony — the verse "and you shall burn out the evil from your midst" (Devarim 19:19) applies. But once the sentence has been carried out, the thought behind the testimony is no longer in existence, and there is no trace of a deed here either. Had they killed him with their own hands, then even though the act is past, they did perform a deed, and the deed stands before us. But in the case of thought, if the accused has been put to death, the deed is not called by the witness's name, since it was the *bais din* that performed it; and there is no ground in intellect for holding him liable to death. When an evil thought is present, one must burn out the man in whom that thought resides. Once they have testified, the thought is present in them, and therefore "you shall burn out the evil from your midst" is to be fulfilled in them. But when the thought is no longer present, having already passed, there is no such judgment here. And this has good sense and good reason to it.

Know further, so as to understand the deep words of the Sages — and their statement "as he schemed, and not as he did" is a word of truth — that this belongs to the distinctive property of thought. By *sevara* it would not be fitting for an *eid zomem* to be sentenced to death, since there is nothing here but thought alone. That the Torah made the *eid zomem* liable to death is because it is fitting that the very thought he wished to carry out against his brother be turned back upon himself. He thought to have the man killed; that thought is turned back upon him, and his sentence is to be put to death, as the verse says (Devarim 19:19), "you shall do to him as he schemed to do to his brother." And why did the Torah need to make the reason turn upon this? Rather, the Torah is saying that the thought he thought to carry out returns upon his own head — that the thought itself is turned back upon him.

We find everywhere that it is fitting, by intellect, that one who thinks a thought of iniquity should have that very thought turned back upon the thinker. So it says (cf. Esther 9:25), "let Haman's thought return upon his own head — the thought

he thought, to destroy the Jews" — and so in every case. The reason is that a thought is easily turned back upon the thinker: when the thought does not go out into actuality, it turns back upon him. An analogy: a man throws a stone at some object; if that object does not receive the stone, the stone rebounds upon the thrower, for it is turned back upon him. This is why the Sages, of blessed memory, said (Shabbos 97a), "Whoever suspects the innocent is stricken in his body." When a man suspects his fellow in his thought, and his fellow does not receive that thought — since it is false — the just result is that the thought is turned back upon the suspecter himself. For thought is exactly like throwing a stone at an object: if the object receives the stone, the stone does not come back upon him; if it does not receive the stone, that thought acts upon the thinker, since it is turned back upon him. And they certainly learned this from the Torah's making an *eid zomem* liable to death "as he schemed, and not as he did." So long as the witness is still within the thought he means to carry out, that thought is turned back upon him, so that he is judged by that very thought. He himself is actively engaged in bringing about a killing, so it is readily said of his thought that it turns back upon the thinker, since he thinks to act — and a thing that goes out into actuality easily does go out into actuality. But once the deed has been done, it makes no sense at all to say that the thought is turned back upon him. It lies close at hand that the witness be judged by the very thought he wished to carry out, as Achashverosh said when they told him (Esther 7:9), "Moreover, the gallows that Haman made...", and the king said, "Hang him upon it" — because his own thought is turned back upon him. But if the deed has already been done, since this cannot be said, he is not sentenced to death. This is likewise why they said that one who suspects the innocent is stricken in his body: the suspicion itself — thinking in his mind that a certain man did such a thing when he did not — is a thought that is turned back upon him, and he is stricken in his body.

And if you object that in the end, since he caused his fellow's death and testified falsely, why should so great a sin not be judged with death — we have already said that judgments are of two kinds. The first is judgment measured by the law in itself; for the Torah is a Torah of truth, and it speaks from the standpoint of the law in itself. It is not fitting that a man who testified falsely and performed no deed should be put to death by a *bais din*, or be liable to death at all. So too, by the law of the Torah, if one man said to another, "Kill this man," and he killed him — even if he hired him to do the killing — the law is that the one who hired him is not liable to death. This is from the standpoint of the Torah, which is wisdom: it imposes liability only on one who performs the deed with his own hands, as the verse says (Devarim 21:7), "our hands did not shed this blood." By the Torah a man is liable to death only when his sentence is death entirely; and if the

perpetrator falls short by so much as a hair's breadth, so that the law does not require his blood to be shed, his blood is not shed. Everything is measured exactly, with nothing less and nothing more at all — for a *bais din* cannot put half a man to death. Therefore the divine Torah declared him exempt from human judgment, and set his judgment with Hashem, blessed be He, who will give him his sentence and his judgment precisely as he acted, adding and subtracting not even a hair's breadth. All of this is from the standpoint of the Torah. And it holds when there is no fear of the generation's corruption — that everyone will act this way — that is, when the generation is a righteous generation; and it is of such a generation that the Torah spoke. But if the generation is not righteous, and there is reason to fear that they will break loose more and more, of this the Sages said (Sanhedrin 46a) that the court flogs and punishes outside the strict law, because such a man comes to corrupt many, as we said. Power was given into the hand of the *bais din* to repair the breach of its generation — not so that they should fix a *halacha* for the generations to come, but only as a ruling for the moment, according to what that generation requires.

We have already said that neither should you be troubled that the sinner, the man who committed the sin, should profit by it. To this we answered that his judgment rests with Hashem, blessed be He. When the generation is a righteous generation, Hashem does not acquit a man of this sort; rather, "He repays him to his face" (Devarim 7:10). For Hashem watches over Israel to destroy the sinners from among the generation and to set Israel right; and when Hashem is with Israel, He destroys the wicked and executes judgment upon them. So the Sages, of blessed memory, said (Makkos 10b): one man killed intentionally and there were no witnesses to it, and another killed unintentionally and there were no witnesses. The first cannot be sentenced, and the second cannot be exiled. HaKadosh Baruch Hu brings them together at one inn, and there there are witnesses: the one who killed unintentionally climbs a ladder, and the one who killed intentionally is standing below, and he falls upon the intentional killer. So this one is put to death, and that one goes into exile. And likewise they said that where a man is liable to death and there are no witnesses to the matter, if he is liable to stoning he falls from a roof and dies — and so with all four modes of court-ordered execution, as is set out in the Gemara. You see, then, that when Hashem is with Israel, no man liable to death escapes His hand in this world; he receives what is his.

As the verse says (Shemos 23:7), "and do not slay the innocent and the righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked." Why should the command not to slay the righteous and the innocent require the reason "for I will not acquit the wicked"?

It is on this account that Chazal received the tradition (Sanhedrin 33b) that the meaning of the verse is this: once a man has left the *bais din* acquitted, and someone then says, "I have an argument by which to convict him," you do not bring him back to the court. For it is not fitting that a *bais din*, which is a court of righteous judgment, should bring a man back to be judged to conviction once he has gone out acquitted. And do not think that the wicked man thereby profits — for even if he has gone out acquitted from your hand, he has not gone out acquitted from Mine: "for I will not acquit the wicked," and I will judge him. Accordingly, you should no longer find difficulty with "as he schemed, and not as he did." If he sinned and caused a man's death, it is not fitting that he be put to death by a *bais din*, since there is no deed here; and if he falls short even by a hair's breadth, a *bais din* will not go even a hair's breadth beyond truth and righteousness, while HaKadosh Baruch Hu will give him his righteous sentence, with nothing less and nothing more. Only where the deed was not carried out is it certainly fitting that the thought be turned back upon him, just as he thought to act. And so it is fitting that a thought be turned back upon the thinker, as we have said. Their words, then, are words of wisdom and of complete truth.

The first chapter of Sanhedrin (17a): Rav Kahana said, [Aramaic: a Sanhedrin all of whose members saw grounds to convict — they acquit him. What is the reason? Since it is a received tradition that a case requires *halanas din* — that the verdict be held over to the next day — in order to find grounds of acquittal for him, and these judges can no longer see any grounds of acquittal for him.] This too strikes the critics as strange: that because all the judges saw grounds to convict, the accused should be exempt by law. We have already said above that a *bais din* may judge only what is a true judgment from every side, with no injustice in it whatsoever. For the Shechinah is present in Israel, and it is the Shechinah that executes judgment upon the wicked; therefore it is not for the court below to do anything that ought not to be, even by a hair's breadth. The Torah required *halanas din* because man is material, and any intellect and knowledge that has a dependence on matter is not a clear intellect — it is not a complete intellect like the intellect that is entirely separate from the material. The delay of the verdict is therefore needed in order to arrive at clarity. This is especially so in a capital case, where if any injustice results there is no undoing it — unlike monetary cases, where restoration is possible. When the case stands with a man and the judgment stays the night with him, one cannot say that he ruled in haste, before it was fitting to rule, since the judgment lodged with him overnight; and then the judgment is as befits a man who possesses matter.

A court all of whose members saw grounds to convict is a court for which the verdict has, in effect, already been decided. Certainly if one of them argues for acquittal the case still hangs in the balance; but when all of them saw grounds to convict, they have already withdrawn from the case. And since they have withdrawn from the case, no one searches out grounds of acquittal for him at all. We have already said that because man is a physical being, his intellect must descend into the depth of a matter, and his intellect is not in actuality. He must examine the matter until he descends to its depth and his intellect emerges into actuality — as befits a human intellect, which is not in actuality. But these judges, all of whom saw grounds to convict, have had the case removed from them, and they examine it no further. That is not fitting for a human being, for man is physical, his intellect has a dependence on matter, and it requires examination. And where there is cause to be concerned about anything that is not as it ought to be, it is not for the court below to judge the man; rather the Judge of all the earth, to whom judgment belongs, will judge him. For the Torah gave to each what befits him: the court below ought to judge in the way that befits a physical human being. The human intellect is not an entirely separate intellect in actuality; only the upper beings possess a separate intellect in actuality. Therefore when the court below judges without *halanas din*, it is as though the human intellect were separate and in actuality — and that was not given to the lower beings. The distinction between the judgment above and the judgment below must be preserved as it ought to be.

Know further, so as to understand, that judgment issuing from the court below is wholly directed toward acquittal. The members of a court ought to be righteous and upright, and from one who is righteous and upright nothing comes essentially except the good. Only when no grounds of acquittal are found for the accused is he sentenced to conviction — and this too is a good, since it removes evil from the world, as it is written (Devarim 19:19), "so you shall burn out the evil from your midst." But that is accidental — it happens only where no grounds of acquittal are found. This is why they said (Sanhedrin 32a) that in capital cases the court opens with arguments for acquittal and not for conviction. All of this is because from a court of righteousness, righteousness and good should come essentially and primarily, before it begins with conviction — for conviction is not what comes essentially and primarily. And this is why a court all of whose members saw grounds to convict acquits him. Inasmuch as it must be a court of righteousness, and the good must come from a court of righteousness essentially and primarily, from this aspect *halanas din* is required, so that grounds of acquittal may be sought. But when all the members of the court saw grounds to convict, they already hold the man guilty, and they cannot find grounds of

acquittal for him. They would therefore not count as a court of righteousness — not as a court of righteousness ought in itself to be, whose judging begins with righteousness and which holds the verdict over for the sake of acquittal and righteousness. So they acquit him, since they must be a court of righteousness. Should the court depart from what befits it, and no longer be seen as a court of righteousness, merely because this man is wicked? Therefore they acquit him, and the true Judge will judge him. These matters have support and a great foundation in the Torah, in what it says (Shemos 23:7), "and do not slay the innocent and the righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked," as was explained above. And we have already said above that all of this holds when the Shechinah was with Israel, so that there was no concern whatever about the corruption of the generation.

This is also the meaning of what they said (Sanhedrin 32a): in capital cases the court may reverse its ruling in favor of acquittal, but it does not reverse it in favor of conviction. The reason is that acquittal is what should come from the court essentially and primarily, as we have said. Conviction, by contrast, is not essential and primary but accidental only, and what is accidental does not annul what is essential. Hence it is impossible to go back and rule for conviction, annulling the acquittal. But one who ruled for conviction may go back and rule for acquittal, because what is essential can annul what is accidental. The Gemara explains (Sanhedrin 34a) that this is said of the time of deliberation; at the time of the final verdict, however, one may go back and rule for conviction. For every case has some measure of merit in it, and what a judge ruled at the outset for acquittal he cannot go back and rule for conviction; he remains instead with the acquittal he ruled at the outset. Since this does no harm to the substance of the case, it is fitting that he stay with the good that he ruled. But that the verdict should actually issue that way — that cannot be. Since the man is in fact liable under the law, nothing goes out into actuality except as it truly is; and this is what is called "a judgment of truth in accordance with its truth." You see, then, that all of this is wondrous wisdom, when a person examines it closely.

And in the first chapter of Makkos (7a) we learned: a court that puts a man to death once in a seven-year cycle is called destructive. R. Elazar ben Azariah says: once in seventy years. R. Tarfon and R. Akiva say: had we been on the court, no man would ever have been put to death. All of this accords with what we have said. Since such a court sentences a man to death once in a seven-year cycle — a span of seven years, and these cycles come round again and again — it cannot be called unusual; it counts as regular, and it is not something accidental. That is why it is called a "destructive court." R. Elazar ben Azariah says: once in seventy

years. And the Gemara (Makkos 7a) raises a question about this: does it mean that a court which puts a man to death once in seventy years is already called destructive — since whatever occurs once in a man's lifetime, which is seventy years, means that they sentence to death in every single generation, and that counts as regular, so that they are destructive? Or does it mean that once in seventy years they ought to sentence a man to death, for otherwise they could not be called a court at all, since they never sentence anyone to death? The Gemara leaves the question unresolved (*teiku*). R. Tarfon and R. Akiva say: had we been on the court, no man would ever have been put to death — so far would they have gone in arguing for acquittal, as is set out there. To this they answered them: you too would multiply shedders of blood. For when people see that everyone is acquitted, no fear of the court will be upon them at all, since no one is ever condemned. All of these are words one should draw close with both hands; they are words of truth and uprightness.

And in the chapter *Arba Misos* (Sanhedrin 67b) Abaye said: the laws of sorcery (*keshafim*) are like the laws of Shabbos. Some acts of sorcery carry stoning, some are exempt from punishment yet forbidden, and some are permitted from the outset. One who performs an actual deed is liable to death. One who merely deceives the eyes (*ochez einayim*) is exempt yet forbidden. And some are permitted from the outset, as with Rav Chanina and Rav Oshaya: [Aramaic: every Shabbos eve they would occupy themselves with *Sefer Yetzirah*, and they would create for themselves a third-grown calf, and eat it.] Thus far the Gemara. Now the critics argue that once Abaye said "there are three kinds of sorcery," it must follow that this practice too is sorcery — and so the Sages permitted sorcery. Heaven forbid; such a thing never entered their minds. Rather, Chazal explain the term "sorcery" to mean "that they contradict the heavenly retinue" (*pamalya shel ma'alah*) (Sanhedrin 67b) — that is, whatever has been decreed upon the earth by the upper hosts, sorcerers alter and annul. This world is conducted by means of the upper powers, and sorcery annuls what the upper hosts have decreed. For that reason anything that annuls the decree of the upper powers — even when it is done by means of a Divine Name — is designated by the term "sorcery."

Moreover, the sense of "three kinds of sorcery" is that a thing may appear to a person to be sorcery without being sorcery at all. This is self-evident, for the like is found in many places, and no proof can be drawn from a name. Merely because they said "there are three kinds of sorcery," does the name "sorcery" therefore attach to the third? They used that phrasing on account of the other two, which genuinely are sorcery. Their own words point to this. Since they said

"there are three kinds of sorcery," and said that one of them is forbidden and carries stoning, it follows that the one they permitted is not sorcery at all; Abaye gave it that name only because it is not something natural. He said, in effect, that although it looks like sorcery, it is distinct from what actually is sorcery. For their occupying themselves with *Sefer Yetzirah* and creating a third-grown calf for themselves is entirely permitted. It belongs to the very order of the world and its customary course that He, blessed be He, annuls the decree of the upper powers and rules over them. The Sages explain that this is why He, blessed be He, is called by the Name *Shakai* — because He plunders (*shoded*) the arrays of the upper hosts. If so, why should this be forbidden, when it accords with the way the world is run? He, blessed be He, is called by that Name precisely because He has the power and the dominion over the upper hosts; this is His capacity and His might in the world. It is like any prayer: because a person calls upon the Name of the Blessed One, the decree issued against him is annulled. Therefore *Sefer Yetzirah*, which consists in the invocation of His Names, blessed be He, with which He created His world — "for with *Kah*, Hashem, the worlds were formed" (Yeshayahu 26:4), the whole world having been created with His Names — is not something that stands outside the order of the world, even though it annuls the natures of things and their customary course. Were that not so, prayer itself would be forbidden, since prayer likewise annuls a decree of this world. So too natural things can be annulled by means of His Name, blessed be He. And this is certainly permitted, for Hashem surely has the power to annul the natures of things, and this is nothing outside the order of the world.

It is a received tradition among the Sages of Israel that Moshe split the sea by the Name of seventy-two, since there are three consecutive verses each of which contains seventy-two letters. This is proof that Moshe invoked His Name, blessed be He, over the sea, and split it by His Name. And by the Name of forty-two Elisha cursed the youths, for precisely forty-two of them were killed. So they were acting by means of the Name: they invoked His Name, blessed be He, and He answered them by His Name. And what one engages in with the books of *Yetzirah* is nothing other than the invocation of His Names, blessed be He, with which He created the world. How, then, can anyone say that invoking the very Names by which the world itself was created stands outside the order of creation? That is why they said it is entirely permitted.

They tied the matter to the labor of Shabbos rather than to some other prohibition. Now there is no mitzvah in the Torah in which you will not likewise find all three: something forbidden by Torah law, something forbidden by rabbinic decree, and something entirely permitted. Abaye could therefore have

tied his statement to other prohibitions as well, where some cases are forbidden by Torah law, some are exempt yet forbidden, and some are permitted from the outset. He tied it to Shabbos only because of the likeness and correspondence between the two. Here is the likeness: on Shabbos it is forbidden to carry out one's work, for no labor is fitting on Shabbos, since on it the world was completed, and in what is complete there is no labor. Some labor is full labor, forbidden by Torah law; some is not so fully labor, and is forbidden by rabbinic decree; and some does not violate the Shabbos at all, because it does not count as labor. Just as it is not fitting to perform labor on Shabbos, because the world was completed on that day, so it is not fitting to perform labor upon a world already finished — to alter anything in it by means of sorcery. For the world is complete, and in what is complete there is no alteration. Hence one who performs an actual deed to alter something in the world by sorcery is liable to death; one who performs no actual deed is exempt yet forbidden; and some cases are permitted from the outset, because what a person does by means of His Names, blessed be He, is not called an alteration in the world at all. It is no alteration of the world, since every existing thing was itself created by His Name. When a person invokes His Name, blessed be He, and thereby annuls the natures of things, he has not departed from the order of the world.

In sum, this is not called an alteration but a coming-to-be, for it is His Name, blessed be He, that brings all things about, and the things mentioned in *Sefer Yetzirah* are likewise brought about by His Name. It is entirely like the creation, in which nature was not the agent. For when they occupied themselves with *Sefer Yetzirah* and invoked His Names, certain things that were fit to come forth into actuality came forth into actuality. These are words of wisdom: they knew how to distinguish between things according to what each thing is — unlike the fool, who walks in darkness (cf. Koheles 2:14) and does not know the difference between what is permitted and what is forbidden.

They further object that the Sages' prohibition against drinking in pairs is a matter of sorcery. But it is not so. How can a person fail to believe the psalm "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High" (Tehillim 91:1), where it is stated explicitly that a person needs protection from harmful spirits? Is it an evil thing for a person to learn what these spirits have power over, so as to guard himself against them? On the contrary, this is great wisdom — teaching a person how to be delivered from harmful spirits. Heaven forbid that the Sages were acting through them; they meant only to shield and to rescue. Nevuchadnetzar himself called Daniel "chief of the magicians" (Daniel 4:6), meaning the greatest of all the sorcerers. And it is further written (Daniel 1:20): "In every matter of wisdom and

understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers in his whole realm." This proves that they knew sorcery — and Heaven forbid that they themselves were sorcerers; they knew it only in order to save themselves. Because the Sages knew by their wisdom that demons have power over one who eats or drinks in twos, they saved a person from this and taught him not to eat two and not to drink two.

This matter is a most wondrous piece of wisdom, and here too what has been received on the authority of the Sages must be brought to light and explained. When Hashem created His world, there is a class of created thing that is not the essence of the creation; such things follow after the essence of the creation and are not what is primary in it. We have already explained this above as well. You find it among corporeal creatures and among non-corporeal creatures alike. Spirits and demons, for instance, are not the essence of the creation; they follow upon the creation and are subordinate to it. And among corporeal things, such as worms and the like, there is no act of creation in them; they exist only because the creation cannot be without them, and in any case they are not the essence of the creation. This is what is called *shniyos*: essentially and primarily there is no creation in them at all — they are merely secondary to the creation. That is why they hold sway wherever there is *shniyos*, a twoness, for that is the whole of their power.

This is what they said in the first chapter of Berachos (5a): whoever recites krias Shema upon his bed is as though he holds a two-edged sword in his hand, as it says, "the exaltations of God are in their throat, and a two-edged sword in their hand" (Tehillim 149:6). The explanation is this. "The exaltations of God" refers to His being unique among the upper beings and exalted above all — and that is krias Shema. When a person cleaves to His oneness, blessed be He, that oneness annuls the power of the harmful spirits, in whom there is nothing but *shniyos*, for the reason already explained. As for "as though he holds a two-edged sword": a two-edged sword is sharp on every side, unlike an ordinary sword, which has only one edge — sharp on that side, blunt on the other, and on the blunt side it admits of division. But a sword with two edges is wholly sharp on both sides. This is precisely the difference between the oneness of Hashem and the oneness of every other existing thing. Other existing things also possess oneness, but it is oneness in a certain respect and not oneness absolutely. A king of flesh and blood, for example, is one, since "two kings do not use one crown" (Chullin 60b); yet this is not absolute oneness, only oneness in a certain respect. In respect of his kingship he is one; in respect of his humanity he is not one. But Hashem is absolutely one from every side. That is why the Sage said "as though he holds a

two-edged sword" — a sword that is sharp throughout, with no division in it. By this absolute oneness the power of the harmful spirits is annulled, since they hold sway only through *shniyos*. There is a further point in "a two-edged sword": these powers are divided and various, no one of them like another, as those who understand know. Concerning this he said "a two-edged sword," which is sharp to the right and to the left, as it says, "a thousand shall fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand" (Tehillim 91:7); and by means of this sword, which has two edges, one cuts on both sides. These matters run deep, and this is not the place for them. What has been made clear here is only that the words of the Sages are built upon the highest wisdom.

In the chapter *Chelek* (Sanhedrin 101a) they said that it is permitted to inquire of the princes of oil and the princes of eggs. Some people suppose that this is sorcery — but such people know nothing of what sorcery is. If the case were that the demon performs some act that departs from the customary course of the world, that would be a difficulty, and it would indeed look like sorcery. But where there is no act whatever to change anything in the world, only to tell a man something or to show him something, with no alteration in the customary course of the world, the name "sorcery" does not apply at all; of this there is no doubt. Accordingly, in the chapter *HaPo'alim* (Bava Metzia 107b) we say: [Aramaic: Rav went to the cemetery and did what he did. He said: ninety-nine die of the evil eye, and one by natural causes.] Rashi explains there that Rav knew how to whisper an incantation over the grave and to learn by what death the man had died. Similar to this is what they said in the chapter *Arba Misos* (Sanhedrin 65b): "your father's grave will prove it." There too the point is that he knew how to whisper an incantation, and so knew that his father was not being judged on Shabbos. Sorcery has no application here. Only one who performs strange acts in the world — to make things grow and sprout, or to ruin them — is called a sorcerer; that is what is called sorcery. But to tell a man something, or to show him something, where there is no act departing from the customary course of the world, is not sorcery. All that has happened is that the demon has a connection with him, without any harm. That is why they said (Sanhedrin 67b): one who performs an actual deed is liable to death, while one who deceives the eyes is exempt yet forbidden. The reason is as we have said: sorcery applies only to one who genuinely brings something about. One who deceives the eyes appears to perform a deed but performs none, and is therefore exempt yet forbidden. This is plain. Anyone who raises an objection here does not know what the name "sorcery" applies to, for the name "sorcery," as Chazal explained it (*ibid.*), means that they contradict the heavenly retinue. Where there is no deed at all, only telling a man something or showing him something, there is no act departing

from the customary course of the world. And this they accomplished by adjuration: they would adjure these powers and impose a decree upon them in the Name of Hashem — just as one adjures a witness in the Name of Hashem to tell what he knows, so they would adjure them to tell whatever they wished to know. If an angel or a demon told a man something of its own accord, would there be any prohibition in that? Just so, if he adjures it until it tells him something, that too is permitted; there is no difference. For there is no act here departing from the customary course of the world — only that it tells him something he did not know.

The practice of *ov* and *yidoni*, however, is forbidden, even though it too consists in nothing but inquiry. The reason is that the practitioner raises up the dead man after he has departed from the world and no longer has any connection with it, and he brings him up — as it is written, "Bring up Shmuel for me" (I Shmuel 28:11), and "I saw beings coming up out of the earth" (ibid., v. 13). There is no greater alteration than this, for the dead man has no relation to the world, as Shmuel said: "Why have you disturbed me, to bring me up?" (ibid., v. 15). But to inquire of an angel, or of the other powers, is no alteration, since an angel is sent into the world many times over for many purposes; therefore, even if a man adjures it to tell him something, there is no prohibition in that. The dead, by contrast, is not sent to tell things in the world; he has been removed from the world altogether. This is plain. In sum: were the practice a means of bringing wealth or strength, or of ruining something, or the like, it would be a strange act, bringing about something otherwise than by the way of nature and the customary course of the world, and that would be called sorcery. But a practice that merely tells a man something, introducing no new creation into the world at all, does not fall under the name "sorcery." All the more so when it is done by an incantation, since every incantation works by means of Divine Names — such a thing is in no way outside the customary course of the world.

In sum: the Sages were masters of Torah. They grasped the mitzvos of the Torah and did not walk in the Torah like a blind man who cannot distinguish one thing from another. What was fit to be pushed away they pushed away with both hands, and they even added decrees and stringencies in great abundance — for so it is fitting in matters of Torah and its mitzvos: even over a single Torah matter they strengthened and fortified the Torah as far as wisdom and intellect warrant. But there are things that ought not to be pushed away from the standpoint of the Torah, even though popular opinion holds that they should be. Were a man to push those away as well, he would not know how to distinguish one thing from another, and would be nothing more than "likened to the beasts that perish"

(Tehillim 49:13). Just as it is right to distance to the utmost whatever the Torah says must not be done, so it is not right to distance what is not against the Torah. The fool imagines that when he adds in such matters he is strengthening the Torah; but this is no strengthening — it is the nullification of the Torah. That is why the Torah warned against the rebellious elder (*zakein mamre*), who innovates something on his own authority. The Torah placed everything in the hands of the Sages. Were it otherwise, there would be no Torah grounded in intellect here at all: each man would say whatever seemed right to him, declaring that this ought to be pushed away and that ought to be done, and the Torah would, Heaven forbid, be nullified. That is why it issued this warning.

Horayos, chapter three (13b): ten things are harmful to one's learning — passing under a camel's halter, and the rest. And there also: five things cause a man to forget his learning — eating what a mouse has eaten, and the rest. And in the second chapter of Niddah (17a): one who throws away his nail clippings is wicked; one who buries them is righteous; one who burns them is pious. Thus far the Gemara. These are among the teachings that the critics push away, and we do not know why they push them away. If they push them away because reason does not allow that harm should come to a person through such things, then they ought to be just as astonished at the magicians of Mitzrayim and its sorcerers, who by incantations and rites brought about great effects. Why, then, should they deny that some act can bring a person to harm, as in the cases the Sages mentioned? For the Sages knew that when a man performs these acts, the harmful spirit gains power over him. Did they do wrong in knowing these things by tradition from the earlier sages and in warning people about them?

And if what they intend is that a person should be wholehearted with Hashem (Devarim 18:13) and should not guard himself against harmful spirits, but should simply go about all his affairs in his innocence while the Blessed One protects him — that is not what reason allows, for in matters of this kind one does not rely on a miracle at all (cf. Pesachim 64b). Hashem gave man wisdom and knowledge so that in all his doings he should be a person governed by intellect; why, then, should he not guard himself against things that harm? Daniel was called "chief of the magicians" (Daniel 4:6) because he understood the matter of sorcery and the workings of demons, and so knew how to guard against harm. And when the Torah commanded, "You shall be wholehearted with Hashem your God" (Devarim 18:13), and that one should not go after such things, what it means is that a man should not act or undertake anything on their basis — saying that this hour is auspicious for such a purpose, and so on. That is what is called departing from wholeheartedness. But guarding oneself against harm is certainly the act of

a wise man who considers his ways, and neither divination nor sorcery applies to it. This is clear, and there is no need to expand upon what is self-evident. It is not out of wisdom that anyone speaks who says of these teachings that they are not sound. There are, moreover, many things that people suppose ought to be pushed away, and the Sages drew them near — and the whole of it is as we have said.

In the first chapter of Yoma (22b): R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Shimon — any talmid chacham (Torah scholar) who does not avenge and bear a grudge like a snake is no talmid chacham. The Gemara objects: But is it not written, "You shall not take vengeance nor bear a grudge" (Vayikra 19:18)? [Aramaic: That verse was written with regard to money.] For it was taught: What is vengeance, and what is grudge-bearing? One man says to another, "Lend me your axe," and he answers, "No." The next day the second says to him, "Lend me your axe," and he answers, "I do not want to lend to you, just as you did not lend to me" — that is vengeance. And what is grudge-bearing? He says to him, "Lend me your sickle," and he answers, "No." The next day he says to him, "Lend me your axe," and he answers, "Here it is; I am not like you, who would not lend to me" — that is grudge-bearing. And where the injury is to the body, is there no prohibition? But was it not taught: those who are insulted and do not insult in return, who hear themselves reviled and do not answer, who act out of love and rejoice in suffering — of them Scripture says, "And they that love Him shall be as the sun going forth in its might" (Shoftim 5:31)? In truth the ruling stands, and it speaks of one who keeps the matter in his heart. And what of Rava's statement that whoever passes over his own measures, they pass over all his transgressions? That is where they appease him and he is appeased.

These words the critics are unwilling to accept, and they push this teaching away — that a man should bear a grudge and take vengeance. But to a man of understanding they are words of very great wisdom indeed. For this belongs to the attribute of intellect in the talmid chacham: it is fitting for the intellect that it uphold its own measures, since the intellect's entire concern is judgment and law. This has already been explained at length — the intellect desires the things that are necessitated to be, for that is the very nature of intellect itself, which is necessitated and compelled to be. This is clear. Therefore it is the character of the talmid chacham that he does not waive what is due, since waiving and law are two opposites: waiving is not law. And this is what they meant by "any talmid chacham who does not avenge and bear a grudge like a snake is no talmid chacham." They mean that the more he avenges and bears a grudge and does not waive, the more this is the attribute of intellect, which establishes everything it holds by necessity and obligation. The opposite of this is the man who inclines

after matter: there is no law in him at all, because he lacks the attribute of intellect, which is law. This is clear, for waiving is not law. And know that when it is said of Hashem, blessed be He, that He is "a jealous and avenging God, and a bearer of wrath" (see Nachum 1:2), Heaven forbid that any of these traits should belong to Him. All of it is said only because He, blessed be He, is utterly remote from the corporeal and entirely separate from it — and whatever is separate from the corporeal does not waive. That is so where it is not fitting to waive; but if the intellect determines that one should waive, then this too is an act of intellect, that one should waive. Waiving where the intellect does not require it, however, is no act of intellect at all.

This is what they said in the chapter *HaParah* (Bava Kamma 50a): Rav Chanina said, whoever says that HaKadosh Baruch Hu waives what is due — may his own life be waived, as it is said, "The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice" (Devarim 32:4). Thus everyone who holds a religion is bound to this, for it is not right to say that He, blessed be He, waives anything; were that so, His ways would not be intellect. The intellect proceeds by justice and by necessity, since it is the intellect that necessitates a thing, and things that are merely possible and are not law are not objects of intellect at all. Therefore, whoever says that HaKadosh Baruch Hu waives what is due makes His governance fall outside the intellect — and Heaven forbid to say such a thing; hence "may his own life be waived." So it is with the talmid chacham as well: when he waives needlessly and for no reason, he does something that falls outside the intellect, whose conduct is strictly according to necessity.

Even so, for all that, it is not fitting that an evil act, an act with no good in it, should issue from a talmid chacham, who is a man of intellect. That is the force of the statement (Yoma 23a) that "he keeps it in his heart" — that this should exist only in his heart, which is the intellect, and from the standpoint of the intellect it is not fitting to waive at all. But that it should come out into actuality is not so, for then he would be doing evil. Even if a man has done him harm, Heaven forbid that he should avenge himself and repay him in actuality; only in his heart, which is the intellect, and from that standpoint there is no waiving whatever. That is why it says "he keeps it in his heart" — that is, in the intellect, for the intellect ought not to waive at all. But an action has the acting soul joined to it as well, and to these this trait is not fitting. All this applies where the offender has not asked to be forgiven: there, if he were to forgive him though he had not asked, that would be waiving, since he did not ask for forgiveness. But if he did ask to be forgiven, this is not waiving, and one is obliged to forgive him.

The principle of the matter is this: one ought not waive gratuitously, for that is not an act of intellect at all. The intellect contains no waiving, except where waiving is fitting according to the intellect. Hence, any talmid chacham who does not avenge and bear a grudge like a snake is no talmid chacham — for he is a man of intellect, and because this is what befits the intellect, which does not waive. When he avenges and bears a grudge like a snake, he is wholly a man of intellect. That is why it is written of Hashem, blessed be He, that He is "a jealous and avenging God" (Nachum 1:2) — for so it befits one who is intellect. And that is why it says (Yoma 23a) that this is not a thing [which] ought to exist in actuality, so as to perform an act that harms another, since the deed belongs to the soul and not to the intellect alone. In monetary matters, however, even this is forbidden: there should be no vengeance or grudge-bearing in him at all. These things are truth and faith, and there is no doubt in them. I am astonished at the questioners: they ought to have examined the words of the Sages closely when they said "any talmid chacham," and so on. It is evident from their words that this is required of the intellect insofar as it is intellect — and so it truly is, for this trait is required of the intellect. Moreover, nothing evil issues from it, since it is only in his heart; and even that only where the offender does not ask forgiveness for what he did. Since the Sages knew in their wisdom that this befits the intellect, and that even so nothing evil issues from it in actuality — as it says, "he keeps it in his heart" — for that reason they said, "any talmid chacham who does not avenge and bear a grudge is no talmid chacham." For this serves to strengthen the intellect and to give it its excellence, since all its affairs proceed by justice and not by waiving. These matters are compelling to anyone possessed of understanding. But that he should do evil to another — that is not the case at all.

In the second chapter of Bava Metzia (21a) the Sages said that one need not return a lost object once its owner has despaired of recovering it (*yei'ush*). This strikes people as far-fetched: that a man should take what is not his, having neither labored nor toiled for it, and covet another man's money. It also runs against conventional law (*das nimusis*, the law framed by human convention), which obligates a finder to return a lost object even after its owner has despaired of it.

The reason is this. Conventional law obligates whatever ought to be done for the ordering of the world, even where the intellect does not require it — the sole ground being that this is what the ordering of the world requires. So conventional law is sometimes stringent about a matter that, by the intellect and by upright justice, would not have had to be done at all. And sometimes it is exceedingly lenient, where the thing need not be done for the ordering of the world — even

though such leniency is not fitting according to the intellect, but only according to conventional law. Hence, under conventional law, one must return a lost object after its owner's despair, and that is a stringency. The reverse holds as well. If a man found a silver vessel or a gold vessel, announced it once and twice, and no one inquired after the lost object for a year or two, he keeps it for himself and uses that vessel — for the ordering of the world is not served once he has announced it several times and waited a year or two or more, since the owner will no longer come. But this is not so according to the Torah: if he found a silver vessel or a gold vessel and announced it many times, they remain forbidden to him forever; the object simply lies until Eliyahu comes, and he may never touch it. Here, then, they were exceedingly stringent.

All of this is because the words of the Sages follow the Torah, and every word of Torah is measured by the intellect. Whatever is as it should be according to the intellect is what it is fitting to do, as the Torah says (Devarim 4:6), "You shall keep them and do them, for that is your wisdom..." The Torah is not conventional law. Conventional law settles its matters by *sevara* and by human reflection, whereas the Torah is wholly of intellect, and it does not turn to *sevara*.

A man's money is not bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh; it is only his possession, something that belongs to him. Therefore, once the money is lost to him, so that it is no longer in his domain — for in every case of loss the money passes out from under his control — the money itself is not in his domain, and his mind is not upon it either, since he has despaired and put the money out of his heart. At that point it is no longer his money at all: it is not in his domain, nor is it in his mind, and it is wholly *hefker*, ownerless. So when he despairs of the thing and puts the money out of his mind, it is no longer his money. This is why they said that if a man left a vessel in his house, believed it lost, and despaired of it in his heart for some years, and then someone found that vessel, it does not belong to the finder — because the vessel is in the owner's domain and does not leave his domain. Conversely, if it did leave his domain, having been lost, but he did not put it out of his mind, since he did not despair, then it is still his possession and counts as his money, and the one who finds it does not acquire it.

Therefore, what they said (Bava Metzia 21a) — that a lost object whose owners have already despaired of it belongs to the finder — accords with the intellect, since they knew the matter of money: that it is a possession and nothing more. Its owner's name must be called upon it, and it is by that that it is his possession — either it is in his mind or it is in his domain. Where it has left both his domain and his mind, that is not so. How, then, could they say that a man is obliged to

return a lost object after its owner's despair? The ruling is true, and what is true is what ought to be done, even though the man who lost the object bears a loss by it, since it is a true ruling according to the intellect.

One must follow the intellect, which is a lamp that gives a man light, so that he not walk in darkness; in all his deeds he should be drawn after intellect and knowledge, as Scripture says (Mishlei 6:23), "For the mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light." Granted that by sevara and by conventional law it appears that this ought not to be done — man was created precisely for this, that all his deeds be of intellect. Is the "Torah of truth" (Malachi 2:6) not [sufficient] to lay down a thing that is true in its own right? For the essence of the Torah is truth. And if the object does not leave his domain through despair, then when would it ever leave his domain? Hence, if a man found something that its owners do not despair of, he may not touch it even for a hundred years. This too is "the Torah of truth": so long as the money has not left its owner's domain and his mind, it is entirely forbidden to use it, until Eliyahu comes — for it is another man's money. Every word of the Torah is as befits a Torah of truth.

From this we learn the matter of money and its level: that a man should not treat money as though it were his body and his soul, for when it is not with him he has no share in it. That is why, when a man departs from the world and is no longer beside his money, silver and gold do not accompany him, whereas Torah and good deeds do accompany him; they are with a man and do not depart from him. In this the possession of Torah and good deeds is different. Were the law such that money still bore its owner's name even when it was lost and removed from him, a man would rate wealth higher than it is. As it is, we know the matter of wealth and are not fools — as Scripture says of the Torah's ordinances (Devarim 4:6), "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." It is fitting, then, that the Torah's ordinances accord with the intellect.

And should someone say that in the end the lost object ought to be returned as a matter of what is fitting, so that his fellow suffer no harm — the Sages did indeed say that a lost object should be returned even after its owner has despaired of it, but not from the standpoint of obligation. From the standpoint of obligation there is no need, as has been explained; it is from the standpoint of kindness (*chesed*). They derived this (Bava Metzia 30b) from the verse (Shemos 18:20), "And you shall make known to them the way in which they shall walk and the deed that they shall do" — that a man should act *lifnim mishuras hadin*, beyond the letter of the law, and not insist on his rights under the strict law; and this is because it is fitting to act with kindness. In this the Torah is complete with the utmost

completeness: it is a "Torah of truth" in what it obligates according to the intellect, and it also teaches a man to do the good and the kindness that ought to be done out of kindness, so that nothing whatever is lacking in it. And with the Torah are truth and peace.

In the chapter *HaNechnakin* (Sanhedrin 88b) the Mishnah states: there is greater stringency in divrei sofrim than in the words of the Torah. One who says "there are no tefillin," so as to transgress the words of the Torah of Moshe, is exempt; but one who says "five *totafos*" — the Torah's word for the compartments of the tefillin — thereby adding to divrei sofrim, is liable. Their difficulty with this is: how can it be said that divrei sofrim are more stringent than the words of the Torah?

This is no difficulty at all, for the matter is self-evident. The rebellious elder is liable to death (Devarim 17:12) precisely so that dispute should not multiply in Israel, with every individual setting himself against the many — and that applies only to divrei sofrim. What I mean is this: the mitzvah itself is written in the Torah, but the interpretation of the mitzvah comes from divrei sofrim, as with the many mitzvos whose interpretation was stated from divrei sofrim. It is in such a case that the Torah imposed the death penalty, so that no individual should dispute the words of the Sages about the interpretation received among them, with the result that the Torah's interpretation would, God forbid, be nullified. For if the received interpretation were not in the hands of the Sages, we would not know a single mitzvah in its truth, and by that the Torah as a whole would collapse. Therefore the Torah made one who disputes divrei sofrim liable to death.

But as for one who disputes something written in the Torah — dispute simply does not apply to a matter set out explicitly in the Torah. It is folly on the disputant's part, and no one is drawn after him, since there is no greater folly than disputing what Scripture states explicitly. There was in fact no need to answer this objection at all, for it is clear to everyone.

In the chapter *Arba Misos* (Sanhedrin 64b) they said, regarding one who passes his offspring to Molech, that one who passes part of his offspring is liable, while one who passes all of his offspring is exempt — as it says (Vayikra 20:3), "of his offspring," and not all of his offspring. They ask: how can it be that one who passes part of his offspring is treated more severely than one who passes all of it? But it is not that he is treated more severely; rather, what the Sages said is that "one who passes all his offspring is exempt," and that is what these critics refuse to accept.

There is nothing to wonder at here — indeed the verse itself proves the point, for it writes (ibid.), "for he has given of his offspring to Molech," and does not write "for he has given his offspring to Molech"; the implication is plainly *part* of his offspring. And this too is clear in itself: what is given to divinity is a part of a thing. That is evident from several mitzvos — *terumah*, *ma'aser* (the tithe), and *challah* (the portion of dough) — which are given to Hashem: if a man gave the whole, it is not *terumah*, not *ma'aser*, and not *challah*. The reason is that he is obligated to separate from what Hashem has given him; that is what generates the obligation — that he give to Hashem inasmuch as Hashem gave to him. If he gives everything, leaving nothing for himself, then there is nothing fitting to give, for out of what is he giving when he has nothing?

This is why the worshippers of Molech made a practice of giving *of* their offspring, out of what had been given to them — this according to their error, since they believed in *avodah zarah*, idolatry, and so would give a part to the idolatry. But if a man gives all of it he is exempt, since that does not count as a giving *of* his offspring, nothing having been left to him. The honor of divinity lies in a man's giving it a part of what was given to him, for in this it is evident that it was given to him, since he still has a remainder. If nothing remains to him, it is as though nothing had been given to him at all, and it is not called a giving whatever. For the same reason, one who makes his entire threshing-floor *terumah*, or his entire dough *challah*, has made neither *challah* nor *terumah*. The point is that a man gives to Hashem *from* what He gave him.

There is more for you to understand here. What belongs to divinity is a part, in that it is chosen out of the whole — just as the tribe of Levi was chosen out of the whole, for there are twelve tribes and He chose the tribe of Levi out of the rest. Accordingly, when a man gives part of his offspring, it applies to that part that it has been chosen out of the whole to serve divinity, and that is what is called a giving to divinity. But if he gives the whole, then since there is no choosing here — nothing selected out of the rest — this is not a giving to divinity. Nothing belongs to divinity except what is chosen out of the rest, as the tenth is chosen for *ma'aser*. These matters need no explanation. And even where he does not actually pick one out from the rest, it must still be a part, because with a part choosing does apply, precisely in that it is a part. Here too, then, as in the other cases, their astonishment comes of their having distanced themselves from the ways of the Torah and from wisdom.

In the third chapter of Horayos (12a) Abaye said: [Aramaic: "Now that you have said that a sign is a substantive matter, a person should make a habit of eating on

Rosh Hashanah gourd, fenugreek, leek, beet, and dates."] Here too I have found them wondering, because this looks to them like divination. It is nothing of the kind. Were it so, the act of Elisha and the act of Yirmiyahu would likewise be a matter of divination. Yirmiyahu commanded Baruch ben Neriah (see Yirmiyahu 51:63–64), "And when you have finished reading the words of this book, you shall tie a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, and you shall say: Thus shall Babylon sink..." So too with Elisha, who laid his arm upon the bow: "And Elisha said, Shoot — and he shot. And he said: An arrow of deliverance from Hashem, an arrow of deliverance against Aram" (Melachim II 13:17). And it says there (ibid., v. 19), "And the man of God was angry with him and said: You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck Aram until it was finished. But now you will strike Aram three times." The acts of Elisha and of Yirmiyahu were certainly not — God forbid — divination.

Rather, such an act is a sign and a token that the matter be brought to completion. This was explained by the great Rav, the Ramban, of blessed memory, the divine kabbalist, to whom alone the hidden things of wisdom and the secrets of the Torah were revealed. He writes in Parshas Lech Lecha (Bereishis 12:6), and these are his words: "Know that with every decree of the upper powers, once the decree has gone forth into the act of symbolic representation, the decree is then fulfilled in any event. That is why the prophets perform an act along with their prophecy — as Yirmiyahu said to Baruch, 'And when you have finished...', and likewise Elisha's act in laying his arm upon the bow, 'And Elisha said, Shoot...'. Therefore HaKadosh Baruch Hu had Avraham take possession of the land, and made for him symbolic representations of everything that was destined to be done to his offspring. Understand this well." Thus far the words of the great Rav.

These words are clear. From here on you will know how to understand this matter, for it is a wondrous wisdom: to make below a symbolic representation and a sign for a decree from on high, so that the decree may come forth into actuality for good and be fulfilled for good. It is therefore fitting to make a sign and a representation, just as you find that the prophets did. This is the point of the representation involved in eating on Rosh Hashanah foods that carry a good sign — so that the decree may come forth into actuality, and then the good decree will be fulfilled. There is no divination in this; it is only a preparation for the decree to come forth for good. And that is what he meant by saying, "Now that you have said that a sign is a substantive matter" — it is indeed a substantive matter in this respect, that through a sign the decree comes forth into actuality

for good. These words are pleasant and more precious than fine gold, and nothing one could desire compares with them.

In the chapter *Kol Kisvei* (Shabbos 118a) the Gemara says: "Whoever fulfills three meals..." and so forth. This too I found recorded among the other objections raised against the words of the Sages, and I do not know what the question was. Perhaps the question is that the Sages encouraged eating in quantity. If so — surely we find the same thing at every festival, for it is written, "and you shall rejoice in all the good, you and your household..." (Devarim 26:11; cf. 14:26). And is it not written (Yeshayahu 58:13), "and you shall call the Shabbos a delight"? There is much of this kind. All the more so since the matter has a reason. Shabbos marks the fact that Hashem, may He be blessed, created the world and brought it to completion. Hashem therefore commanded that a man rest on this day, the day on which Hashem rested from His work, having brought it to completion — and so that no one should say that, although He completed the world, it is still a world lacking in some respect. This is what the delight of Shabbos comes to declare: that Hashem completed the world, that no deficiency at all is to be found in it, and that everything is delight and completion. For this reason it is fitting that a man fulfill three meals on Shabbos. If he does not eat a meal at night when Shabbos comes in, there is a deficiency here, since it is a man's way to eat a meal at night, when Shabbos enters. And if he does not eat two meals during the day, that too would be a deficiency — and no deficiency is fitting on Shabbos. He must therefore eat three meals: one at night, as it is the way to eat at night, and two during the day, so that a man have no deficiency on Shabbos. That is what the mitzvah of Shabbos comes to express: that everything was created by Hashem in completeness.

And it may be that what struck them as astonishing was this: what has the three meals they spoke of to do with being saved through them from three calamities — the judgments of Gehinnom, the birth-pangs of Mashiach, and the wars of Gog and Magog? Because they never grasped the words of the Sages, they are left astonished. There is a great deal here to wonder at — but there is no wonder for one who understands. When a man fulfills three meals on Shabbos and thereby acknowledges that He, may He be blessed, created His world in completeness, he is saved from these three calamities that are in the world. That is to say: there is the judgment of Gehinnom, and this corresponds to the meal of the night. Because he believes that Hashem created His world in complete perfection, that belief rescues him from the judgment of Gehinnom, which is like night — for Gehinnom is darkness and destruction. And this is fitting: since he eats the meal that signifies the completion of the world, it is fitting that whatever constitutes a

deficiency in the world should not reach him. That is why he said that such a man is saved from these three calamities — because these are reckoned a deficiency in the world. They are not like the other calamities, which come on account of the sin of [man], calamities that enter the world on account of the deficiency of [man], which is his sin. These three calamities, by contrast, are in the world not on account of sin. Gehinnom is certainly prepared for the wicked and for sinners, yet its creation itself preceded man's sin. Not so the other calamities: they came into the world only after man sinned. One who fulfills three meals acknowledges that Hashem completed the world in complete perfection. And although Hashem created Gehinnom, that is not in truth a deficiency, for if there were no Gehinnom there would be no punishment of the wicked and no fear of punishment. Therefore one who fulfills these three meals — and by them acknowledges that Hashem created the world in completeness, and that there is no deficiency at all here — is saved from the calamities that are a deficiency. But one who does not acknowledge that Hashem created the world in completeness is not saved from them.

And the two calamities that are the birth-pangs of Mashiach and the wars of Gog and Magog: the birth-pangs of Mashiach are called "evening", as it is written (see Zecharyah 14:7), "and it shall be that at evening time there shall be great light." So if a man fulfills the minchah meal — the afternoon meal, which corresponds to the birth-pangs of Mashiach, since these will come at evening time — he will be saved from the birth-pangs of Mashiach that are to come at evening time, as it is written, "and it shall be that at evening time there shall be light." The wars of Gog and Magog come after Mashiach has been revealed, when light will be in the world, and that is called "the morning of Israel," the time when Mashiach will be revealed. One who fulfills the morning meal — a meal that signifies that Hashem completed the world in completeness — is therefore saved from the wars of Gog and Magog.

The sum of the matter is that these three meals signify that there is no deficiency in the world. Although these three things do exist in the world, all of them are for the sake of completeness. Gehinnom, as has been explained, exists so that the wicked may be judged in it, and that is a completion for the world. As for the wars of Gog and Magog and the birth-pangs of Mashiach, this needs no explanation: all of it is a completion leading to the redemption. Accordingly, when a man eats the meal of the night — and night, which is the privation of light, resembles death — and he eats that meal at night and takes delight in it, this signifies completeness, and so he is saved from the judgment of Gehinnom. Likewise, when he has a meal in the morning, this signifies that he believes

Hashem completed the world, and that he has no deficiency on the side of what is called "morning," which is the light of dawn. That is to say: when the light of Mashiach arrives, he will be saved from the war of Gog and Magog and will have no deficiency at all. So too, when he fulfills the minchah meal and believes that Hashem created the world in utter completeness, he will be saved from what is called "at evening time" — namely, the birth-pangs of Mashiach — because he believes that Hashem brings the world to completion in every respect. There is no need to elaborate further.

The second chapter of Nedarim (20b), where the Sages permitted intercourse not in the usual manner (*shelo kedarkah*). This strikes them as exceedingly strange — so much so that all who pursue her have despised her, and they say that "they have seen her nakedness" (see Eichah 1:8). So now let us put a question to them. If what astonishes them in this passage is the emission of seed in vain, has the Rambam (R. Moshe ben Maimon), of blessed memory, not already written (Hilchos Issurei Biah 21:9) that it was permitted only where a man does not emit seed in vain? On the Rambam's reading, then, the Sages meant to say only that *ha'ara'ah* — that is, the mere contact of the organ — is permitted not in the usual manner. For if intercourse not in the usual manner were forbidden outright, then even mere contact, which is *ha'ara'ah*, would be forbidden; and everywhere even mere contact by itself is called *tashmish* (marital relations). It is of this that they said that intercourse not in the usual manner is permitted — meaning *ha'ara'ah*, which is mere contact. On that score, then, there is no difficulty here at all. And who has spoken more emphatically about the punishment for emitting seed in vain than they? In the chapter *Kol HaYad* (Niddah 13a) it is taught: R. Eliezer says, anyone who holds his member while urinating is as though he brings a flood upon the world. The reason is spelled out there: "And why so severe? Because he brings himself to emit seed in vain." So they declared the gravity of this prohibition and did not conceal it — the severity of the punishment for one who holds his member. How, then, could they be lenient in this very matter, Heaven forbid, the matter of emitting seed in vain?

From this you can see that all the words of the Sages are spoken in truth and in accordance with the judgment of the Torah, and that stringency here is fitting on the side of the law and on the side of wisdom alike. Consider what the Sages, in their wisdom, hinted at concerning the magnitude of this sin — that in R. Eliezer's view it is as though the man brought a flood upon the world. What this means is that there is no doubt that one who destroys seed nullifies a coming-to-be, since offspring ought to have come from that seed. And lest it enter your mind that, because no complete offspring has yet been created and brought forth into

actuality, this is not to be reckoned destruction and loss — it is for this that he said "as though he brought a flood upon the world," which is utter destruction. For one who destroys his seed nullifies the beginning of a coming-to-be, and that is a complete loss. It is not like other kinds of loss. One who nullifies a coming-to-be that already exists, and merely fails to let it continue in being, does not abolish the coming-to-be itself entirely from the world, such that the very name of coming-to-be would not be found in the world at all; he only cuts short the continuation of its existence. And that is not so grave, since here there is no nullification of the *beginning* of coming-to-be: the coming-to-be was already there, and he nullifies only the continuation of its existence. But one who destroys seed — inasmuch as he nullifies the beginning of a coming-to-be — this is what is called being as though he brought a flood upon the world. For the flood was the destruction of existence itself, so that existence should not be found; in the generation of the flood there was a complete nullification of coming-to-be, as the verse says (see Bereishis 6:7), "I will blot out man from the face of the earth... for I regret that I made him." The flood was nothing other than the nullification of the root of coming-to-be from its very beginning, so that the beginning of coming-to-be was annulled — exactly as with one who ruins seed, so that there is here no beginning of coming-to-be and no primary root of coming-to-be.

The sum of the matter is this. One who kills a man has not thereby prevailed over the beginning of coming-to-be; he has prevailed only over its continuation, not over its beginning. But one who destroys his seed — and this is precisely why it is called destruction, since all destruction is from the beginning of coming-to-be — does the very thing that brings a flood upon the world. The flood was only to uproot coming-to-be, so that no coming-to-be at all should be found; in the flood no coming-to-be was in force. Understand this. And they knew this great sin — that one who destroys seed sins in that he destroys and nullifies the root of coming-to-be. For man and beast are not equal: man is what is primary in the world's existence. One who nullifies the beginning of man's coming-to-be — that is, one who destroys his seed — nullifies and ruins the coming-to-be of the whole world, since man is unique among the lower beings. There is therefore great gravity here, and an exceedingly extraordinary punishment, in his nullifying the beginning of coming-to-be; and so it is as though he brought a flood upon the world.

There is more for you to understand of these words of wisdom. Bound up in the seed is a power of soul that goes forth into actuality, namely the formation of the child; and that is why it says there (Niddah 13a) that he is as one who sheds a soul. This power is not a particular power. One who kills a person has killed that

person, who is a particular soul; but that does not apply to the power bound up in the seed, to which particularity does not apply at all. Therefore one who destroys seed is as though he brought a flood upon the world: the flood is universal and has no particularity in it, and so too one who destroys seed, in which the power of coming-to-be is bound up and which is not particular, is as though he brought a flood. You should grasp the depth of this. Once a man has been created, his soul has a connection and an attachment to the body, and it is on that account that he is this particular man; and if he is killed, that is not reckoned a flood upon the world. In the seed, by contrast, the power of the seed is bound up without any complete connection: only the power of coming-to-be is bound up in it. That is not reckoned particular but is simply the power of coming-to-be, and is therefore reckoned universal — so he is as one who brings a flood upon the world, which is a universal annulment. How, then, could it enter any man's mind that they would be lenient in such a matter? They elaborated further there (Niddah 13a) on the magnitude of this punishment, saying that he is reckoned as one who serves *avodah zarah* and as one who kills a soul. There is no need to elaborate, for it is set out plainly in their words, and we have explained it more fully elsewhere. But if what troubles them is that the Sages permit union not in the usual manner, we have already explained this (above, s.v. "The second chapter of Nedarim"): they came to permit only *tashmish*, and *tashmish* here means *ha'ara'ah* alone, which is mere contact according to the commentators, as we said — and they said nothing whatever about emitting seed in vain.

So that you may know that all the words of the Sages rest on a wisdom of very great depth, and in order to put an end to the perverse talk and crooked speech directed against the words of the Sages — who knew every hidden recess of wisdom and entered the innermost sanctum, and not one of whose words the wise-hearted have ever understood or attained, not even the easiest of them, still less the deep ones — we will explain a little, in the hope that they may concede. In the chapter *Arba Misos* (Sanhedrin 58b), R. Elazar in the name of R. Chanina holds that a *ben Noach* (a gentile, bound by the seven commandments given to the descendants of Noach) who has relations with his wife not in the usual manner is liable to death. And although Rava disagrees there, he disagrees only on the strength of this *sevara*: that we do not find anything permitted to Israel and forbidden to a *ben Noach*. In any case, before it was permitted to Israel — that is, before the Torah was given to Israel — this was forbidden to a *ben Noach*, whereas for Israel it is permitted. And this is a great wonder, for the Torah did not come to Israel in order to be lenient with them but in order to be stringent. The explanation is this: before the Torah was given to Israel they did not possess the higher level; only when they received the Torah did they possess the higher

level. And the matter is as follows. The union of man and woman has two aspects. The first is the union for procreation, as with the coupling of all living creatures, whose coupling is for the sake of procreation — for "He did not create it a waste; He formed it to be inhabited" (see Yeshayahu 45:18). Such a union is certainly in the usual manner. The second aspect is that the man is like form to the woman, and it is on this side that they have a union together. Man, who is the completeness of creation among the lower beings, ought to be complete, and the creation of man is not complete except through the woman. This is the second aspect: their union together is the completion of man. And this union holds in any manner whatever that is called union, whether in the usual manner or not.

R. Chanina's view is that for a *ben Noach* only the usual manner is fitting, because they do not possess the level of form — for the level of form belongs to Israel alone. We have treated this at length in the work *Gevuros Hashem* (ch. 4); look there and you will find it explained that the excellence of form belongs to Israel alone, who are called *adam*, whereas the nations, once the Torah was given to Israel, do not possess this, for they are material. As the Sages of blessed memory said (Yevamos 61a), "You are called *adam*, and the nations of the world are not called *adam*." Accordingly, among the nations there is no union of man and woman from this aspect, the man's being like form to the woman, because that is not the level of the nations. Their union is therefore like that of all other creatures, which couple together for procreation. But Israel possess the level of form, and the union of man and woman among them is from the side of the man's being like form to the woman; it is from this side that their union comes. Among the nations, then, union is only specifically in the usual manner, for the sake of procreation, like the beasts of the field and the wild animals. Only among Israel is their union a union of matter and form, and therefore in any manner at all, whether in the usual manner or not, it is a joining of matter to form — even not in the usual manner. Consider one who understands the parable that Rabbi brought as proof for this (Nedarim 20b), when he said: it is like a man who buys meat from the butcher and eats it roasted, boiled, or cooked, in whatever manner he wishes. The explanation is that since the man is reckoned as form to the woman, everything comes from him, and in whatever manner he has relations with her it is permitted to him. All this is on the side of the man's being reckoned as form to the woman; form has a connection to that of which it is the form, and this does not depend upon procreation. That is why it is permitted to Israel and forbidden to a *ben Noach*. And since it is permitted to Israel, it is permitted to *bnei Noach* as well, for we do not find anything that is permitted to Israel and forbidden to *bnei Noach*. This is enough for one who understands words of wisdom and discernment.

There is more for you to understand concerning these two kinds of union, the one in the usual manner and the one not in the usual manner. We have already said that the union of man and woman is a union of matter and form, as has been explained in several places. Now the union of form with matter takes two forms. The first is the union of a form *in* matter, where the form is embedded in the matter. The second is the union of a form *to* matter, where the form is not embedded but is a separate form. Corresponding to these there are two unions. The one union is in the usual manner, and this is a complete union, in which the form is entirely attached to the matter. The second is the union of the separate form, and this is not like the union of a form in matter that is embedded in it entirely.

Therefore R. Chanina said (Sanhedrin 58b) that a *ben Noach* who has relations with his wife not in the usual manner is liable to death. This is because *bnei Noach* do not possess this level, the excellence of the separate form; their union is only the union of a form to matter in which it is embedded. Hence if a *ben Noach* has relations with his wife not in the usual manner he is liable to death, since this is not the union proper to him — it is as though he had relations with something to which he has no union at all. But Israel, who possess the excellence of the separate form, have this union too as something proper and in good order, since the separate form is not embedded in the matter entirely; the form has a connection to the matter without being embedded in it. Now you can understand the parable he brought (Nedarim 20b): it is like a man who buys meat from the butcher and eats it roasted, boiled, or cooked. That is to say: because he bought it and paid his own money for it, what he bought is under his authority, and he may eat it however he wishes, boiled or roasted. So too the man who possesses the excellence of the separate form: the woman, who is likened to matter, is entirely under his authority. He is not like a form that is embedded in matter, for in that case he would be on the same footing as she is, and on that side the union would have to be in the usual manner. But in the union of a separate form — because the form is separate from the matter, and the matter is under the authority of the form — this union holds in every manner, even where the form does not reside in the matter and is not embedded in it. These are matters of extraordinary depth of wisdom.

Now the words of the Sages have been explained, so that when a man contemplates them with understanding his heart rejoices at such words, which point to the surpassing reach of their wisdom. It would not have been fitting to disclose these things; but we have done so for the honor of the Torah, and they will plead on our behalf. From this you should know that wherever you find

something of this kind that is remote from the human intellect, it is only because their words followed the ways of the Torah, which is the divine intellect, and that stands above the human intellect. May Hashem, may He be blessed, grant us atonement for having entered upon the explanation of matters that are wondrous. And all of this only because these things have been set down in writing by those who raise an outcry against matters such as these.

In the chapter *HaNizakin* (Gittin 60a): [Aramaic: R. Yochanan and Reish Lakish would study a book of Aggadah on Shabbos.] The Gemara objects: but it has not been permitted to write it down! And it answers: on account of the verse (Tehillim 119:126), "It is a time to act for Hashem — they have made void Your Torah." Thus far the Gemara. That is to say: when the time and the season call for it — as in these generations of ours, where forgetting is to be feared — then "it is a time to act for Hashem; they have made void Your Torah," and even something forbidden, such as writing down the Aggados, they permitted. But I find this difficult. On account of one prohibition, the prohibition against writing down the Oral Torah (Gittin 60b), is the whole Torah made void, that the verse should say "they have made void Your Torah"? It seems right to say, rather, that because the Aggados were written down, people who do not understand them in their depth, and do not see that they are words of profound wisdom, raise an outcry against the Sages. *That* is certainly the voiding of the entire Torah — when an outcry is raised against the Sages, who are the pillars of the Torah and upon whom everything is built. For this reason the Torah forbade writing down the Oral Torah: the Oral Torah was entrusted to the Sages, and if it were written down people would dispute with them, as in fact they do. And that is not fitting for the Sages, for "the wise shall inherit honor" (Mishlei 3:35). When they do inherit honor, the Torah endures, because people listen to their words and accept them. But the Written Torah, which was given to Moshe — about that no one disputes. And this is sufficient.

In tractate *Pesachim* (54a): R. Yosi said — two things arose in [divine] thought to be created [on] Shabbos eve, yet were not created until the conclusion of Shabbos. At the conclusion of Shabbos HaKadosh Baruch Hu placed understanding in man, after the pattern of what is above. He took two stones and ground them one against the other, and light came out of them; and he brought two animals and mated one with the other (*hirkiv* — literally "compounded"), and a mule came out of them. Thus far the Gemara.

Here too I do not know on what grounds, or why, they deride this. Perhaps it is over the statement that something arose in thought to be created and yet was not

created — for it strikes them as strange that there should be any regret before Him, when Scripture says (see Bamidbar 23:19), "God is not a man, that He should relent." And further, over the statement that man took two animals and mated one with the other so that a mule came from them; this appears to them a matter of sexual immorality and disgrace, to compound two species.

And the answer to the question is this. Know that our Sages came to tell us something about nature and about the works of man: that the works of man go beyond nature. When Hashem, may He be blessed, created during the six days of Bereishis the whole order of nature — the simple things and the compounded — and brought the world to completion, there yet remained in potential the making of a further compounding. Take this very case: the animals were created, and their compounding, the joining of one animal to another, is a compounding. Yet a further compounding remains beyond it, namely the compounding of two distinct species together, which is a compounding of a higher degree still. And because this compounding is not entirely according to nature — for they are separate species — it did not emerge into actuality during the six days of Bereishis, when the natural things were created. It is about this that he said there that it arose in thought for this to be created during the six days of Bereishis: that is, it stood there in potential. Man, who brings things out into actuality even when they are not according to nature, is the one who brought this out into actuality. Still, since it is in some measure a natural thing, and stood in potential to be made, it is apt to say of it that it arose in thought to be created.

The opposite of this is his bringing two stones and grinding them one against the other, so that fire came out of them. That is the reverse of compounding. Just as a compound has no simplicity in it but only compounding, so what came out of the two stones — light — was something separate and simple, since light is not a corporeal thing. Hence the compounding of two species to produce the mule, and the producing of light, which is not corporeal, are the opposite of each other. Both stood in potential during the six days of Bereishis, and both emerged into actuality through man. This light, which is a thing not so corporeal, emerged into actuality at the conclusion of Shabbos, and it is certainly a completion for the world, since light is an excellence for the world, as we have said. That is why we recite a blessing over it at the conclusion of Shabbos: the blessing goes up to Hashem, who added to the completion of the world. And this is why we recite no blessing over the things created during the six days of Bereishis, but only over the light of fire, which is [the completion of] the world, as we have said — over that we do recite a blessing.

This was done through man, who is above nature. For just as the power of nature acted by the decree of Hashem, and during the six days of Bereishis produced what is proper to nature, so man acts by virtue of the intellect within him, which is above nature: his action is something not natural, and it is not those things that belong specifically to nature. And just as man himself stands in potential and his intellect emerges into actuality, so these two things likewise emerged into actuality through man. That is why he said that two things arose in thought to be created — for through thought they stood in potential. And he said that at the conclusion of Shabbos He placed understanding in man, and so forth. He means what we have said: the creating of these two things, up to the point where they stood in actuality, came about through man, who is of intellect and is above nature, and through him they emerged into actuality. This is what befits these two things, since they are not entirely natural.

You should understand that these two things are divided as opposites. The mule is born of two species, and this is a complete compounding: they are nothing but two separate species, and their joining is the most complete compounding there is. The fire that comes out of the stones is the reverse — entirely simple, since it is separate from the corporeal, as with everything that is light, which is not corporeal but separate from the corporeal. The elemental fire was certainly created during the six days of Bereishis; even so, there is a distinction between the elemental fire and this fire, as the philosophers have explained. The elemental fire does not burn, whereas this fire burns. Moreover, the elemental fire is not red — were it red, it would be visible at night. And because the fire we have here comes out of a body, it is therefore separate from that body. Hence this fire that we have, which gives light, is separate from the corporeal and is simple. The opposite of it is the joining of two species, the horse and the donkey, which is a compounding of a further degree. Neither of the two emerged into actuality by way of nature.

Perhaps you will object. Light, which is separate from body, fittingly emerges into actuality through man, who is of intellect and separate from body — but the thing that is compounding in the highest degree, what has man especially to do with that? This is no objection at all. This compounding, which comes from two species and is not fitting to occur according to nature, came about through man, who is above nature; and he is indeed fit for it, as you will grasp when you understand the matter and go deeply into it. And because this light stands above the natural things, it is therefore the completion of the world, and it emerged into actuality through man, who is above nature. Know further that light is a completion of *Ma'aseh Bereishis*, since light brings man's sight out into actuality:

when a man sits in darkness at night, the light brings his sight out into actuality. That is why we recite a blessing over it at the conclusion of Shabbos — this light is a completion for man, bringing his sight out into actuality. At the conclusion of Shabbos, when everything has already been brought to completion, it is right to recite a blessing over the light, which is man's completion, completing him and bringing his sight out into actuality, so that everything is complete. These matters are exceedingly deep. We have come only to make clear that all their words are spoken with wisdom, and we have explained only a little of it, for the depth of the matter makes it impossible to expound further.

In sum, they came to disclose that during the six days of Bereishis only the natural things were created. Things that stand above nature were, during those six days, in potential, and emerged into actuality through man, who is of intellect and is above nature — such as the light that came out of the stones, an act befitting man, who is above nature. Through him came this completion, the light that brings man's sight out into actuality. And so too the compounding of two separate species.

As for their astonishment at the compounding of two species: certainly, according to the Torah that HaKadosh Baruch Hu gave to Israel, the thing is forbidden as *kilayim*, the forbidden mingling of species (Vayikra 19:19). But Adam, the first man, did this, because it was fitting that such a thing exist in the world, so that the world should be brought to completion. And even though, according to the Torah that Hashem gave, this is forbidden because it is *kilayim* — that is the way of the Torah alone. Many species were created in the world that the Torah forbade as food, and they were nevertheless created in the world, for through them the world is completed. Nor is the prohibition of *kilayim* on account of sexual immorality and licentiousness: the Torah forbade even driving two species together. From this you can see that the prohibition of *kilayim* is because separate species are not to be joined together, and this is the way of the Torah. And we have already said that the way of the Torah is one thing and the completion of the world is another. Because they took the joining of two separate species to be an act of sexual immorality and licentiousness, they raised their complaint about it. But that is a mistake, and so there is no cause for astonishment here at all. Hashem brought the world to completion with everything that stood in potential to be, and the mule too stood in potential to be created; the world was therefore not left lacking it, and it emerged into actuality through man, as was fitting. And this is sufficient.

In the chapter *HaBa al Yevimto* (Yevamos 62b): Our Rabbis taught — one who loves his neighbors, who draws his relatives near, who marries his sister's daughter, and who lends a *sela* (a coin) to a poor man in his hour of need: of him Scripture says (Yeshayahu 58:9), "Then you shall call, and Hashem will answer; you shall cry out, and He will say: Here I am."

This too I found among their complaints, since marrying within the family seems to them somewhat a matter of forbidden union. But if, God forbid, there were any disgrace or prohibition in this, consider that Amram married Yocheved his aunt, and from him came Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, the pillars of the whole world. Rather, the prohibitions of forbidden unions hold according to the Torah; where the Torah had not yet been given, there is no prohibition here at all. On the contrary, reason dictates drawing near rather than keeping distant — and Yaakov married two sisters (Bereishis 29:16–30). The Torah's prohibition of all the forbidden unions written in the Torah is a *chok*, a statute whose reason is not disclosed, like the other *chukim* of the Torah. But where there is no prohibition from the Torah — as with a sister's daughter, whom the Torah did not forbid — then, precisely because it was not forbidden, drawing near to one's relatives is on the contrary proper and good, and there is nothing better than it.

And this is what they said: "one who loves his neighbors, who draws his relatives near, who marries his sister's daughter, and who lends a *sela* to a poor man in his hour of need — of him Scripture says, 'Then you shall call, and Hashem will answer,'" and so forth. He means that a man ought to join himself to whatever he has a bond with. Neighbors: a man is near to them by reason of where he lives, and Scripture says (Mishlei 27:10), "Better a near neighbor than a distant brother." A man has a bond with his relatives, who are his own flesh and blood. And a man likewise has a nearness and a bond with his own people; of this he said, "one who lends a *sela* to a poor man in his hour of need," as it is written (Shemos 22:24), "If you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you." That is to say: the poor man, who is of his own people, is one whom he ought to draw near and lend to. So too when he marries his sister's daughter — that is drawing near in the fullest sense, for man and wife become one person, as Scripture says (Bereishis 2:24), "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

And he recorded the order of drawing near. First he said, "one who loves his neighbors" — and love is only in his soul; this is not a drawing near in actual deed, but love alone. Then, "one who draws his relatives near" to himself — this is certainly a drawing near, and a greater one. Then he said, "one who marries his

sister's daughter" — a drawing near greater still, since a man's wife is as his own body (Berachos 24a). And more than all of these is the one who lends to a poor man in his hour of need: this costs him out of his own purse, so that he diminishes himself and lends to another. That is a complete bond, as though the two were reckoned entirely one person. [These] matters you should understand well.

Therefore it is said of him (Yeshayahu 58:9), "Then you shall call, and Hashem will answer," and so forth. This is because it is likewise written (Devarim 4:7), "For what [nation] is so great that it has God near to it whenever we call upon Him." And the reason is that Israel are called near to Hashem, since Israel are called "His children." Because they are near to Him, Hashem is near to them in turn, to hear their voice when they pray before Him. So a man of this kind, who draws near those who are near to him — just so does Hashem act toward Israel, who are called "the people close to Him" (Tehillim 148:14): He draws them near and hears their prayer. This is clear. We have gone on at length here to make clear to you that all their words are spoken with a higher wisdom; for as the heavens are high above the earth, so are their thoughts high above ours.

The Third Well — sweet waters. They yield a taste more pleasant than the honeycomb. A delight to the eyes, and beloved to the heart. Clear and refined, purified sevenfold. Good for making a man wise, and a strength to knowledge. Lovelier to look upon than aged wine. They gladden God and righteous men.

The Third Complaint is that they cast aspersions on the midrashic expositions of the Sages, which appear to them far removed from the plain sense of the verse — and this is precisely what is primary in the Talmud. Included in this same complaint is their claim that in many places the words of the Sages depart from the precision of the language; by which they cast a blemish upon the holy ones of the Most High, as though these men did not know the precision of the language. This will be established here by clear proofs: all their words are lucid, and they are the very plain sense of the verse. It is only that those who do not understand them fail to do so because they never set their heart to understand; they have not grasped what the Sages said. For their words require explication and wisdom, and every matter, small or great, requires a heart that examines it with great care. Because these critics gave no thought to what the Sages said, they spoke as they did. We shall bring forward here the statements of theirs that seem the most far-fetched and are the most difficult — since it is impossible to expound every one of these passages, which make up the main body of their words. We shall adduce only those statements of theirs about which we have found people

astonished, which seem far-fetched to them, as though they were things said in the manner of men who speak for the elegance of the language and do not belong to the words of Torah at all. But it is not so; rather, they are the primary interpretation of the Torah.

The first chapter of Kesubos (5a): "Bar Kappara expounded: What is meant by the verse (Devarim 23:14), 'And you shall have a peg upon your *azeineicha*'? Do not read *azeineicha* (אזניך, 'your gear'), but *oznecha* (אזניך, 'your ear') — that if a man hears something unseemly, he should put his finger into his ears. And this is what R. Elazar said: Why are a man's fingers tapered like pegs? What is the reason? If you say it is because they are divided, each one made for its own task — as the Master said: this one is the little finger (*zeres*), this one the ring finger (*kemitzah*), this the middle finger (*amah*), this the index finger (*etzba*), this the thumb (*gudal*) — then what is the reason they are tapered like pegs? So that if a man hears something unseemly, he may put his finger into his ear. The school of R. Yishmael taught: Why is the whole of the ear hard, while the lobe is soft? So that if a man hears something unseemly, he may fold the lobe into it." Thus far the Gemara.

Many are astonished at this passage, holding it far removed from the plain sense of the verse: how, on this construction, are we to account for the continuation of the verse? And if we say that these two or three words may be expounded in this way without regard to the run of the surrounding verses, it is hard to expound the words of the Torah so. More difficult still is the reason they gave — that the finger is tapered so that if a man hears something unseemly, and so forth — for this reason strikes a man as far-fetched. So too the claim that the lobe of the ear is soft so that a man may fold it into the ear if he hears something unseemly. None of this will go into a man's ear.

But when you search their words, you will find that everything they said is wisdom. For the ear is a receiver; and that is why every act of hearing — since the words enter the ear — is rendered in the Targum by a term of receiving. And because a peg is driven into the thing it enters and stops it up, Scripture writes, "And you shall have a peg upon your *azeineicha*." Why did it write it in this way, when it should have written only "and you shall have a peg"? Certainly I know that a peg is driven into something. Rather, it comes to teach you that a man needs a closure over the receiver — which is the ear as well — so that nothing shameful or disgraceful may enter it. And although the Torah does not write *oznecha* but *azeineicha*, it nonetheless used a term that plays upon the other (*lashon nofel al lashon*). For since this passage speaks of "And you shall have a peg

upon your *azeineicha*" — the peg that enters the opening and closes what receives, and that is to be ready to dig a pit and cover over the disgrace, namely the excrement — just so is it fitting that you have a closure over the receiver, which is the ear, so that it not receive the disgrace of foul speech. That is why it wrote the expression *oznecha*, when it would have been enough to write "and you shall have a peg." But because a man must make a closure for the ear so that he not hear anything shameful, and because the passage here likewise speaks of closing something up so that no shame or disgrace remain, it wrote in this form: "And you shall have a peg upon your *azeineicha*." This is plain. It is no far-fetched interpretation; it is close at hand and sound. There is no doubt that the Torah hinted at this by the hint of its wording when it said, "And you shall have a peg upon your *azeineicha*" — hinting at it just as we have said above. Weigh this closely and you will find something quite extraordinary.

As for what he said — that a man's fingers are tapered so that if he hears something unseemly, and so forth — this is not a far-fetched reason at all. For man was created in the image of God (Bereishis 1:27), and his form is complete, with no deficiency. Were it otherwise, and there were a deficiency in his form, it would not be fitting to say of him that he was created in the image of God. Therefore no deficiency whatever should be found in his form, as all have testified concerning this complete creation. And there is no doubt that a thing that can be opened at will is the better for it — as with the eyes, the mouth and the rest of his organs, in which opening serves him when he wishes, and closing when he needs it and wants it. This is the completeness of the creation. The ear, however, stands open more than any other organ, and cannot be closed, even at the moment when he needs it closed so as not to hear something that ought not be received. This is not complete in itself, and on that account the image of God would be deficient. So, to complete the creation, the fingers of the hand were created tapered, so that when he needs the closing, the finger may serve for it.

As for why the ear has no covering of its own, as the eyes and the mouth do: if the physicians or the natural philosophers offer you natural explanations for it, do not consent to them and do not listen to them, for they are worthless physicians who know nothing of the wisdom of formation and creation. The matter is rather this. The ear serves receiving alone, as was explained above, and the completeness of receiving consists precisely in its being open to receive — not in the ear, which was created for receiving, having a closure in its own self, for that would be two opposites in a single subject. It does, however, have a closure from outside the vessel, so that it is like a sealed covering upon it. Therefore the

ear, which is the vessel of reception, is rightly without a closure in itself. These are words of the deepest wisdom.

And because the school of R. Yishmael found this difficult — that the ear itself ought not to lack a closure, since in the end the ear would then be deficient in itself — it therefore said that a soft lobe was created for the ear, so that if a man hears something unseemly he may fold the lobe into his ear. Now its deficiency is remedied in the ear itself. Moreover, were he to put his finger into his ear, he would soil his fingers with the filth that is in the ear; and for that reason the lobe was created for him. But since the lobe does not stay in the ear, the fingers of his hands were created tapered, so that he may place his finger upon the lobe and it thereby remains closed. From this point on it is complete in every respect. For the ear, which serves reception, ought not to have a closure of its own; and inasmuch as its standing open is a deficiency, it is fitting that the completion be in the ear itself, so that there be no deficiency in the ear itself — and in this way the closure is one that is not in the ear's own substance. And because the lobe does not stay in place, so that this is no real closure, from that side it is still open; only that the fingers of his hands are tapered, so that he sets his finger upon the lobe and it remains closed.

In this it is exactly like the doorway of a house, which has a door. The door does not stay shut, since the door serves for opening; so he sets something — a piece of wood, say — to hold the door back, so that it does not swing open of itself. We have already explained elsewhere that the ear in man is like the door of the house, and that this is why the slave's ear is bored through against the door (Shemos 21:6): the ear and the door are equivalent. But this is not the place for these matters. Here, then, they have given a profoundly true account of the form of man; when a man contemplates these matters with intellect he will find them correct and true. Do not make light of this. In any case the ear requires a closure, for complete openness is not fitting; and they looked into the matter of man's form so closely that his form is shown to be complete, with no deficiency. These words deserve to be received with love, and they are nothing other than entirely close at hand.

In the chapter *Ein Omdin* (Berachos 32b): "'But Tzion said: Hashem has forsaken me, and Hashem has forgotten me' (Yeshayahu 49:14). Reish Lakish said: Knesses Yisrael said before HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Master of the World — when a man marries a wife in addition to his first, he still remembers the deeds of the first; yet You have forsaken me and forgotten me. 'Can a woman forget her infant?' (ibid., v. 15). HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to her: My daughter, twelve *mazalos* —

constellations — did I create in the *rakia*, the firmament; and over each and every *mazal* I created thirty hosts; and over each and every host I created thirty legions; and over each and every legion I created thirty cohorts (*rehatim*); and over each and every cohort I created thirty maniples (*kartim*); and over each and every maniple I created thirty camps (*gastra*); and over each and every camp, 365 stars, corresponding to the number of the days of the solar year. And all of them I created only for your sake — and you say, 'You have forsaken me and forgotten me.' 'Can a woman forget her infant?' — HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to her: Would I forget the burnt-offerings of rams and the firstlings of the womb that you offered before Me in the wilderness? She said before Him: Master of the World, since there is no forgetting before the Throne of Your Glory, perhaps You will not forget for me the incident of the calf. He said to her: 'These too will be forgotten' (ibid.). She said before Him: Master of the World, since there is forgetting before the Throne of Your Glory, perhaps You will forget for me the event at Sinai. He said to her: 'But I will not forget you' (ibid.) — this is the event at Sinai." Thus far the passage.

This passage — the derash appears extremely far-fetched, since you will find nothing like it anywhere in their words: to explain *ulah* (עֹלָה, with a *shuruk*, "her infant") as though it were *olah* (עֹלָה, with a *cholam*, "a burnt-offering"), and *merachem* (מְרַחֵם, "having compassion") in the sense of *peter rechem* ("that which opens the womb"). Know, however, that this verse is difficult in its own right. Scripture says "Can a woman forget her infant" in the singular, and then says "these too" in the plural; it should have written "she too will forget." The Radak (R. David Kimchi) resolved "these too" as referring to women in general (Yeshayahu 44:15 [recte: 49:15]) — but even so the wording of the verse remains difficult. Further: according to the sense of the passage it should not have written "Can a woman forget her infant, etc." at all. It should have written, "Even a woman may forget her infant and cease to have compassion on the son of her womb, but I will not forget you." Why write "Can a woman forget her infant?", when the main point of the verse is to inform us that even if a woman forgets her infant, I will not forget you — for this phrasing implies that a woman does *not* forget her infant. There is a further difficulty: it should have written only "And Tzion said, Hashem has forsaken me and forgotten me." And likewise the doubled expression, "Can a woman forget her infant, from having compassion on the son of her womb."

Therefore they, of blessed memory, explained that Scripture comes to convey an answer to Israel's question. Israel suppose that because the exile is so great, Hashem, may He be blessed, has abandoned them. And so they say: "Master of the

World, when a man takes a wife in addition to his [first] wife, he remembers the deeds of the first." For she is first to him, and she is his destined mate — a first pairing — and so she is the more decreed to him. It is therefore not fitting that he should fail to remember the deeds of the first, precisely because she is first to him. And Israel were first; they certainly have a more essential joining and pairing to Hashem than all the other nations, since they were first of all the nations — as is true of anything that is first. If so, how can it be that He has forgotten me in exile? From here the meaning is as follows: "And Tzion said, Hashem has forsaken me" — and such a thing you will not find even in flesh and blood, that a man forgets his first wife; "and Hashem has forgotten me" — that He has dealt with me not in the way of the world, which is a thing that is not fitting. Now the wording is exceedingly precise: it did not write "Hashem has forsaken me and forgotten me," because these are two distinct things — the first, to magnify the matter; the second, the astonishment itself.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu answered Israel that it is impossible for Him to forget them, since forgetting does not apply to something that is everything. Forgetting applies to a thing that is unimportant, which a man does not set upon his heart, and which he removes from himself and forgets. But Israel are everything, for the whole world was created only for Israel's sake, as they said in a number of places. Forgetting therefore does not apply here at all: were He to forget them, what would He then remember, seeing that Israel are everything and all of existence was created for Israel? For forgetting indicates that what is forgotten has no existence, being forgotten by him as one dead; and a thing that is everything admits of no forgetting, since wherever He turns it is before Him, for they are everything. Hence it cannot apply that He should forget them — for if so, what would He remember? The meaning of the verse, then, is that Scripture is reporting the words of Tzion, who says thus, but it is not so. It is like a man who says to another, "See, this man is saying things that are not so." Just so, Hashem reports the words of Tzion, who says "Hashem has forsaken me and Hashem has forgotten me" — and it is known that it is not so.

"Can a woman forget her infant, etc." (Yeshayahu 49:15). That is: a woman does not forget her infant — her small child, whom she has raised — nor cease to have compassion on the son of her womb, who came forth from her. So too Israel: they were created by Hashem essentially, unlike other existents, which are not created by Hashem essentially but are created to serve others. That is why no others are called by the name "children," which indicates generation and creation — only Israel, whose creation is not for the service of anything else. Hence this name is applied to Israel: "You are children to Hashem your God" (Devarim 14:1). And

they are called "My son, My firstborn" (Shemos 4:22) because they are singular and there is none like them. A man may have many sons; but Israel are one, for it is impossible that there be another nation of Israel's kind, and therefore they are called "My son, My firstborn."

This is what it says (cf. Shemos 4:22–23): "Thus says Hashem: Israel is My son, My firstborn — send out My son that he may serve Me." That service is the sacrifices, for it is written in that same connection (Shemos 5:1), "Send out My people that they may celebrate a festival to Me in the wilderness," and this refers to the sacrifices, which are a festival of Hashem — for that is what *chag* means everywhere. He means that because they are His children, Israel in particular are fit to offer sacrifices before Him. The reason is that through the sacrifice there comes about a complete drawing near to Hashem; that is why it is called a *korban* (קרבן), from the root that means to draw near, since through it comes the complete drawing near. And Israel are Hashem's children, and none are nearer than they; therefore they alone are fit to offer before Him. And there is no forgetting of a thing that is entirely near.

Two things He mentioned. "Would I forget the burnt-offering of rams?" — for the *olah*, which goes up entirely to Hashem (Vayikra 1:9), indicates this complete drawing near to Hashem. "And the firstlings of the womb" — these are the firstborn, who belong to Hashem because He said, "Israel is My son, My firstborn; send out My son that he may serve Me." And because Pharaoh refused to send them out, He slew every firstborn in Mitzrayim, and for this reason He commanded that the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast be sanctified. Hence He said, "Would I forget the burnt-offering of rams that they offered before Me, and the firstlings of the womb?" — all of which indicates that Israel are children to Hashem, and that they are a singular nation, like the firstborn, who is unique. And certainly the plain sense of the verse "Can a woman forget her infant, from having compassion on the son of her womb" is that there is no forgetting here, since he is the son of her womb; so too Israel, who are children to HaMakom, are not forgotten. It is only that Scripture wrote the word *ulah* and did not write "Can a woman forget her child and the son of her womb," so that one might expound the word *olah* and the phrase "firstlings of the womb," which indicate the complete drawing near. And as for His saying "Would I forget the burnt-offerings that they offered before Me in the wilderness," rather than all the sacrifices ever offered before Hashem — it is because the offering in the wilderness was the first, and the first offering indicates that Israel are the children of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. For the beginning of a thing is what is primary in it and the very essence of it; and to what is primary and essential there is no

forgetting, since a thing that is not primary and not essential admits forgetting, whereas a thing that is the essence of the matter admits no forgetting. That is why He said, Would I forget the very essence of the matter, namely what Israel offered before Me in the wilderness?

The forgetting spoken of here does not mean forgetting as it exists in a man — Heaven forbid that forgetting should be predicated of Him, may He be blessed. The forgetting spoken of here means removal and withdrawal from Him, as it says (Yeshayahu 49:14), "And Tzion said, Hashem has forsaken me" — that is the withdrawal and the removal. And He says that here there is no withdrawal or removal, just as He said that there is no withdrawal from the fruit of a person's womb, which is not withdrawn from the mother because of the great attachment and joining that a mother has to her child. So too there is no withdrawal or separation of Israel from Hashem, because of the great joining and attachment that Israel have with Hashem, in respect of their being reckoned as children, as has been explained.

And because one might think that there is removal and withdrawal for Israel on account of their own deeds — for the calf they made causes them withdrawal, since as soon as He brought them out of Mitzrayim they made the calf — consider the following. Just as the sacrifices they offered in the wilderness indicate the essence of Israel, that they have a joining to Hashem, as we said, so too the calf they made in the wilderness indicates that Israel have some separation and withdrawal from Hashem on their own side. For had Israel had a complete joining to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, as we said, they would not have made the calf at their very beginning, when He brought them out of Mitzrayim; and this certainly indicates withdrawal and separation. Just as they have a joining and a drawing near to Hashem from their own side, so also the incident of the calf indicates withdrawal and separation from their own side.

Concerning this He said, "These too will be forgotten" (Yeshayahu 49:15). The word *eileh* (אלה, "these") is a term of severity, as the Sages said in the second chapter of Yevamos (21a): the punishment for forbidden unions is severe, for "these" is written concerning them — "for all who do these are an abomination to Hashem" (Devarim 25:16). Every use of the word *eileh* implies severity, as it is written (Yechezkel 17:13), "and he took the mighty of the land" — *eilei* (אילי), a term of strength and severity. And Scripture says that although this matter — the mother's joining to the fruit of her womb — is a strong thing and hard to remove, nevertheless there is removal for it. This is because father and son are distinct from one another, and therefore this joining admits removal, and forgetting

applies to it. Had Israel no other joining except that they are His children, then, hard and strong though it would be to remove, there would still be forgetting for it — as He said, "These too will be forgotten," meaning: though it is a hard thing that there should be forgetting for this, forgetting for it is nonetheless possible. So too the calf, from this side, admits forgetting: for it was possible that Israel should not have made the calf, and anything that is possible admits removal, as though it had never been.

But "and I will not forget you" (Yeshayahu 49:15). The meaning of this is that what is from Hashem's side — that His Name is called upon Israel, and that He, may He be blessed, is King over them — admits no forgetting, and there is no removal for it. For He, blessed and exalted, is the God of Israel by necessity, as it says (cf. Yechezkel 20:33), "with My fury and with My wrath I will be King over you": Hashem is God to Israel whether they will or not. Therefore, when He came to give the Torah to Israel and to impose decrees upon them, as a king comes to impose decrees upon his people — beginning, as He did, with "I am Hashem your God" (Shemos 20:2), that is, I am your King and your God — He held the mountain over them like a barrel. He showed them that He, may He be blessed, is their King in spite of them, as we have explained; and this is in no way from Israel's side. For anything that is from the side of the receiver — every receiver is merely possible in itself, and since it is possible in itself, removal and withdrawal are possible for it. But this matter is from the side of the cause, which is Hashem. One therefore cannot say that there is any aspect of possible removal in it, since it did not come from the side of Israel's will; rather He held the mountain over them like a barrel, as we have explained at full length in the work *Tiferes Yisrael*. For this, certainly, there can be no removal.

Therefore "I am Hashem your God" is the first of all the commandments, for this matter precedes everything, being a necessary matter that could not be otherwise. And this is plainly evident: even though Israel made the calf and served *avodah zarah*, they certainly were not *kofrim* — deniers — of "I am Hashem your God." Hence the incident of the calf, although by it they transgressed the commandment "You shall have no other gods" (Shemos 20:3), does admit forgetting, since the calf is from the side of the worshippers. Understand and see: in the first commandment it is written "I am Hashem your God" — He did not say, "Accept Me as God," which would have made the matter depend upon Israel. Rather He said, "I am Hashem your God," whether you will or not and in spite of you. But in the second commandment, which is from Israel's side, He said, "You shall have no other gods" — and we have already explained

this in the work *Tiferes Yisrael*. Therefore the incident of the calf admits forgetting. Understand these matters well.

Now, once you grasp the matters explained here, and grasp some of it on your own — for it is impossible to set everything down in writing — your heart will be astonished at this sight: how deeply they expounded the verse, and how their exposition is the true meaning of the verse, with the utmost precision. For in saying "Can a woman forget her infant, from having compassion on the son of her womb" (Yeshayahu 49:15), Scripture hinted that forgetting and removal are hard with respect to the joining that Israel have in being His children — and it hinted at it by *lashon nofel al lashon*. So too in saying "These too will be forgotten" (ibid.), which comes to say that there is removal and forgetting from the side of Israel, the receivers, even though it is hard. And likewise there is removal for the baseness that Israel have, since that too is from their own side — namely the incident of the calf. With the word *eileh* Scripture hinted at Israel's sin in making themselves the calf, which is *avodah zarah*, a severe sin; and this is "These are your gods, Israel" (Shemos 32:4), as is known to one who understands words of wisdom — all of it a matter of the greatest depth. So too in saying "and I will not forget you" (Yeshayahu 44:15 [recte: 49:15]): this is what is primary in there being no forgetting and no removal for Israel, namely that He, may He be blessed, is the God of Israel in particular. For this there is no forgetting, since it is from Hashem's side, and a thing that is from Hashem's side admits no removal or withdrawal.

Every wise and discerning man will marvel at how close their words are to the plain sense, together with a depth that is utterly wondrous; while the man who is a stranger to words of wisdom will marvel at how far they are from the meaning of the verse, and their words will not seem right to him at all. This is nothing new, for it is so with the Torah and with all of Scripture: to the man who is a stranger to words of wisdom, certain things in the Torah appear far-fetched. But the discerning man will say that it is no empty thing — and if it is empty, it is empty from him. So too with all the derashos in the Talmud and in all the other midrashim: there is not one of them, great or small, whose words are not the depth of the verse according to its truth; when a man probes deeply into the meaning of the verse he will find it. That is why it is called a *derashah* — because it is the searching-out of the verse by investigation and by *derishah* (דרישה, "searching") pressed very far indeed, down to the depth of the verse. And although one sometimes finds one Sage expounding in one direction and another in another, this is no difficulty, for the form of the plain sense is certainly one, while the deep matters that issue from it are very many. So it is with every single

thing found in the world: it is one in itself, as it is revealed to every eye; yet when each thing is examined according to the truth of its matter and its essential nature, many things and many aspects are found in it, and all of them are clearly true. Therefore, when the Sages examined the truth of the verse, they found many differing things and various matters according to the subject — and all of it is true. It is only to one who does not grasp their words that the matter appears strange.

On this point some of the rabbis deserve a measure of rebuke, who apply the name *derashah* to whatever they say about a passage from the words of the Sages, whether or not the one who said it meant it so — the preacher merely wishing to string together novel ideas. The stranger a thing is, the more beloved and acceptable and pleasing it is to them; and they hang themselves upon those midrashim of the Sages that appear most far-fetched. Heaven forbid! They have stumbled and fallen. That is not what a *derashah* is. It is called a *derashah* because it is the searching-out and investigation of the verse, in the way that the Sages had it by tradition to expound the Torah by the thirteen *middos* — the hermeneutical principles — from which they subtracted nothing and to which they added nothing at all. But a *derashah* made of empty words — Heaven forfend — is nothing other than a falling short of the Sages' understanding and of the depth of their words, as we said. There is no doubt that it is impossible to explain their words in general terms, for given the depth of their words a single statement of theirs requires a very extensive exposition, which is not possible here. Rather, the things we have said are meant to teach about the whole: that all of their words are true and complete, and there is no blemish in them. For if what seems the most far-fetched of all — as these passages seem — is as we have shown, then how much more so what is not nearly so far-fetched.

A man thinks at the beginning of his study that their words are far-fetched, when in fact they are close at hand; their words simply require great contemplation. The reason is a single one: it is the way of the Sages that even their plainest words require contemplation, in accordance with the depth of the wisdom in them. In proportion to the greatness of each sage's wisdom his words are deeper, and in proportion to a man's smallness in wisdom there is no depth in his words. This is manifestly evident to the senses from all the sages who have lived until now: that the closedness of the words is in proportion to the greatness of each man's wisdom, for his words are deeper; and in proportion to a man's smallness in wisdom there is no depth in his words. And this is manifestly evident from all the sages who have lived until now: that the closedness of the words is in proportion to the greatness of the sage's wisdom.

Now look at the first chapter of Chullin (6a). There the verse is cited: "When you sit down to eat bread with a ruler, understand well (*bin tavin*) what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are a man of appetite" (Mishlei 23:1–2). [Aramaic: "Of what does the plain sense of the verse speak?"] And the answer given there is: of a student sitting before his teacher. For it was taught: R. Chiya says — if a student knows of his teacher that he can give him a reasoned reply, then "*bin*," understand; and if not, "understand what is before you, and put a knife to your throat." "If you are a man of appetite" — separate yourself from him. Thus far.

These words appear, at first thought, exceedingly far-fetched: that the sense of the verse should be "if a student knows of his teacher that he can return him an answer, *bin*; and if not, and so forth." For in this they drive a wedge between words that belong together, since "understand well what is before you" is a single expression, and they divide it in two. Our Rabbis, of blessed memory, do say that the verse means this: when a man draws near to a ruler and eats bread with him, let him take care not to be scorched by his coal on account of coming too close. That is "when you sit down to eat bread with a ruler, understand well what is before you" — that is, that you should understand what lies before you, so as not to be scorched by it. But the view of Chazal is that the verse is not speaking of a ruler who is a king, or of any ruler at all, since the verse goes on to say, "and put a knife to your throat if you are a man of appetite." What danger so great is there in this, that it should say "put a knife to your throat," if a man eats with some ruler? They therefore explained the plain sense of the verse as speaking of one who draws near to men of excellence and wisdom, whose sting is the sting of a serpent and a fiery serpent, in proportion to their holiness. Scripture describes the student as one who "sits down to eat bread," on the model of the verse "Come, eat of my bread" (Mishlei 9:5). And when he studies before a man who possesses wisdom and Torah, let him take care not to be scorched by his coal by shaming his teacher, should his teacher fail to answer his question properly. Of this it says, "understand well what is before you" — that he not be scorched. The doubled expression "understand well what is before you" implies that he must be exceedingly precise about not being scorched, for sometimes he may study with him and sometimes he may not. It is as if to say that he should discern when to study — and that is "understand well what is before you." So the phrase "understand well" itself already indicates that sometimes he studies and sometimes he does not. That is why they divided the verse: if his teacher can return him an answer, then "*bin*"; and if not, "let him understand what is before him" and not study. "And put a knife to your throat if you are a man of appetite" — even though you crave Torah and wisdom exceedingly, and wish to seek out

and ask about certain matters in Torah, a man must restrain himself, for the punishment is exceedingly severe. The plain sense of the verse, then, is entirely sound.

In the chapter *HaMocher es HaSefinah* (Bava Basra 78b), Rav Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of R. Yonasan: What is meant by the verse, "Therefore the *moshlim* — those who speak in parables — say: Come to Cheshbon..." (Bamidbar 21:27)? "The *moshlim*" — these are those who rule (*moshlim*) over their evil inclination. "Come to Cheshbon" — come, let us make the reckoning (*cheshbon*) of the world: the loss incurred by a mitzvah against its reward, and the reward of a transgression against its loss. "Let it be built and established" — if you do so, you will be built up in this world and established for the world to come. "The city (*ir*) of Sichon" — if you make yourself like this colt (*ayir*) that runs after pleasant talk (*sichah*), what is written after it? "For a fire has gone forth from Cheshbon..." (Bamidbar 21:28) — a fire will go forth from those who reckon and consume those who do not reckon. "A flame from the town of Sichon" — from the town of the righteous, who are called "Sichon." "It consumed Ar of Moav" — this is the man who runs after his evil inclination, like this colt that runs after pleasant talk. "The masters of the high places of Arnon" — these are the arrogant, for the master said: any man in whom there is arrogance falls into Gehinnom. "And we cast them down" (*venirom*) — the wicked man said, "*ein ram*," there is no Exalted One. "Cheshbon is lost" — the reckoning of the world is lost. "As far as Divon" — HaKadosh Baruch Hu said: wait until judgment comes (*ad sheyavo din*). "And we laid waste as far as Nofach" — until a fire comes that needs no blowing (*nipuach*). "As far as Meidva" — until their soul languishes (*she'tad'iv*). And some say: until He does what He wishes. Thus far.

This interpretation too, and this derashah, appear exceedingly strange — the like of which is not found anywhere in the words of the Sages. This is so from the side of the subject matter, since it has no bearing in a place where Scripture is speaking of Sichon's conquest of Cheshbon; and all the more so from the exposition of the individual words, which are exceedingly remote from the plain sense. Now know this: when the Sages have a wisdom to draw from a verse, they were not particular that all the verses should follow from it in a plain-sense reading, even though they do not — for certainly the whole passage does follow that matter which is disclosed in the verse. And even if it follows only by a far-fetched route, there is no cause to object; for concerning this and the like they said [Aramaic: "Leave the verse be — it strains and settles itself"] (Pesachim 59b). That is: even though it is expounded in a far-fetched way, the verse settles itself into this matter, since in any case the matter is to some degree disclosed in the

verse, and everything is drawn to it, as will be explained. This is a very firmly laid foundation, upon which a great many things are built, for whoever has eyes to see and a heart to understand.

Now this verse (Bamidbar 21:27) must perforce be saying, "Expound me!" For otherwise, what have those who speak in parables said in "Come to Cheshbon, let the city of Sichon be built and established"? Any man could say such a thing. Why does Scripture hang the matter upon composers of parables, who are the sages of old, men of renown? Rather, the sense of the verse is that these speakers of parables spoke by way of parable and figure when they said, "Come to Cheshbon, let the city of Sichon be built and established." That is: when you come to a reckoning — namely, to reckon whether the conquest of the city is fitting, so that this city should be Sichon's city — you will find, according to the reckoning, that it is fitting that it be Sichon's city. And that is "let the city of Sichon be built and established." "For a fire has gone forth from Cheshbon, a flame from the town of Sichon; it consumed Ar of Moav, the masters of the high places of Arnon" (Bamidbar 21:28) means that a fire went forth from this judgment — for every reckoning is a judgment, as the Sages used this idiom everywhere: "he is destined to give judgment and reckoning." And from their reckoning — which is the judgment and justice rendered according to the exact reckoning — their kingdom was lost. That is why the dominion of Moav was removed from Divon as far as Meidva, and "we laid it waste as far as Nofach." The whole passage follows this, and such is the plain sense of the verse.

Yet the verse does not come to relate that Sichon conquered Cheshbon, for that is not something that endured, since Israel afterwards conquered it all (Bamidbar 21:25). Accordingly, what is written in the Torah, "Come to Cheshbon," comes only to say that a man ought to come to a reckoning — that is, that he should perform all his deeds so that they are exact according to the reckoning. This is so according to the plain sense of the verse as well: "come to Cheshbon" means that the matter is according to the proper reckoning, with nothing wanting and nothing in excess. And because the verse means to say that a man's deeds should be according to the reckoning — and this is what is primary in the verse, and this foundation is disclosed and evident, as has been explained, that the verse alludes to it — it follows that this is a verse that "strains and settles itself," in that the whole passage is to be drawn to this; and even if it is drawn by a far-fetched route, there is nothing to wonder at in that. For what is primary is disclosed explicitly in the verse — namely, that everything is done according to the exact reckoning — and everything else follows of itself, even if it is very remote. This is

a very great foundation in the Sages' interpretation of the Torah, and it is a thing altogether proper and well received.

In the first chapter of Gittin (7a): Rav Huna bar Natan said to Rav Ashi, What is meant by the verse "Kinah, Dimonah, and Adadah" (Yehoshua 15:22)? He said to him, [Aramaic: "It is enumerating towns of the Land of Israel."] But Rav Geviha of Argiza gave a reason in the matter: whoever has a grievance (*kin'ah*) against his fellow and stays silent (*domeim*) — He who dwells forever (*shochein adei ad*) will execute judgment for him. He said to him: if so, then "Tziklag, Madmanah, and Sansanah" (Yehoshua 15:31) likewise? He said to him: if Rav Geviha of Bei Argiza were here, he would give a reason in that too. Rav Acha of Bei Chozai gave a reason in it thus: whoever has a cry over food taken from him (*tza'akas legimah*) against his fellow and stays silent (*domeim*) — He who dwells in the bush (*shochein basneh*) will execute judgment for him. Thus far.

This midrash is far from the plain sense; and it is also difficult, for the verse surely is enumerating towns of the Land of Israel. So too with what it says, "But Rav Geviha of Argiza gave a reason in the matter, and so forth" — all of this is difficult: why was it necessary to give a reason, rather than to say that the verse is enumerating towns of the Land of Israel? But when you examine the matter closely you will find something wondrous. For this name "Adadah," and likewise "Sansanah," is a doubled name. Although we certainly do find doubled names, they are not like these, which are names of places. Rather, where doubled names are found, they are found among names that have a meaning, as is well known. But we do not find the name of a city doubled unless there is a reason for it — for why should the name be doubled, as though there were no other letters to be had? And certainly, had the name consisted of two entirely separate words, there would be no need to give a reason why it is so called. But where the name is doubled in its very letters, a reason must be given for it.

He therefore expounded "He who dwells forever will execute judgment for him" — and that is why it is written "Adadah." Likewise "Sansanah" is doubled, meaning that just as Hashem, may He be blessed, executed judgment upon Mitzrayim for Israel's sake — and Hashem revealed Himself to Moshe in the bush (*sneh*) in order to execute judgment upon them — so too He will execute judgment for this man; and that is why this name is doubled. We have explained this in our work *Gevuros Hashem*; see there. And with regard to the man who has a grievance, he said, "He who dwells forever will execute judgment for him." For one who has a grievance — that is, where his fellow did something to his person because he was lowly in his eyes — of him it says "He who dwells forever," who

dwells on high yet sees the downtrodden, and executes judgment for him. And the man who has a cry over food taken from him — because his fellow took his money, which is his livelihood — for him too Hashem executes judgment, He whose attribute is judgment and who therefore revealed Himself in the bush in fire. Nor should it trouble you why these places should be named for such a matter; it is no difficulty. Since one city is called "Kinah" (Yehoshua 15:22), which is an expression of grievance, those beside it were called "Madmanah and Sansanah" (ibid., v. 31), to indicate what they said; and so too "Tziklag" (ibid.). That is why these places were called by these names. This is exceedingly clear to whoever has wisdom in him.

In the first chapter of Berachos (4a) they expounded why Moshe said "about midnight" (*kachatzos*) and not "at midnight" (*bachatzos*) (Shemos 11:4). They said there that Moshe said: lest Pharaoh's astrologers err and say that Moshe is a liar. He therefore said *kachatzos*, which implies close to it — either before it or after it.

Rashi (R. Shlomo Yitzchaki) **explained** in his commentary on the Torah (ad loc.) that *kachatzos* is like "as the dawn rose" (*ka'alos hashachar*, Yehoshua 6:15) — meaning that it is an infinitive, since *ka'alos* denotes only the very moment of rising, neither before it nor after it at all. So too *kachatzos* denotes the very dividing of the night, neither before nor after. And this is the view of all the grammarians with one voice: that it is the infinitive of the *kal* conjugation, from the class of verbs whose final root-letter is *heh* — so much so that the matter is perfectly clear in their eyes, and they have no doubt about it whatsoever. But this is the way of the grammarians: they look only at the shape of the word, at its measure and at its form and pattern. Once they have found the word's pattern and measure, they immediately determine that this word belongs to this class, without giving a thought to the meaning of the word at all; and then they drag the sense to fit the word, even by a far-fetched route. This is not the way of the Sages; they looked rather to the meaning of the word and its sense. Thus, since the word *kachatzos* is of the same measure as *ka'alos*, the grammarians take it as obvious that its sense is likewise the same. But this is not so, for there is a distinction. *Ka'alos* is an active verb — the day rises — and "as it rose" applies to it; but the dividing of the night involves no action, so an active form does not apply to it. What applies to it is the *nifal* form, as in "and the night was divided against them" (Bereishis 14:15), which is a *nifal* form. And Rashi himself explained *kachatzos* (Shemos 11:4) as "when the night divides" (*kehechalek halailah*) — thereby indicating that it is the *nifal* form that applies to the dividing of the night, and not the active form. If we were to explain *kachatzos* as being like *ka'alos*, it would be an active form, and that cannot apply to the dividing of the night. Their words are

therefore right: they did not explain it as they explain *ka'alos*, and they expounded, according to their wisdom, what they expounded.

Likewise, in the chapter *Ein Omdin* (Berachos 32a): "because of Hashem's lack of ability (*mibilti yecholes*)" (Bamidbar 14:16) — it should have said *mibli yachol*. Moshe said before HaKadosh Baruch Hu: Master of the world, the nations of the world will say that Your strength has grown weak like a female. Thus far. It would appear from this that they explain *yecholes* as a second-person feminine verb form. That is certainly not so, for it is a noun. Rather, because it is difficult that Scripture should have written *mibli yachol*, they explained that this expression indicates a deficiency of power. For "he is not able" can be said even of something that is impossible in itself, as you would say, "no man is able to ascend to heaven." But it is not apt to say, "he has not the ability to ascend to heaven," since "there is no ability" is said of a deficiency of power. Had Scripture written *mibilti yachol*, it would not have implied a deficiency of power, but rather that the thing is impossible in itself; and the meaning would then have been that He is unable to bring them in because it is a thing against nature that a small nation, as Israel was, should defeat the seven nations that were in the land. And in a thing impossible in itself there is not so great a deficiency. But as it stands they will say *mibilti yecholes* — that His strength has weakened, Heaven forbid — for this is not against nature at all, and is not impossible; it is only that His strength has weakened, Heaven forbid. That is why it is written *mibilti yecholes*: to indicate deficient power, to say that His strength has weakened, Heaven forbid, like a female, whose power is deficient.

Furthermore, anything that is subordinate to something else is called "female." Thus "wisdom" is spoken of in the feminine, because it is subordinate to the man, who is the possessor of the wisdom. That is also why the Sages called the Torah a "wife," since she is subordinate to, and joined with, the master of Torah. Likewise ability is a "wife" to the possessor of ability, since ability attaches and is joined to the one who possesses it. Here Scripture said *mibilti yecholes* and not *mibilti yachol*, because it comes to say "Your strength has weakened like a female" — the female being the ability; and He, may He be blessed, would then be, Heaven forbid, as it were the ability itself, which is feminine, as we said. That is why it said *mibilti yecholes*. And apart from all this: *yecholes* is said of a female just as of a male — as you would say "for lack of Reuven's ability," and likewise "for lack of Leah's ability." Since Scripture wrote an expression that is the same for female as for male, this is a hint that they would say, "Your strength has weakened like a female." All their words, then, are exact (*medukdakim*), and nothing departs from

grammar (*dikduk*) at all. And so it is with everything they said: nothing departs from the grammar of the language.

There is a further matter in their words that appears strange from the standpoint of grammar. It is in the first chapter of Kiddushin (3b), where it is derived that a woman is betrothed with money, since it is written "and she shall go out free, without money" (Shemos 21:11) — "there is no money for this master." That is: when she leaves the master's authority there is no money; "but there is money for another master," namely the father — when she leaves his authority there is money, for the father receives her betrothal money, and thereupon she is no longer in the father's authority. And it says there (Kiddushin 4a): And from where do we know to expound in this way? For it was taught: "and she has no seed" (Vayikra 22:13) — from this I know only her own seed; from where do I know her seed's seed? Scripture says "and she has no seed" — *ayein lah*, examine her case. And the Tanna himself, from where does he know that we expound in this way? Because it is written "Bilaam refused" (*me'ein*, Bamidbar 22:14) and "my husband's brother refuses" (*me'ein*, Devarim 25:7), and in neither of these is a *yud* written, whereas here a *yud* is written — learn from this.

Now there are some who say that this derashah is remote from the grammar of the language. For here the *mem* is a root letter, and a *yud* cannot occur in the word, since its measure is that of *beirech*, "he blessed" (Bamidbar 23:20), and *bei'er*, "he expounded" (Devarim 1:5). Moreover, every *ein* in Scripture is written full, with a *yud*. Yet here too their words accord with the grammar. For this proof amounts only to this: that the sense of the word *ein* is like *me'ayin* in "from where (*me'ayin*) will my help come" (Tehillim 121:1) and "from where (*me'ayin*) are you?" (Bereishis 29:4). And lest you say that the *yud* of *ein* is there merely on account of the *tzeirei* beneath the *aleph*, and that the word does not belong to the same class as *me'ayin* *atem* — he therefore brought a proof: "*me'ein* Bilaam" has no *yud* in it; and if the *yud* in the word *ein* were not a root letter, the word would not have a *yud* on account of the *tzeirei*, just as there is no *yud* in the word *me'ein*. He cited *me'ein* only because of the similarity of the word. For this reason the word *ein* in Scripture is like *me'ayin* in "from where will my help come": the word means "where is this thing?" — as in "and behold, there was no man in the house" (cf. Bereishis 39:11), meaning "where is he?" The word *ein* is the same as *ayin*, in which the *yud* is mobile; only because this word is used so frequently, they left the *yud* quiescent. The Radak explained that "if not, I am a dead woman" (Bereishis 30:1) and "from where will my help come" (Tehillim 121:1) are two distinct senses. But it is not so; they are one and the same sense, as has been explained. And since the word *ein* is of the same idiom as *ayeh*, "where?", and this

idiom implies searching — where is it, when you search for it? — Chazal therefore explained that the word *ein* by its very idiom implies that the thing is altogether absent, even if you search for it. That is why they expounded (Yevamos 22b) "he has no child" (Devarim 25:5) — *ayein alav*, examine his case by searching; for the idiom implies "where will you find this, even if you search?" Hence they expounded, "there is no money for this master, but there is money for another master." For this idiom implies "where is this thing, which ought to be here?" And such an expression is used only when there is money in another case, so that one asks: where is it here, as it is elsewhere? From this we learn that there is money in another case.

Now the words of the Sages do accord with the grammar, and they are things open to view: the Sages went to great depths in examining the language precisely and descending to the depth of the verse. This is what is called *midrash chachamim*, "the exposition of the Sages" — the things that issue from the depth of the verse, while the verse's plain sense stands firm. So they said in the second chapter of Yevamos (24a): a verse never departs from its plain meaning. They thereby disclosed to us that the plain sense is not to be uprooted at all; it remains, and the *derashah* they expounded within it is the depth of the verse.

To what may the matter be compared? To a tree whose root stands in the ground: it puts forth branches, and puts forth fruit and leaves as well, and all of it issues from a single root. So too the plain sense is the root of the verse, and it then spreads out into many things, so that many branches ramify and twine out from it in every direction. So they said in the first chapter of Sanhedrin (34a): one verse divides into several senses. There is therefore no difficulty when you find that they expounded a single verse in several ways. For even in natural things, many things spread out from one thing — as we have said, that from the one thing which is primary many things spread out and divide — and all the more so with the words of the living God, where there is no doubt that the holy utterance divides into several ways and several matters.

For the holy utterance comes from Hashem, may He be blessed, in accordance with intellect; the utterance of Hashem is not something He merely wills and desires, without reason and intellect. Were the matter so — that it is what it is only because He wills and desires it — nothing further would follow necessarily from it, since a thing of that kind is a matter of will and desire alone. But the utterance of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, which is the Torah, is not like that. Rather, the commandments of the Torah follow necessarily from wisdom; and from the things that follow necessarily from wisdom, further things extend, and from

those a further matter of wisdom follows necessarily. This is known to every person of intellect. Therefore, since the words of the Torah are intelligible, many further intelligible things extend from it and follow necessarily from it.

This is the matter of the perfect Torah, in which a single verse divides and spreads out into several senses — some remote from its plain meaning, some close to it. It is like a tree whose root, which is what is primary in it, is in the ground: things extend from what is primary in it, some remote from what is primary and some close to it, yet all of them extend from the root. So it is with the Torah. The root is one — it is the plain sense of the verse — and from the plain sense many things follow necessarily in every direction, and these are the *derashos*. A person thinks that the exposition stands divided off on its own and does not emerge from the plain sense of the verse. That is not so at all: whoever descends to the depth of the Sages' words will find that their words extend from the plain sense and follow necessarily from it. Some are close and some are remote, but the root is one. This is entirely clear, and there is no need to elaborate further.

You should further know and understand this: in everything the Sages expounded from a verse, what is primary was not that they learned the matter from the verse. Rather, even apart from the verse the matter is so according to the Sages' knowledge and intellect, and the matter is true in itself. And once the matter is true in itself, it is simply impossible that it should not be hinted at in the verse, for the Torah is perfect and everything is in it. Therefore it is impossible that the matter not be hinted at in the midrash, even though the hint is very remote. In the end everything is found in the Torah, as befits the Torah.

With this, this complaint too is removed. For certainly it is impossible to explain everything: what has been said here could not suffice for all that is primary in the Talmud. But it does suffice as evidence concerning the remaining words of the Sages — that in all of them there is no deficiency whatever, for one who probes deeply and studies them.

The Fourth Well — living waters, flowing down from the treasury of the heavens. No hands have laid hold on their source, and no eyes have had mastery over them. They go forth from Eden, waters welling up. Their appearance is like crystal, purified sevenfold. They shine and sparkle like the sun at noon.

There is one who speaks rashly, like the thrusts of a sword (Mishlei 12:18). These are the words of a grumbler (cf. Mishlei 18:8), of men of contention. They open their mouths wide against them (Tehillim 35:21), and their tongues stand like a

sharpened sword (cf. Tehillim 57:5). They bend the bow to shoot at words that are beloved — words that flow from a fountain of living waters (Shir HaShirim 4:15), from the river of Rechovos (cf. Bereishis 36:37); hewn out by a spirit of wisdom and a spirit of understanding (cf. Yeshayahu 11:2); sparkling and shining like the gleam of burnished bronze and like flames (cf. Yechezkel 1:7); built to Talpiyos (cf. Shir HaShirim 4:4), carved after the pattern of a palace (Tehillim 144:12); refined and tested (cf. Yirmiyahu 9:6), seated in the height of the world (cf. Pesachim 118a); bread of delights (Daniel 10:3), sustaining the heart (cf. Tehillim 104:15); precious sayings (cf. Tehillim 12:7), better than the honeycomb; and to those who find them they are life, healing every pain (cf. Mishlei 4:22).

[The twelve clauses from "There is one who speaks rashly" to "healing every pain" form an acrostic on their initial letters in the Hebrew: יהודה בן בצלאל — Yehudah ben Betzalel, the author's name.]

And now they turn a bright light in the skies (cf. Iyov 37:21), a light blazing out on every side, into darkness and the shadow of death and disorder (Iyov 10:22). Words that are pleasant, and are bread eaten in secret (Mishlei 9:17), they turn into bitter wormwood. What is measured out in all wisdom and intellect they treat as though it were folly and alien talk; and judgments that are true, righteous and upright are reckoned falsehoods. Therefore my heart, my heart moans like the sea, and my spirit too is broken within me, for I have heard the evil report of a people who deride and scoff at words of delight. The things that appear in the Talmud they spurn, and these have become loathsome to them.

Now the great rabbi who was filled with wisdom like the sea in every branch of learning — natural, divine and mathematical — the Rambam, of blessed memory, treated these precious matters at length in his introduction to Seder Zeraim. He taught knowledge to the people in a manner befitting the greatness of his wisdom in this matter, and he opened a gateway of wisdom for us, making known to us that all the Sages' words are delights and are the very principles of wisdom, and that they spoke in them as it befits the wise to conceal what is hidden — as the great rabbi elaborated at length, giving reason and understanding. His words, in general and in detail alike, need no strengthening, no support and no prop; for who could support or prop up a great tree, whose every word is planted like nails driven home, and which sends out its roots by the stream? To his words nothing is to be added and nothing taken away. They are famous to all, and whoever wishes to grasp them will find them ready to hand.

And because the rabbi spoke only in general terms — to show the peoples that the matter is not as they think, that things are to be found in the Sages' words

with no substance to them, Heaven forbid, when this is not the case at all — while as for the individual passages, he did not explain them, and that for two reasons. The first is the sheer length of the undertaking: without doubt, had he set out to expound their wisdom for even a single Seder alone, no great stretch of time would have sufficed. The second is that a man must take care not to contend with their words. They covered the matter over and concealed it deeply — how then should he uncover it? Sin and guilt might follow from doing so. So it was that they said to R. Akiva when he said (Shabbos 96b) that the wood-gatherer (Bamidbar 15:32) was Tzelafchad. They said to him: in either case you are destined to give an accounting for this. If it is not so, you have cast a slur upon that righteous man; and if it is so, you are destined to give an accounting, for the Torah covered him over and you are uncovering him. The rabbi was therefore careful not to contend with the divine intent, in accordance with which the Sages sealed these matters up.

But those who cast doubt will not listen to any of this; they still rise up in their own strength to dispute. It is therefore fitting to go further and establish a just verdict by clear testimony — to bring proof and trustworthy evidence, a weighing of righteousness and truth — and to quiet the complaints with clear words, taking up some of the passages that seem the strangest and the most remote from reason. These will serve as the test for all the rest, showing that every one of them is precious. For if the most remote of them prove to be words of delight and precious, then all the more so those the critics find less loathsome; and in this way the complaints of these men will be quieted. The matters we shall explain are ones found in the books of wisdom, stored away and hidden. To those matters we shall neither add nor subtract; we shall only add explanation, because those matters are so hidden and concealed, until a person acquires an understanding of them. It is not that we boast of such things, for they befit only the wise of heart, whose heart is broad as the sea, and not men such as I.

I prostrate myself upon the ground, hands and feet outstretched, before the reader, and ask him to grant me two things. The first: that if he reads these words and they do not enter his heart, he read them again and study them further. For these matters enter the reader's heart only through very great study. Such is the way of all words of truth and uprightness: at first study they appear remote, and in the end they are disclosed and shine like the sun at noon. The second request: that if after all this the matters still do not enter his heart, these words should be for him as though they had never been said at all. Let him not say that, even though an explanation has been offered for these passages, the explanation does not enter the mind of the one who studies it, so that there is no further

explanation to be had — and thereby ascribe, Heaven forbid, a deficiency to the words of the Sages. In that case our remedy would have turned into a ruin, having caused him to think ill of the words of the Sages. Perhaps this is the very reason the early authorities were unwilling to disclose the words of the Sages: out of the fear that, if the explanation did not enter the mind of the student, he would, Heaven forbid, impute a deficiency to the words of the Sages, saying that there is no further explanation and that this explanation is unacceptable. So they left the matter sealed, so that the student would say: the words of the Sages are like a sealed book, and there is no grasping them, as with everything that is sealed. Therefore I ask and plead that this be granted me — that if after study he does not accept what is said, he set my words aside, and let them be for him as though they had never been said at all, and let the words of the Sages be for him a sealed book, just as they were for him before these things were said.

And first one must wonder at this: they ought to have given thought to the rest of the Sages' words, which are the overwhelming majority — so much so that beside them the few are nullified as one among thousands. All of them are precious and well ordered, luminous, teaching a person wisdom and the fear of Heaven by their moral instruction — things unknown to any of the sages of the world. And the order of prayer and of the blessings, and abstinence, scrupulousness, holiness and purity: so that if a person walks in their ways, he is given a place to walk among those who stand enduring on high.

When a person of understanding and wisdom contemplates their words, this is a wonder in his eyes. For it does not lie within human knowledge to encompass all these matters, in general and in detail, unless the Sages received them on the authority of the prophets. And all the more so the explanation of the commandments. Anyone with a heart to understand knows that without their explanation no one would know how to expound a single commandment: what it is that is called *chelev* (the forbidden fat); which kind of blood is forbidden — for the Torah writes only "of fowl and of animal," whose implication is: and not a wild beast; and meat with milk, where nothing is said but "You shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk" (Shemos 23:19). So too with all the commandments: there is not one, small or great, whose meaning we could know were it not for their great wisdom. This is evident, and can be tested by any thinking person. How, then, can it enter a man's heart to assail their words and say that something is to be found in them, Heaven forbid, whether small or great — as these people say when they see in their words things that are strange according to the plain sense, and conclude in their own minds that such a passage is folly? In saying this they have spoken perversely against Hashem. And if so, where then is that exalted

wisdom of theirs, which is evident in everything else, in which they plumbed the depths of the sea? They ought to have taken to heart that what is closed up is learned from what is explicit. Since what is explicit in their words is manifestly deep wisdom — take the matter of the laws, in which they descended to the very depths of the great abyss, and likewise their dialectic, all of it words of wisdom — why should they reckon sin and iniquity against them? They ought rather to have judged of them thus: were it not that these men slaughtered the feast and set a table before us with every kind of delicacy upon it — would that we even had a mouth with which to eat! To this both the sages of Israel and the sages of the nations must testify: that the Sages were eyes for us in the Torah of Moshe, and that without them we would have been like blind men groping in the dark, wearing ourselves out to find the doorway to a single commandment in its clarity and its truth. And it is not merely that we would not have known the true meaning of any commandment; rather, we would have gone from one opposite to the other, understanding a commandment in the opposite sense from what the Torah intended. How, then, can we think of them, on account of a few passages that appear remote from reason, that their intent was nothing but falsehood — to relate things that never happened? And still less that they had it in mind, Heaven forbid, to say something that does not accord with the true faith in Him, may He be blessed. Are they not the very ones who warned and were stringent about anyone who speaks a false word?

In the last chapter of Pesachim (113b) R. Elazar said: Anyone who alters his word is as though he served *avodah zarah*. It is written here (Bereishis 27:12), "and I shall be in his eyes as a deceiver," and it is written there (Yirmiyahu 10:15), "they are vanity, a work of delusions." Thus far the Gemara. What they meant by this is that one who lies resembles an idolater, for the idolater cleaves to falsehood. The essential severity of the idolater's sin is that he is lying: He, may He be blessed, is One (Devarim 6:4), and there is nothing besides Him, yet the idolater lies in making a god that is a falsehood. Therefore one who lies in his words resembles one who serves a false god, whose essential severity is that he is lying. For falsehood has nothing to stand on and has no existence at all — that is the very nature of falsehood; and so too *avodah zarah* is falsehood and has no existence at all. Although there is a further dimension of sin in the idolater, nevertheless, in the very respect in which Scripture condemns idolaters — that "they are vanity, a work of delusions" — this liar too cleaves to falsehood and vanity. He is therefore reckoned as though he served *avodah zarah*, from the side of the disgrace of falsehood and delusion.

They further said in tractate Sotah, in the chapter *Eilu Ne'emarin* (42a): Four classes do not receive the presence of the Shechinah — the class of scoffers, the class of liars, the class of flatterers, and the class of those who speak *lashon hara* (malicious speech). Thus far. So they said that the liar does not receive the presence of the Shechinah, since two opposites, such as truth and falsehood, cannot be joined together, by reason of the opposition between them. He, may He be blessed, is called "God of truth" (Tehillim 31:6), and His seal is truth (Shabbos 55a). How, then, should a liar receive the presence of the Shechinah and be joined with Him face to face? That would be the existence of two opposites together. In many other places, too, they dwelt at length on the disgrace of the liar — to the point that they said the defining mark of a *talmid chacham* is one who does not alter his words, as they said in the second chapter of Bava Metzia (23b). This is because there is no falsehood in wisdom; that is precisely why it is wisdom. If there were falsehood in his wisdom, it would not be wisdom but imagination. Therefore there is no falsehood in a sage. And it is fitting that in all his affairs — even in a matter that does not belong to his wisdom but is something else entirely — since he is a sage, and from the side of his being a sage there is no falsehood, no falsehood whatever should be found with him.

After all this, how could their words be the reverse of it — that they should alter their words and relate things that are not true? Rather, if we find in their words things that seem beyond a man's grasp, surely there is wisdom hidden in them: they are words of parable and figure, in the manner of the wise, as Scripture says (Mishlei 1:6), "to understand a parable and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles." Are we to think ill of them merely because we do not grasp their words? Nor is it any wonder if a man does not penetrate the secret of their words. Just as our time is far removed from theirs — very far indeed — so there is a difference between their wisdom and ours corresponding to the difference between the times. All agree on this, that wisdom belongs to the earlier generations and not to the later. The sages of Israel have already dwelt at length on the difference between the earlier and the later generations in wisdom, as was explained above. It is therefore only right that we should say we do not understand the riddles of their wisdom. Had they lived with us in one and the same time, then it would have been fitting for us to form a judgment about their words; but the difference and division between the times makes a difference between their wisdom and ours.

Now see that most of their words are in the manner of parable and the figurative speech of wisdom. In the chapter *HaDar* (Eruvin 63a) it is said there that it is forbidden to rule on a point of law in one's teacher's presence, and that one who

does so is liable to death. An objection was raised [Aramaic: the give-and-take that follows is quoted in Aramaic]: R. Eliezer had a disciple who ruled on a point of halacha in his teacher's presence. R. Eliezer said to Imma Shalom his wife, "I wonder whether this man will live out his year" — and he did not live out his year. Rabbah bar bar Chanah said: that disciple's name was Yuda ben Guria, and he was three *parsaos* distant from him. The Gemara answers: it was in his presence. It objects: but it says he was three *parsaos* distant from him! And according to your reasoning, why do I need his name and his father's name? Rather, they are given so that you should not say it was a parable. Thus far the Gemara. You see, then, that because it is the way of the Sages to speak in parable when they speak of wondrous matters — as here, where R. Eliezer said that this man would not live out his year, and so it was, and one might well have supposed it was a parable — the Gemara therefore mentioned his father's name and his place, to show that it happened in fact and not in parable. It follows that where the statements are extraordinary and they did not specify that it is not a parable, as they specified here, these are words of wisdom and are like a parable. One should therefore not be astonished, when he sees in their words things that appear to fools remote from reason, [that] they are words of wisdom — and all the more so when he finds in their words things that seem, Heaven forbid, to detract from His honor, may He be blessed, for these are hidden matters. We shall now begin to adduce some of their statements: the ones that are strange and by far the most difficult, those about which we have heard and seen people complaining. From these we shall take the test for the rest, in which the difficulty is not so great.

In the first chapter of Berachos (7a) it is said: R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Yosi ben Zimra, how do we know that HaKadosh Baruch Hu prays? Because it says (Yeshayahu 56:7), "and I will bring them to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer." It does not say "in the house of their prayer," but "in My house of prayer" — this teaches that HaKadosh Baruch Hu prays [Aramaic: *metzalei*]. And what does He pray? "May it be My will that My mercy conquer My anger, that My mercy prevail over My attributes, that I conduct Myself with My children with the attribute of mercy, and that I enter with them beyond the letter of the law." Thus far the Gemara.

Over this statement many pour out their bile: to whom, they ask, should He pray? There is none besides Him, and everything lies within His power. But now consider — who other than the Sages themselves taught us the unity of Hashem, may He be blessed, and fixed it in us evening and morning, together with His power and His might, when they arranged for us the order of prayer and of the

blessings? Could it enter anyone's mind that after all this they would say such a thing, Heaven forbid, and hold such a notion? Rather, the difficulty arises because their understanding is far removed from ours. They knew the secrets of wisdom and of prayer, the essential nature of prayer, and what the very word *tefillah* means. For when you consider the word *tefillah* (תפילה), it derives from *palal* (פלל), as it is written (Tehillim 106:30), "and Pinchas stood up and *vayefalel*" — and this is well known. The root *palal* denotes thought, as Rashi explains on "I had not *pilalti* to see your face" (Bereishis 48:11), and as in (Yeshayahu 16:3) "bring counsel, render *pelilah*." So too Onkelos renders the verse (Bereishis, *ibid.*) [Aramaic] *lemechzei anpach lo sevaris* — "I did not suppose that I would see your face." Judges are likewise called *pelilim*, because a judge renders judgment in his thought: this matter stands thus, and that matter stands thus. The word *tefillin* has the same sense of thought, for the tefillin are "for a sign and for a remembrance between his eyes" (Shemos 13:9), and remembrance takes place in thought. That is why the tefillin are set upon the head, where thought resides — so that a man's thought should always be that He, may He be blessed, is his God. And they are likewise set opposite his heart, so that his heart should always be turned to Hashem. The tzitzis, by contrast, are named for seeing, from the expression (Shir HaShirim 2:15 [recte: 2:9]) "peering through the lattices." Of tefillin it is written (Shemos 13:9), "and for a remembrance between your eyes," and of tzitzis (Bamidbar 15:39), "and you shall see it."

Prayer, then, is named from *palal*, which denotes thought, because prayer requires intention and thought that Hashem should do what a man desires and wills; and this is what is called *tefillah* — that his will and his thought desire and seek the good. This is the sense of "how do we know that HaKadosh Baruch Hu prays": since He is the true good, "abounding in kindness" (Shemos 34:6), called "one who delights in kindness," and He seeks the good. His praying, therefore, means His seeking the good. For prayer is nothing but request, and that is the very sense of the word "prayer" everywhere. It is only that with a human being the request is directed to Hashem — for otherwise, what would his request accomplish when he asks for something? In any case, the word "prayer" is a word of request. And so it says that Hashem desires and seeks this: that it be His will that His mercy conquer His anger, that He conduct Himself with His children with the attribute of mercy, and that He enter beyond the letter of the law. As for why they used precisely this expression, "HaKadosh Baruch Hu prays," and did not say "HaKadosh Baruch Hu desires" or "seeks," that will be explained shortly.

Now as to why it says that HaKadosh Baruch Hu prays "May it be My will that My mercy conquer My anger," rather than praying simply "that My mercy conquer

My anger" — why should He desire that the will be so? This is no difficulty. He says "may it be My will" because it is through will that the thing He seeks comes to be in full completeness. Had the prayer been merely "that My mercy conquer My anger," the conquest of His anger by His mercy would not have come about in full completeness. This is why most requests are framed as "May it be Your will..." — because it is through complete will that the thing sought comes to be in completeness from Him, may He be blessed. Accordingly, the prayer — that is, His request and His desire — is that there be complete will regarding this. And there is a great difference between "desire" and "will": the latter is said of complete will, and when the will is so, the matter comes to be in completeness. This is plain.

The Rambam wrote in his book, in Part II, chapter 18 (*Moreh Nevuchim* II:18), that an agent who acts by will, and does not act for the sake of some end but acts as follows from his will, does not undergo any change of mind when he performs an act he had not performed until now. For this is the very truth of will itself — that he wills — and it is no change in him. On this basis, it says that He prays "May it be My will..." since it is through will that He does what He wills and enters beyond the letter of the law. Were it otherwise, there would be, Heaven forbid, a change in Him, from not willing to willing; but when the prayer is "May it be My will," there is no change in Him at all, since everything follows upon the will. Such is the nature of will: that He wills and does not will, and this is no change. That is why they used this expression, "May it be My will." Still, the first explanation is clear beyond doubt.

Because He, may He be blessed, is the good and seeks to bring about the good, His prayer is that there be the will to enter beyond the letter of the law. Were He not to seek this, it would not come to be at all. For a thing that falls under the attribute of justice needs no request or desire on His part, since the attribute of justice of itself yields that it be so, and no request is required for it. But a thing that is not on the side of justice — such as this, that He enter beyond the letter of the law and conduct Himself with the attribute of mercy — would never come to be were it not that He, may He be blessed, desires and seeks the good; it comes about only because He desires and seeks the good with all His intention and desire. That is why they said, "HaKadosh Baruch Hu prays." Prayer is an utterly complete request, for such is every prayer: a complete request to do the good. And this is His prayer — that His mercy conquer His anger, that He conduct Himself with His children with the attribute of mercy and beyond the letter of the law. It is on this account that good is found in the world at all, even though it is not on the side of strict law. It would not be fitting for anything to exist in the

world that is not on the side of justice; but inasmuch as He is the complete good, He seeks to bring about the good — for whatever is good seeks to bring about good. The reverse of this is "the soul of the wicked desires evil" (Mishlei 21:10): he desires and yearns to do evil.

Had he stated it in this way — that He, may He be blessed, is the good itself, and therefore seeks to bring about the good — the words would have been welcome and accepted. And that is precisely what the matter amounts to. They stated it in the language of prayer only because of the verse they brought as proof (Yeshayahu 56:7), "and I will make them joyful in My house of prayer" — it does not say "in the house of their prayer," but "in My house of prayer." Thus far. The explanation of this is that "the house of their prayer" is the Beis HaMikdash, for it is there that Israel's prayer to Hashem is offered, that He conduct Himself with them with the attribute of His goodness and beyond the letter of the law. And for that very reason He too, who is the true good, seeks to bring about the good in accordance with their will and their request. Were it not that they ask it of Him and pray to Him, it would not be fitting that He should desire and seek to do them good, since they do not ask it of Him. The house of Israel's prayer is therefore the house of HaKadosh Baruch Hu's prayer. It is on this account that what Hashem desires and seeks is called by the term "prayer," in the language of the verse.

Furthermore, it is fitting that the term be precisely "prayer," because prayer bears upon the very self of the one who prays: he asks for something he desires, and that thing bears upon his own self. And since Hashem is the good and seeks to bring about the good, this matter bears upon His own self, inasmuch as the good seeks to bring about good. Therefore it says, "HaKadosh Baruch Hu prays."

But what is primary is as we said: there is a difference between one request and another. There is a request in which a man does not exert himself so greatly, because the thing he asks for does not depart so far from what is due that it requires exertion. But prayer is for a thing that would not come about of itself without such exertion. It is therefore called *tefillah*, a word said of a man's thought and intention, since here thought and intention are engaged to the utmost. This is what they said in the fifth chapter of Berachos (32b): four things require strengthening, and these are they — Torah, good deeds, prayer, and *derech erez* (one's worldly occupation). And it says there: prayer — from where do we know it? Because it says (Tehillim 27:14), "Be strong and let your heart take courage." That is to say: because a man asks for something that Hashem has not granted him in accordance with his nature, prayer requires strengthening — for he is asking for something that is not due to him. In the same way, His desiring

something that is not according to justice, namely to go beyond the letter of the law, is called "prayer," since He desires this exceedingly: to enter beyond the letter of the law. On this reading everything stands according to its plain sense: He greatly desires that His mercy conquer His anger, and this desire of His for something not due according to justice is His prayer. So too with anything that is not according to justice and that He desires to be: Hashem brings it about through the very intensity of His desire and His request for it, and that is His prayer. Thus in saying "HaKadosh Baruch Hu prays, may it be My will...", they made it clear that Hashem desires exceedingly that there be the will that His mercy conquer His anger. And when this comes about through Hashem's will, the conquest of anger will be entirely complete. This is a clear and correct explanation, beyond doubt.

In this they came to make known [that one must] reject the view of the philosophers, who said that all things come from Him, may He be blessed, by way of necessity, without His intending or willing to act — that they simply come by way of necessity. Our Sages rejected these things and say that they come from Him by way of intention and will. That is why they said that He prays: for when one desires and requests a thing, that thing is not necessitated. Were it necessitated, there would be no need to request that it come to be, since it is necessitated. And so they said that He prays — that is, that He requests something not necessitated, such as this, that He enter with them beyond the letter of the law. On the philosophers' view, nothing could be found in the world but strict law, since they say that everything comes by way of necessity; and it is known that what is beyond the letter of the law is not by way of necessity. On their view, then, nothing comes into the world from Him but strict law. This is what the Sages came to reject: the matter is not so. Rather He performs kindness and enters beyond the letter of the law, and this by willing and seeking the good.

As for the objection raised — how can we say that He, may He be blessed, does anything beyond the letter of the law, since He is complete with the utmost completeness? How could He do something that is not on the side of justice? For what justice yields is fitting to be of itself, and what justice does not yield is not fitting to be; why, then, should He desire something that is not due from the side of justice? This is no difficulty, for He seeks and desires to bring about the good, as we said: that which is the good itself seeks to bring about good. It is on this account that He seeks to bring about the good and to enter beyond the letter of the law, and this is the complete good, in which there is no strict law. And because He is the good, good comes forth from Him even where it is not according to strict law, and this is from the side of His goodness. Nor is there any

question here of a change of will in Him, from not willing to willing, for this is the very truth of will: to do what He wills and when He wills; and that is why it says "May it be My will," as above. Moreover, it is fitting that He enter with them beyond the letter of the law when the receiver asks it, as was explained above, since it is written (Yeshayahu 56:7), "and I will make them joyful in My house of prayer" — for the house of Israel's prayer brings about the prayer of HaKadosh Baruch Hu as well, as was explained above. There is thus no change of justice here and no change of will.

Rashi, of blessed memory, explained the verse in the book of Tehillim (72:15), "all day long he will bless him," and these are his words: "It is prayer, it is blessing; when HaKadosh Baruch Hu says [to a person] 'May you be blessed,' this is an expression of prayer." Thus far his words. He too means what we have said: that Hashem's desire regarding a thing is what is called "prayer." See, then, that all the gold and precious stones in the world could not equal these words — the answer the Sages gave to those who are bent on doing harm, who say that everything is emanated from Him by way of necessity, without intention or will. They refuted their words and taught us good sense and knowledge. And when you understand the expression "HaKadosh Baruch Hu prays," that very expression teaches us the opposite of what those men say. For they said that things come from Him not by way of intention and desire, but are emanated from Him by way of necessity; whereas the word "prayer" points specifically to intention and desire, since, as was explained above, it derives from a root meaning thought and intention. What is primary in every prayer is the intention and the desire — which is to say that everything comes from Him wholly by way of intention and desire. For this reason too they cast the matter in the language of "prayer" and in no other language: to say that there is intention before Him in the things He does, and that they do not come by way of necessity, in which case there would be no intention in them. The truth of their words is thereby made clear. For this one ought to extol and praise them, to glorify and exalt them above all the wise of heart. More on this will be explained in connection with the statement "Yishmael My son, bless Me" (Berachos 7a) — see there, for there we have opened a further gateway of wisdom and gate of heaven.

In the first chapter of Shevuos (9a), and in the chapter *Eilu Tereifos* (Chullin 60b), Reish Lakish said: In what way is the he-goat of Rosh Chodesh different, that of it alone it is said (Bamidbar 28:15), "as a sin-offering (*chatas*) to Hashem"? HaKadosh Baruch Hu said: Let this he-goat be an atonement (*kapparah*) for Me, for having diminished the moon, and so on. Thus far. When they see this statement they are alarmed and dumbfounded, saying that He, may He be

blessed, Heaven forbid, stands in need of atonement. This case too is of a piece with the first: it is the pressure of habitual usage. In Scripture and in ordinary human speech, the word *chatas* is said of one who has sinned against Him, may He be blessed, and brings a korban to secure atonement for it; and the word *kapparah* likewise applies to one who has sinned in deed and brings a korban, which on that account is called a *kapparah*, since it is the atonement of his sin. Neither is applicable to Hashem, may He be blessed. It cannot be said of Him that He did something He ought not to have done, nor does *kapparah* apply to Him at all, Heaven forbid.

But the matter is not as they supposed. Every removal and taking-away is called *kapparah* — Rashi too explained the word in this way on "I will appease his face with the gift" (Bereishis 32:21). The point is plain: every wiping-clean and removal is called *kapparah*, and not specifically the atonement of a sin, that Hashem should grant a man atonement. Accordingly, when He said "Bring a korban of *kapparah* for Me," this means the removal of a grievance concerning the work of Hashem. There are two rulers in the world, the sun by day and the moon by night; yet the moon is diminished month after month, until no light of the moon is found at all. You will find nothing like this in the whole of the upper host of heaven, so that in this respect the moon departs from the rest of the host of heaven. Hashem therefore established for it an excellence corresponding to this. For this is Hashem's way: He gives an excellence in place of the lowliness that has come upon a thing, until everything is in balance. Hashem brings all existing things into balance, so that no grievance is to be found with the Creator. This is why He gave the moon a korban on Rosh Chodesh — a level you will not find in the sun or in any other of the host of heaven. Corresponding to the diminution He gave it, which is found in none of the host of heaven, He gave it a distinction found in none of the host of heaven, namely the korban written in the Torah. So the matter is in balance: "this corresponding to that" (cf. Koheles 7:14).

Perhaps you will object: what excellence does the moon gain from a korban offered on Rosh Chodesh? You should know that the korban, which bears this very name, indicates the drawing near to Hashem that belongs to this day more than to the other days. The moon's diminution is precisely what brought about a drawing near to Hashem, who draws near the lowly and the small — as the Sages, of blessed memory, expounded (Megillah 29a) on [the] verse (Tehillim 68:17), "Why do you look askance, O many-peaked mountains," and so on: that Hashem chose Sinai over all the mountains because it was the smallest of the mountains. It is therefore fitting that this day should be just such a day — the day on which He diminished the moon, which rules the world, as it is written (cf. Bereishis

1:16), "and the moon for the rule of the night." And so, at the renewal of the moon — the time when the moon is at its smallest — it receives thereby a drawing near as well. That is why HaKadosh Baruch Hu said, "Bring an atonement for Me": that they should bring something that removes the moon's complaint over its diminution, and this is the korban. For it is on account of the moon's diminution that the world receives the drawing near to Him, and in that lies the removal of the complaint. In saying "Bring an atonement for Me," then, the meaning is that the korban of Rosh Chodesh is a taking-away and a removal, so that the complaint has been removed from the moon; now, by means of this korban, no complaint remains at all.

So too the Radak explained, under the root *kapparah*: the word denotes removal. He treats it at length, showing that the word means nothing other than removal. So too *chatas*: its meaning is nothing but deficiency, as Rashi explained on "I would bear the loss of it" (Bereishis 31:39). Rashi explained that it is an expression of deficiency, like "one who slings at a hair and does not miss" (cf. Shoftim 20:16), and "I and my son Shlomo shall be found wanting" (Melachim I 1:21). Onkelos rendered the verse in the same sense (Bereishis, *ibid.*). Every korban that comes to repair a deficiency is called a *chatas*, because it repairs the deficiency in a man's deed. In the same way this korban repairs the deficiency in the work of Hashem — for the moon was deficient and diminished, as though the deficiency lay in His works, since it alone of the whole host of heaven has a deficiency. Corresponding to this He gave it the korban of Rosh Chodesh, for the korban is a drawing near to Hashem, and this came to the moon on account of its diminution. That is why it is written of this korban (Bamidbar 28:15), "as a *chatas* to Hashem": it is the repair of the deficiency of the work of Hashem, just as every *chatas* is the repair of the deficiency of a man's deed. And there is no doubt that a verse never departs from its plain sense (Shabbos 63a) — "as a *chatas* to Hashem" does mean to repair the deficiency of a man's deed. It is only that "to Hashem" is written of this korban, as it is written of no other korban, to say that this korban also repairs the deficiency of the work of Hashem, so that they are complete, with no deficiency at all.

We have already explained in what respect the moon's complaint is repaired: it is when the diminution itself brings about a drawing near to Hashem. This is the "atonement for Hashem" — that is, the removal of the grievance from Him, may He be blessed. Perhaps, in the view of those men, the korban is not significant enough for it to be an excellence that makes good the grievance. But this is folly on their part, for there is no excellence like this one: through the renewal of the moon — which is to say, through its smallness — the moon has a complete

drawing near to Hashem, since He, may He be blessed, desires smallness. And smallness is certainly to be reckoned a supreme excellence. That is why Hashem said to the moon just before this (Chullin 60b), "The righteous will be called by your name" — meaning that smallness is the attribute of righteousness, and that this is why a righteous man is called "the small one." We have explained elsewhere how smallness is the attribute of righteousness. Yet even this was not enough for the moon that had been made small, and so HaKadosh Baruch Hu said, "Bring an atonement for Me." For the korban is offered on Rosh Chodesh, when the moon is at the utmost of smallness, and on this day there is the drawing near to Hashem — as the very name "korban" indicates, that on this day there is the drawing near to Hashem. And this is the removal of the complaint from the moon.

Are these words not exceedingly pleasant? For you will not find "to Hashem" written of any korban but this one, and it points to the truth of Hashem's ways, who brings His works into balance. The truth of the words of the Sages has thus been made clear to you: there is nothing in their words but divine wisdom of the very highest order. We have only kept guard over the way to the Tree of Life (cf. Bereishis 3:24), so as not to disclose more than we should. Elsewhere we have treated this at greater length. May He, may He be blessed, grant atonement on our behalf, for our intention is to show the nations a little of it — and this is the honor and the glory of the Sages, while they account as nothing words that are words of wisdom. And this is enough.

In the chapter *HaZahav* (Bava Metzia 59b), in the dispute between R. Eliezer and the Sages, R. Eliezer said to them: "If the halacha is as I say, let Heaven prove it." A *bas kol* (a voice from heaven) came forth and said to them: "What have you against R. Eliezer, seeing that the halacha follows him in every place?" R. Yehoshua rose to his feet and said (Devarim 30:12), "It is not in heaven." R. Yirmiyah said: "We pay no heed to a *bas kol*, for it is already written in the Torah (Shemos 23:2), 'to follow the majority.'" [Aramaic: R. Natan came upon Eliyahu and said to him, "What did HaKadosh Baruch Hu do at that moment?" He said to him, "He laughed and said, 'My sons have defeated Me.'"] — thus far. Now these men are astonished on two counts. First, at his saying "We pay no heed to a *bas kol*." Second, at His saying "My sons have defeated Me" — for it is impossible that a layman should defeat his master in a matter of halacha.

Now incline your ear and hear the words of the Sages (Chagigah 15b). Know that when the *bas kol* said, "What have you against R. Eliezer, seeing that the halacha follows him in every place," the words "in every place" are an addition. But the

meaning of its saying "the halacha follows him" is that this is on account of his excellence — such is the measure of the wisdom in Torah that he possesses. It is like our ruling "the halacha follows so-and-so," which is by reason of the excellence in wisdom [of] that particular man, so that it is fitting to follow him. And such is the meaning here: "the halacha follows R. Eliezer in every place" — for it is a matter of weighing the excellence of the Sages against the excellence of R. Eliezer in his wisdom, in every place. It is no innovation that it should declare the halacha to follow an individual against the majority, even though it is written in the Torah (Shemos 23:2), "to follow the majority" — for all of this is on account of R. Eliezer's surpassing wisdom. That is why the *bas kol* came forth to say that the halacha follows R. Eliezer, even though he is an individual against the majority.

To this they said: "We pay no heed to a *bas kol*, for it is already written in the Torah at Sinai, 'to follow the majority.'" What they meant is that they had already acquired the Torah given from Sinai, and the Torah is the supernal simple intellect, which stands higher than a *bas kol*. And the Torah, which is the supernal simple intellect, does not follow the particulars of individual sages, so as to say that because this sage's wisdom is the greater, the halacha ought to follow that sage. That is why he said that they declared: we have already acquired the Torah given from Sinai, and the Torah does not follow the particular of this one or that one, but only the universal, which admits no change — not the particular; and it is the universal that is to be followed. That is why they said, "We pay no heed to a *bas kol*." The meaning is not that the halacha follows R. Eliezer because of the ruling itself, as has been explained above. The wording proves as much, for it would not be apt to say "What have you against R. Eliezer, etc." if the *bas kol* were saying that his ruling is true — since whoever the speaker might be, the ruling would be true. Rather, the *bas kol* said that one must follow R. Eliezer's words in every place, so great is he in Torah; and it granted R. Eliezer this standing of excellence, since he is so great in wisdom that his words are to be acted upon in every place, and the halacha is to follow him. This they were unwilling to accept — only "to follow the majority." And this is by virtue of the Torah, which is the supernal simple intellect, since it is written in the Torah, "to follow the majority."

And Hashem, may He be blessed, "fulfills the will of those who fear Him" (Tehillim 145:19), and He agreed with them, as Eliyahu said that HaKadosh Baruch Hu said, "My sons have defeated Me, My sons have defeated Me." At this they are astonished more than at anything. Yet here too there is no cause for astonishment at all, for the Sages used this expression whenever a thing comes

about from the side of the receiver. Since it is from the side of the receiver, who is man, and not from the side of the Giver, this is spoken of as defeating Him, may He be blessed — for the thing is done according to the mind of the receiver. There is great wisdom in this: they were unwilling to say that Hashem retracted and said, "You have spoken well," for that would imply that there is change and retraction in Him. But by this expression, "My sons have defeated Me," nothing more is meant than that the thing was done according to the mind of the receiver, and that He, may He be blessed, carries out the will of the receiver — even though it is not from the side of the Giver, in accordance with His own attribute, but is done in accordance with the mind of the receiver. Since the receiver desired this supreme level — that the halacha follow the majority — and brought the matter out from the attribute, so that the mind of the receiver was carried out, this is called a defeat. They said the same thing in the chapter *Eilu Megalchin* (Moed Katan 16b): "'The God of Israel said, to me the Rock of Israel spoke' (Shmuel II 23:3) — who rules over Me? A righteous man, as it says (ibid.), 'a righteous man ruling in the fear of God.' I decree a decree, and he nullifies it" — thus far. You see that this expression is plain: when the righteous man, by his petition, nullifies the attribute — something belonging to the attribute of the Giver — the thing is then done according to the mind of the receiver. So, for instance, He decreed something and the righteous man nullifies that thing, which stands by His attribute of judgment; this is called a defeat. We have already explained that this is the term that ought to be used, and that it is not fitting to say that He retracts, for then there would be change in Him, Heaven forbid. Rather it is called setting His attribute aside in order to carry out the will of the receiver, since the receiver too belongs to Him. That is why He said, "My sons have defeated Me" — for they are My sons, and they are His own; and so, in this, what I do is likewise My own mind and My own will. There is therefore nothing troubling in this statement, "My sons have defeated Me"; it is simply an expression of wisdom. The matter is plain: when a father says "My sons have defeated me," he does not mean that they have done something against him. Rather, "my sons have defeated me" means that their will is done, whatever they may desire — and that itself is the father's own will.

And so it is with [this] matter. According to what is fitting for the world, it should follow the individual who is what is primary, just as the *bas kol* said that the halacha follows R. Eliezer in every place, on account of the greatness of his wisdom. But according to the level of the Torah, which is supernal intellect, what is primary should be the majority, which is the universal — for the universal is close to intellect, whereas the particular is close to the physical, and this is well known. Moreover, the universal is the essence of the thing and what is primary in

it, whereas the particular is neither the essence nor what is primary. That is why at Sinai He gave them "to follow the majority," since the universal, which is the majority, is the essence and what is primary. And because the *bas kol* said that the halacha should be ruled like R. Eliezer by reason of the greatness of his wisdom — whereas that which stands enduring and unchanging is the universal, which admits no alteration — therefore at Sinai, where an eternal Torah was given, enduring without change, He gave Israel "to follow the majority." It was this supreme excellence that they wanted, and not the level of a *bas kol*. If it strikes them as strange that HaKadosh Baruch Hu (Bava Metzia 59b) "laughed and said, My sons have defeated Me," this too will be explained: it is the exceeding joy that is before HaKadosh Baruch Hu when His sons possess such completeness that He, may He be blessed, carries out their will. The matter of this laughter will be explained in connection with "HaKadosh Baruch Hu sits and plays with the Leviathan" (Avodah Zarah 3b); see there.

And now, O men — how long shall their honor be turned to shame? For by this expression, "My sons have defeated Me," the Sages meant to disclose a matter of the greatest weight: that a man must take care and guard himself, when he sees that there is a change in some matter, not to say that there is retraction here before Him — Heaven forbid to say such a thing, or even to entertain the thought — for "He is not a son of man, that He should relent" (cf. Bamidbar 23:19). Rather, there are two things here, and they are two aspects. The first aspect is from the side of the Giver and Decree Himself, without the aspect of the receiver entering in at all — only what is fitting by the attribute itself. The second is from the side of the receiver. And when, from the side of the receiver, there is a nullification of the aspect that is from the side of the Giver, this is called a defeat. It is worth attending closely to the wording R. Yehoshua used, "It is not in heaven" (Devarim 30:12) — that is to say, the Torah is not in heaven; rather, we received it from Sinai. And since we have received it, then even if it would be fitting from the side of the Giver for the halacha to follow R. Eliezer, we the receivers received the Torah from Sinai and acquired this very thing, namely "to follow the majority." This mitzvah is an excellence and a completeness for those who receive it, as has been explained above: the Torah is the supernal simple intellect, which does not follow the particular but only the universal, and so it would not be fitting to give them anything else, lesser than this. That is why no heed is paid to a *bas kol*, which is a level below this.

Now, wherever Hashem has instituted something new through a prophet — as with Eliyahu at Mount Carmel, who offered a korban outside the Beis HaMikdash (Melachim I 18:33), even though at Sinai He gave the law that offerings are not to

be brought outside it (Devarim 12:14) — this presents no difficulty. On the contrary: at Sinai this very mitzvah was also given, to listen to a prophet, as it is written (Devarim 18:15), "to him you shall listen." From this they learned (Yevamos 90b) that if he tells them to deviate from one of the mitzvos of the Torah — apart from *avodah zarah* — Israel are obligated to obey. But this is not to establish a halacha for the generations, only for the moment, [in what] he commands them. If so, this very thing is itself a mitzvah of Hashem from Sinai, like the rest of the mitzvos.

See how R. Yehoshua framed his words with wondrous wisdom, by which he won his case before Him, may He be blessed. Inasmuch as they received the Torah from Sinai and acquired this attribute of "to follow the majority," there is no nullifying it. To this HaKadosh Baruch Hu said, "My sons have defeated Me" — meaning: I say that this is indeed what they ought to do, and I agree with them. Even though I said that the halacha follows R. Eliezer, "My sons have defeated Me," like a father whose sons defeat him and who then carries out their will, until the father wants and desires what his son desires. One who studies these words will find the Sages' words weighed in the scales of righteousness and of wisdom; and when he examines them further and probes them more deeply, he will find yet more wisdom. There is no need to expand further here. What has been made clear in this matter is that it is the opposite of what men suppose: by these very words the Sages kept far off what ought to be kept far off.

In the chapter *HaPo'alim* (Bava Metziah 86a), in the account of Rabbah, who was sitting on the stump of a date palm and studying. [Aramaic: He heard that they were disputing in the *mesivta* of the *rakia* (the academy on high): if the *baheres* (the bright spot on the skin) preceded the white hair, he is *tamei* (ritually impure); and if the white hair preceded the *baheres*, he is *tahor* (ritually pure). In a case of doubt, HaKadosh Baruch Hu says *tahor*, while all of the *mesivta* of the *rakia* said *tamei*. They said: Who shall decide the matter? Let Rabbah bar Nachmani decide, for Rabbah said, "I am singular in *nega'im* (the laws of the skin affliction), I am singular in *ohalos* (the laws of corpse-*tumah* conveyed under a roof)." They sent a messenger after him [etc.]. The Angel of Death could not draw near him, because his mouth did not cease from study. Meanwhile a wind blew and rustled among the reeds, and he took it for a troop of horsemen. He said, "Let that man's soul come to rest, and let him not be handed over to the authorities." As his soul departed he said, "*Tahor! Tahor!*" A *bas kol* went forth and said, "Fortunate are you, Rabbah bar Nachmani, that your body is *tahor* and your soul departed with the word *tahor*."] — thus far. At this they are exceedingly embittered on two counts. First, how could they — Heaven forbid — be disputing with their Creator

and their Fashioner? Second, and greater still, that they should say "Who shall decide?", so that a layman decides for his master. Here too, listen to these words, and their righteousness will go forth like brightness and their wisdom will shine like the sun in its full strength and might.

Know that in this statement they disclosed to you something of the upright ways of Hashem, may He be blessed, which are upright toward all created beings. He is not like a king of flesh and blood, who issues a decree upon his people and gives no regard to how the matter stands with those who must receive it. Hashem's deeds and acts are upright toward the receivers. For it has already been explained above that the aspect which is from the side of the receivers is other than the aspect which is from the side of the Giver. HaKadosh Baruch Hu does nothing unless it is fitting and right for the receivers as well — and that is an aspect other than the aspect from the side of the Giver.

And in the chapter *Echad Dinei Mamonos* (Sanhedrin 38b), R. Yochanan said: wherever the *minim* (sectarians) raise their objection, the refutation stands right beside it. "Let us make man in our image" (Bereishis 1:26) — "and God created man in His image" (ibid. v. 27). "Come, let us go down and there confound their language" (Bereishis 11:7) — "and Hashem went down to see the city and the tower" (ibid. v. 5). "For there God was revealed to him" (Bereishis 35:7) — "to the God who answers me in the day of my distress" (ibid. v. 3). "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it as Hashem our God is whenever we call upon Him" (Devarim 4:7). "And who is like Your people Israel, one nation on earth, whom God went to redeem as a people for Himself" (cf. Shmuel II 7:23). [Aramaic: "until thrones were set in place and the Ancient of Days sat" (Daniel 7:9).] Why, then, are these last there at all? R. Yochanan said: HaKadosh Baruch Hu does nothing until He takes counsel with the heavenly retinue, as it says (Daniel 4:14), "the matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones" — thus far. By this the Sages made known that what is written, "Let us make man in our image," and the like, means that He, may He be blessed, took counsel with the heavenly retinue — and that is the sense of "Let us make man." Heaven forbid that the intent should be that He needs counsel and consultation from His creatures: He created them, and their intellect and their knowledge as well, so how could it enter a man's mind to say such a thing? Rather, the meaning is that no opposition should be found in the world. An illustration: when HaKadosh Baruch Hu willed to create man, then even though man was fit to be created from the side of the Agent, who is Hashem, there could still have been opposition to him from the side of the existing beings — if this creation had no joining and bond with the heavenly retinue, so that opposition arose here. For

with this creation, on two grounds, there is more reason for consultation than with the other created beings. The first is that man has in him something of the upper beings — the soul, wisdom, and intellect — and when a man merits it, he has an excellence and a level among the upper beings. It is therefore fitting that this creation have a bond with the upper beings, and fitting that it come about in such a way that no opposition to man be found. The second is that all the lower created beings were created for man's sake; and if man's creation is fitting, then all the created beings that exist for his sake and are subordinate to him are fitting as well, since he is what is primary. That is why Scripture does not write "let us make" of any of the created beings but only of man — because HaKadosh Baruch Hu is the Agent who makes the created beings, and all His acts and deeds are upright and fit to be. Just as a thing is fitting from the side of the Agent, so it is fitting from the side of the existing beings, so that on this reckoning the world is one and has no opposition in it.

This is what they meant (Sanhedrin 38b) by saying that He does nothing until He takes counsel with the heavenly retinue: so that the will of the upper beings should be in it, and there be no opposition to it. That is why it is written, "Let us make man in our image" — meaning that man's creation should not stand in opposition to the angels, among whom man has passage; for man goes out from his own domain to have his domain among the upper beings, and it is therefore not fitting that the upper beings be opposed. This is the sense of "Let us make man": man was not created until the upper beings too consented to his creation — that is, until the upper beings were not opposed to it. Furthermore, since everything was created for his sake, everything depends on him; and once man has no opponent and no accuser regarding his creation, then all the other created beings, which were created to serve man, are fit to be created as well. In this way the decrees He issues among the existing beings are fitting from the aspect of the existing beings too, just as they are from the side of the Agent — as it says (Daniel 4:14), "the matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones." Heaven forbid that the intent should be that He has need of the watchers and the holy ones. Rather the meaning is as we said: His deeds are not opposed to them from the side of the existing beings; His deeds are upright and agreed to by all, and in this way there is no division and no separation in the world.

Therefore they said that the Torah, which is Hashem's decree, must be right and true for the existing beings just as it is with the Giver and Decreeer. That is why he speaks of this particular ruling — a doubtful *nega*, whether the *baheres* came first or the white hair came first. The law of *nega'im* is the weightier to apprehend, as

they said (Chagigah 14a), "What have you to do with Aggadah? Take yourself off to *nega'im* and *ohalos*." It follows that these *halachos* are the weightiest of all, and exceedingly deep; and within them, the weightiest is this ruling concerning a doubtful *nega*. For a matter that stands in doubt is everywhere treated stringently — that is the first and plain view, that every doubt is resolved stringently. And since they said that HaKadosh Baruch Hu takes counsel with the heavenly retinue, meaning that Hashem wants all to be in agreement about His decrees, it follows that when there is an aspect present among the existing beings that is not present with Hashem, that is precisely what a dispute is.

And in this ruling in particular the dispute arose. You must grasp this with depth of wisdom. *Nega'im* in particular are not fit to be in the world, and have no existence at all from their own side; they come only by accident and are not there essentially. Therefore a thing that is accidental is far removed from Hashem, who is necessary of existence — for He, may He be blessed, is necessary of existence, whereas an accident has no existence at all, but merely came about by chance. That is why Hashem declares a doubtful *nega tahor*: as if to say that this *nega* is not there at all, since its existence is an accidental thing, and it has no existence with Hashem, who is necessary of existence. But the rest of the *mesivta* of the *rakia*, who are possible beings and not necessary in themselves — for them a thing that is accidental, like the *nega'im*, is not as though it had no existence whatever; rather it does have existence for them, since they themselves are not necessary of existence. That is why they declare the doubtful case *tamei*: perhaps the *baheres* was there.

But Rabbah, who is singular in *nega'im* and singular in *ohalos* — since he is singular in *nega'im*, one who is singular is the closest of all to Hashem, who is necessary of existence. This is clear to the wise of heart: Hashem, who is entirely one and beside whom there is none other, is entirely necessary of existence; and one who is one in some particular matter — like Rabbah, who is singular in *nega'im* alone — has a drawing near to the One who is necessary of existence. That is why he declared a doubtful *nega tahor*: the accidental *nega'im* have no existence for him either, and so the doubtful case is *tahor*. And for this reason his soul departed in *taharah*, since by this he had the greatest cleaving to Hashem. The principle is this: the One who is necessary of existence declares the doubtful case *tahor*, and a doubtful *nega* in particular, because it has no existence with Him; therefore the doubt is resolved by saying that it is not there. This is very clear to those who possess understanding.

There is a further way to explain it, on the ground that *nega'im* are separate from this world. The proof that *nega'im* are separate from this world is that the Torah commands, of one who has a *nega*, that (Vayikra 13:46) "his dwelling shall be outside the camp" — that the man be set apart from the whole, because the *nega* is separate from the world. If so, then from the side of the *nega'im* there is duality here. The world as a whole is one, yet through the *nega'im* it is said of him, "his dwelling shall be outside the camp," that the man in whom the *nega* is found be separated and divided off from other men. It is thus as though there were outright duality here, inasmuch as there is a division among the existing beings, since the one in whom the *nega* is found is sent outside the camp. Therefore with Hashem, who is one (Devarim 6:4), the *nega'im* have no existence, since it is through the *nega'im* that duality comes to be. That is also why one recites *krias Shema* to remove afflictions — *pega'im* (פגעים) — and the *nega'im* too are a kind of *pega*, for it is written (Tehillim 91:10), "and no *nega* shall come near your tent." Therefore Hashem declares the doubtful case *tahor*. And because Rabbah bar Nachmani was singular in *nega'im*, in this matter he followed after Hashem, who is one.

And now, since it is fitting that Hashem's decree be true among the existing beings just as it is from the side of the Decreeer, they said "Who shall decide?" — in order to establish this ruling from the side of the existing beings. To this the answer was, "Let Rabbah bar Nachmani decide," for he is singular in *nega'im* and *ohalos*, and he would establish that this ruling is indeed as it stands, *tahor*, even from the side of those who receive the Torah; and thereby Hashem's decree would be true before all, even from the side of the receivers. And indeed Rabbah, by the greatness of his apprehension — in that he was singular in *nega'im* and *ohalos* — said "*tahor*," by virtue of the singularity in him in apprehension, for he stood upon the truth of this apprehension. The rest of the *mesivta* of the *rakia*, by contrast, had not apprehension enough to stand upon this matter, and for them it was like every other case of doubt, which is resolved stringently. When a man understands these things, investigates them and probes them deeply, he will find that everything set out here is entirely clear.

And so it is proved in the last chapter of Nazir (65b), where they said: every doubtful case of *nega'im* is *tahor*, but once it has become subject to *tumah*, its doubtful case is *tamei*. It asks: from where are these things derived? Rava said: because it says (Vayikra 13:59), "to declare it *tahor* or to declare it *tamei*" — since Scripture opened with the one first. Such is the reading given by [?], of blessed memory, in the chapter *HaMadir* in Kesubos. It objects: if so, then even once it has become subject to *tumah* its doubtful case should likewise be *tahor*. Rather,

when the ruling was stated it was stated with reference to this: "if the *baheres* came first," and so forth, up to "and R. Yehoshua *kihah*." What does *kihah* (כיהה) mean? Rabbah said: *kihah*, and it is *tahor*. But perhaps *kihah*, and it is *tamei*? Rava said: Scripture says, "to declare it *tahor* or to declare it *tamei*." And this is the meaning of the passage. Rabbah explained R. Yehoshua's word *kihah* as saying that since the matter is not clear but merely doubtful, it is *tahor*. Then it objects: but perhaps *kihah* means that it is dim and *tamei*. The objection is not raised against Rabbah, for it is obvious that R. Yehoshua holds *kihah* and *tahor* — otherwise what would distinguish him from the *tanna kamma*? Rather the objection is: from where does R. Yehoshua derive it? Perhaps on the contrary we should rule stringently, so that even though it is not a clear *nega* it is *tamei* by stringency, as we everywhere go stringently in a case of doubt. And it answers: since Scripture opened with *taharah*, there is the more reason to declare it *tahor*. This is just as we explained: *taharah* is essential while the *nega* is accidental, and what is essential precedes what is accidental. That is why Scripture puts *taharah*, which is essential, before *tumah*, which is accidental.

As for his mentioning this particular doubt — whether the *baheres* came first or the white hair came first — Rabbeinu Tam, of blessed memory, explained that it deals even with a case that has already become subject to *tumah*, and that this is why the verse is needed, to teach that the force of *taharah* is the stronger. But this is not the place for it, for we have explained the substance of this teaching at greater length there. And as for what is written (Vayikra 13:59), "to declare it *tahor*," first — you can understand this in light of what we have hinted concerning the *nega'im*, that they are external things; and that is why Hashem, who is entirely one, declares this doubtful case *tahor*. Rabbah bar Nachmani, who was singular in *nega'im* and in *ohalos*, agreed with *taharah*: because he was singular in *nega'im*, he stood upon the truth of the essence of the *nega'im*, and in their essential truth they have no existence. That is why they said, "Who shall decide? Rabbah bar Nachmani." These matters are exceedingly deep, and it was on this account that Rabbah bar Nachmani had a cleaving to Hashem by way of this *taharah*, as we said; from this side he is with Hashem, and that is why, as his soul departed, he said, "*Tahor! Tahor!*" All of this is as we said: by way of this apprehension Rabbah bar Nachmani had complete cleaving to Hashem, and there is no doubt as to the truth of these things. We have explained at more length than was strictly called for, in order to show all the nations how great the words of the Sages are; and so we have set out what we have found in the words of the Sages, hidden and stored away. It is all one manner of speech, and though it may appear to vary a little, it is nothing but one. And may He, may He be blessed, grant us atonement.

In the first chapter of Berachos (6a): R. Avin said in the name of R. Yitzchak — from where do we know that HaKadosh Baruch Hu puts on tefillin? Because it says (Yeshayahu 62:8), "Hashem has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength." "His right hand" means nothing other than Torah, as it says (Devarim 33:2), "from His right hand a fiery law for them"; and "arm" means nothing other than tefillin, as it says (Tehillim 29:11), "Hashem will give strength to His people," and so forth. The Gemara continues there, in Aramaic: "In the tefillin of the Master of the world, what is written? — 'And who is like Your people Israel, one nation on earth' (Divrei Hayamim I 17:21). And does HaKadosh Baruch Hu take praise in the praise of Israel? Yes," and so forth. What astonished them here is this: why should He require tefillin? These matters are deep and awesome; nevertheless, so that all the peoples of the earth may know how far they reach, we shall uncover about a finger's breadth and keep covered whatever can be covered.

Know that in this statement they came to make known the difference between Israel and the other nations. You should know that all created beings were created for His glory, may He be blessed, as the Sages fixed in the liturgy (Kesubos 8a), "who created everything for His glory, may He be blessed," and as they further said (Yoma 38a), "everything HaKadosh Baruch Hu created in His world He created only for His glory." The explanation is this. All existing things are for His glory, and some of them are a glory to Hashem, may He be blessed, in greater measure. A thing that is His glory is called a "garment" of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, since glory exists only in relation to another — glory applies only where there are others who see it — and it is by means of a garment that a person is seen by others. That is why glory is called a garment. And just as glory is called a garment, so the garment in which one is seen by another is called glory: R. Yochanan called his clothes "my honorers" (Shabbos 113a). The reason is as we said — glory is what is seen by another, exactly as the garment is what is seen. That is why it says (Tehillim 109:29), "let them wrap themselves in their shame as in a robe," as though shame were a garment of disgrace. Glory is the opposite of this: it is a garment of honor, as it is written (Tehillim 104:1), "You have donned majesty and splendor." That is to say, the glory He has, may He be blessed, from existing things is for Him a garment of majesty. It then says (there, verse 2), "wrapping Himself in light as in a robe" — meaning that the glory coming from light is a greater glory than that of the other existing things, since light is an existence of majesty and splendor. That is why this light is like a robe of glory for Him.

It is thus explained that the glory that comes from created beings is called a "garment" of Hashem. But a garment is separate from the one who wears it, and in the same way the glory that comes from all existing things is separate from Him. It is only that through existing things, which are His glory, He becomes known — just as each person is seen by another by means of his garment. The glory and adornment He has from Israel, by contrast, is likewise an ornament of glory to Hashem, yet it is not like the glory that comes from the other existing things. There is a difference here, and it is like the distinction between a garment and tefillin. A garment is the glory of the one who wears it, but the garment is separate from him; the tefillin, however, are a glory and an adornment that cleaves to the man himself — they are his own ornament. That is why they are called *totafos*: "and as *totafos* between your eyes" (Devarim 11:18), and as it was taught in tractate Shabbos (57a), a woman may not go out wearing a *totefes*. They explained there (Shabbos 57b): what is a *totefes*? R. Abahu said, one that encircles the head from ear to ear. So *totafos* are an ornament worn on the head — and so the Ramban, of blessed memory, explained in Parshas Bo.

And because Israel are called "His children" (see Devarim 14:1) — and it was explained above that they bear this name because they are created from Him essentially and primarily, which is why they are called (Shemos 4:22) "Israel is My son, My firstborn," as was set out at length above — while all the other created beings are subordinate to this creation, as the Sages, of blessed memory, said (Bereishis Rabbah 1:4), the world was created for the sake of Israel: therefore, inasmuch as He, may He be blessed, is the cause of Israel first of all, and inasmuch as the cause cleaves to that which is caused by it essentially and primarily — for there is no cause without an effect — Israel are joined to Him with no separation whatever, without the least gap between what cleaves together. The glory that comes from Israel, then, who are caused by Him essentially and primarily, is joined to Him completely. Not so the glory that comes from the other existing things. Although all of them are His glory inasmuch as they are caused by Him — and whatever is caused by Hashem is His glory — nevertheless they are not created from Him essentially and primarily, and there is no complete cleaving to Him here. That is why this glory is called a "garment": a garment, even though it is the glory of the one who wears it, is a glory that does not cleave to him. But with the glory that comes from Israel, inasmuch as they are caused by Him essentially and primarily, there is no separation at all. Therefore this glory, which comes from Israel, who are His effects in essence, is called "tefillin" — an ornament of glory that cleaves to the one who wears the tefillin.

When Moshe said (Shemos 33:18), "Show me, please, Your glory," he was asking to grasp the truth of this glory. HaKadosh Baruch Hu answered (there, verse 23), "You will see My back, but My face shall not be seen." And in the first chapter of Berachos (7a), R. Chana bar Bizna said in the name of R. Shimon Chasida: this teaches that HaKadosh Baruch Hu showed him the knot of the tefillin. That is, He showed him the glory that is not the truth of the glory itself, and this is what He showed Moshe; but the very truth of the glory, which is the tefillin themselves, this He did not show him at all. This is the sense of "My face shall not be seen": the truth of the glory as it is in itself, which is the tefillin themselves. Only the knot, by which they are tied to the one who wears the tefillin, was shown to Moshe — for Israel are tied to Him and cleave to Him. The truth of the glory as it is in itself he did not see. This will be explained further at length, with Hashem's help. Now consider what they have found here beyond what Scripture itself says (Tehillim 104:1), "You have donned majesty and splendor" — and there are many verses that speak of this. So there is nothing astonishing in it at all.

As for these tefillin being on the head and on the arm: the glory that comes to Hashem from Israel is from two aspects. The first is the essential nature of the nation itself, for their essential nature is the most praiseworthy of all — they are one nation. All the descriptions that are praiseworthy descriptions of Israel, and the adornment of their essential nature, are a glory to Hashem, and this is the tefillin of the Master of the world. The second is His having brought them forth into actual existence, for essential nature is a matter in its own right. By virtue of their essential nature, then, which is praiseworthy and adorned, there is glory to Hashem, to the wisdom of the Agent — so from Israel there comes adornment and glory to the wisdom of Hashem — and likewise by virtue of His power and might, by which He brought them forth into actuality. For there is a craftsman who has the power to bring a thing into actuality but cannot set the essential nature of the house in order, and there is one who can set the essential nature of the house in order by his wisdom but has not the power to bring it forth into actuality. Each is therefore a matter in its own right, and the one is not the other. So there is here a glory from Israel by virtue of their essential nature, which testifies to His wisdom, may He be blessed, in that He set their essential nature in order with completeness; and this is what is meant by saying that He has tefillin of the head. And He has tefillin on the hand, because there is adornment from Israel in Israel's being brought into actual existence, in that He brought them forth into actuality. That is why it is on the arm: it is in the arm that the power of bringing forth into actuality lies, as it is written (Devarim 9:29), "They are Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm." And this is the placing of tefillin on the hand.

The tefillin of the head have four compartments, because the tefillin of the head signify the essential nature, and essential nature has divided aspects within it — just as each *parshah* (the Torah passages set inside them) has something distinct to itself: "Who is like Your people Israel" (Shmuel II 7:23); "or has God ever attempted" (Devarim 4:34). These are divided aspects, each aspect distinct in itself. But existence in actuality is a single thing and is not divided. And so with the tefillin of the hand, which signify that He brought them forth into actuality: being brought forth into actuality is a single thing. This much is clear — essential nature has divided aspects within it, whereas the term "existence in actuality" includes everything equally, with no division on the side of existence, which applies to all alike. Therefore the tefillin of the head are divided, while those of the hand have the four *parshiyos* in a single compartment (Menachos 34b): for although essential nature is divided, the term "existence" includes everything with no division at all. This has now been explained to you very clearly, and the matters themselves are the proof, showing you the truth of things that admit of no doubt — for it is impossible to set out the whole of it to its full depth.

The Sages explained this at great length in their midrashim. In Midrash Pesikta: HaKadosh Baruch Hu clothed Himself in ten garments when He created His world, as it is written (Tehillim 104:1), "You have donned majesty and splendor," and so forth. It is thus explicit that when HaKadosh Baruch Hu created His world He had a garment of glory, and that this garment came from the created beings, from whom the glory comes. And again in the Midrash, on (Mishlei 14:28) "In the multitude of people is the king's splendor": R. Simon said, when is His name exalted in His world? When they enter the synagogues and the batei medrash — the study halls — and give praise and greatness to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. At that hour they clothe HaKadosh Baruch Hu in majesty and splendor, as it says, "In the multitude of people is the king's splendor" — thus far. And again in the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni I, remez 241): when they said (Shemos 15:1) "Then sang Moshe," HaKadosh Baruch Hu donned a garment of adornment; and once they sinned He tore it off again, as it says (Eichah 2:17), "He has cut off His word" — and in time to come HaKadosh Baruch Hu will restore it. These matters need no proof, for they are set out plainly in many places. This, then, is why the glory He has from Israel is called "tefillin": this glory cleaves to Him Himself, for Israel cleave to Hashem, and so the glory that comes from Israel cleaves to His truth. The other existing things are a distant glory, as was explained above.

So that you may understand these tefillin, which are the glory He has from existing things, know this. The tefillin whose mitzvah Hashem gave to Israel (Devarim 6:8) were given because Israel possess a distinct excellence, in that His

name, may He be blessed, is called upon them. He is unique in His divinity, as is written in the tefillin (Menachos 34b), "Hear, O Israel," and so forth (Devarim 6:4); and He is omnipotent, as the exodus from Mitzrayim is written in the tefillin, which signifies His omnipotence. The completeness of HaKadosh Baruch Hu's excellence is an adornment for the children, as it is written (Mishlei 17:6), "Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the adornment of children is their fathers" — for children take pride in the excellence of their fathers. And they are called *pe'er* (פֶּאֶר, "adornment"), for it is fitting that Israel should take pride (*mispa'arim* — the same root) and be exalted in the excellence and the exaltedness of Hashem. The tefillin are set on a person's head, for the head is where the intellect is, and this signifies the essential nature, since the essential nature is of intellect; and on the hand (Devarim 6:8), which signifies existence in actuality, for the hand signifies the power of the Agent. By virtue of these two things Hashem's name is called upon them: upon their essential nature, which is praiseworthy in the utmost degree — that is why Hashem's name is called upon them — and upon their existence in actuality, upon which Hashem's name is called as well.

Furthermore, this adornment, which comes from Hashem's side, is an addition to the man: Hashem stands in relation to Israel as a father stands in relation to a son, and that is an added glory for Israel. This is why the greatness and exaltedness of HaKadosh Baruch Hu is mentioned in the tefillin, and why this is bound upon Israel — because it is an added glory and excellence for them. As for the tefillin being on the head: this is because this glory is an added glory, since it comes from Hashem's side and not from the man himself, and it is fitting that a glory which is an addition should rest on the head, which is what is called an addition. And just as the head is at the utmost height, so the arm is the utmost extension of a person, as it is written (Devarim 4:34), "and with an outstretched arm" — for nothing extends farther than the arm. The forearm, in all its use, a person draws in toward himself, but the arm is always outstretched. Just as the head is the utmost height, so the arm is the utmost extension; and in both of these, whatever is placed upon them is an addition. Therefore the tefillin, which signify that Hashem's name is called upon him — an adornment added to the man — are fittingly placed on precisely these two places.

There is a further reason for this, in the mystery of this mitzvah. It is fitting that the glory be in the whole of him — that is, that the whole of him be glory. When this adornment is upon a person at the head and at the arm, then the whole person is glory. For the head, being the head, is the beginning, while the arm is the far limit and the end, since a person's extension ends at the arm, as was

explained above. When this adornment is on his head and likewise on his arm, the glory runs from the beginning to the very end, and then the whole person is glory and is adorned by it, for Hashem's name is called upon him. This is the matter of Israel's mitzvah of tefillin, which are on the head and on the arm. If there is a further reason and wisdom in it, this is not the place to set out the mysteries of the mitzvos — and in any case all the reasons are one reason and one wisdom, so there is no need to go on further.

So you have Israel's mitzvah of tefillin: the children take pride in the fact that their Father in Heaven stands in relation to them and that His name is called upon them; He is their adornment and He is their praise, as it is written (Mishlei 17:6), "and the adornment of children is their fathers." And so too the tefillin of the Master of the world — (there) "Grandchildren are the crown of the aged" — for the father is crowned by his children when the children have something praiseworthy in them. Therefore He, may He be blessed, is crowned with the praise of His children, and that is the tefillin of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Do not wonder how such a thing can be said — that He, may He be blessed, who is complete in every completeness, should be crowned and praised by the praise of His effects, which are the works of His hands. This is no question at all, because the verse that says "Grandchildren are the crown of the aged" means that this praise comes from the side of another, and is an added praise. The praise that belongs to Hashem in Himself has surely no limit; it is only that this praise and this adornment come from the side of another, and are an added praise. That is why He takes pride in the praise of His effects, which are the works of His hands. Even though the thing formed does not resemble the One who formed it, and the effect is not like the cause, there is nevertheless an added praise and adornment here, in that the praise comes from the side of another. And so this is what the tefillin of Hashem are, as we said: an added adornment that comes from the side of another.

Once you understand the matter of these tefillin, you will understand and know the resolution of the great question that has been asked: why did Hashem create all the created beings? Some, in resolving this question, have said that He wished to make the power of His works and His mighty deeds known to the world. But it cannot be said that He created everything for this, to make His power known to flesh and blood. Others have said that this is the way of one who is complete — he bestows good upon another — and that because He, may He be blessed, is the Good (Menachos 53b), He bestowed the world. This too is not sufficient, for then the creation of the world would amount to nothing more than that He should be called "Creator" and "Maker," like a craftsman who builds a house so as to be

called a "builder"; and that cannot be. For this reason the Sages came to set out the answer to this question: the world was created for His own sake. For although this world is an effect, and an effect is not on the level of the cause, there is nevertheless an added excellence accruing to the cause from the side of the effect. That is why He, may He be blessed, puts on tefillin — for tefillin are an adornment upon the one who wears them. In the same way Hashem has, from existing things, which are other than He, an added adornment from another, namely from those existing things — just as a person's tefillin are an adornment added to the person. This description is not like the other descriptions, by which He is called mighty, wise and omnipotent, since that praise is from Hashem's own side, that He is omnipotent, wise and mighty. This description is of another kind: it is a description from the side of the created beings, in that He is described by the completeness of existing things — which is the completeness and excellence of Israel — and that is what the tefillin are. This is what they meant by "HaKadosh Baruch Hu puts on tefillin": that they are an added adornment. In this statement they came, in their lofty wisdom, to make known that HaKadosh Baruch Hu created existing things inasmuch as existing things are a praise to Him. That is why Scripture says (Mishlei 16:4), "Hashem made everything for His own sake" — and this is what the tefillin of the Master of the world signify. Great and awesome matters have now been set out for you. There are still further matters, exceedingly deep, but there is no need for more here; and this statement will be explained again at length.

In the chapter *HaRo'eh* (Berachos 59a): "...and over the *zeva'os* (tremors)." [What are *zeva'os*?] Rav Katina said: a *guha*, a rumbling of the earth. [Aramaic: Rav Katina was once walking along the road, and when he reached the doorway of the house of a necromancer (*ova tamya*), a *guha* rumbled.] He said, "Does the necromancer know what this *guha* is?" The necromancer called out to him: "Katina, Katina! Why should I not know? When HaKadosh Baruch Hu remembers His children, who dwell in distress among the nations, He sheds two tears into the Great Sea, and their sound is heard from one end of the world to the other — and that is the *guha*." Rav Katina said: "The necromancer is a liar and his words are lies. If it were so, there should have been *guha guha*." But it is not so: it does make *guha guha*, and the reason Rav Katina did not concede to him was so that the whole world should not go astray after him. And Rav Katina [himself] said: He claps His hands together, as it says (see Yechezkel 21:22), "I too will strike My hand against My hand, and I shall be consoled concerning you." R. Natan says: He sighs a sigh, as it says (Yechezkel 5:13), "And I will spend My fury upon them, and I shall be consoled." And the Rabbanan say: He kicks at the *rakia*, as it says (Yirmiyahu 25:30), "He gives a shout, like those who tread the winepress, against

the inhabitants of the earth." Rav Ada says: He presses His feet down beneath the Throne of Glory, as it says (Yeshayahu 66:1), "The heavens are My throne and the earth is My footstool." Thus far.

Over this passage they strike their hands together, and they can find no rest at these words being said of the Creator of all, in whom, Heaven forbid, there is no deficiency whatever. It is well known that such things are a deficiency, since completeness is joy and gladness. More than that: these things are all instances of being affected, and with Him, may He be blessed, there is no being affected at all. And so they are affected by these expressions. There is also this great difficulty: before Israel were among the nations, were there then no earthquakes? Surely "there is nothing new under the sun" (see Koheles 1:9), and the world follows its accustomed course (Avodah Zarah 54b).

In truth, here too the words of the Sages are right, and nothing in them departs in the least from what the intellect infers; on the contrary, understanding and intellect require these things entirely. For the Sages were not speaking about nature. There is certainly a nature that necessitates the quaking, as is set out in the books of natural science — but the Sages do not look to nature. Their view is that even though there is a nature that acts, nature itself is necessitated by Hashem, may He be blessed. This holds for every created thing. There is no doubt that nature acts in the forming of a human being, as is known; yet the matter should not be made to depend on nature alone, but on Hashem. So too with all created beings: Hashem created them all. That is why [the Sages] instituted, for each thing that was created, "who creates this kind" and "who creates that kind." For He is the one who acts in everything, and He does so by means of nature. So too they instituted (in the morning prayer) "who gives light to the earth and to those who dwell upon it": even though it is the sun that gives light, this act is nevertheless attributed to Him. This is not the place for the matter, but it is a very great principle, and upon it the foundation of faith is built. We have come only to say that in this matter our Rabbis, of blessed memory, were setting out to establish true faith and to give people understanding — and now these men want to turn the dish upside down and think ill of them, as the truth of these matters will now be explained.

Now the men of inquiry, when they investigated matters of this kind — earthquakes, thunder and the like — made everything depend on nature, and did not look to their Maker from afar. But the sages of Israel, who were the Men of the Great Assembly, and among whom were a number of prophets — and the prophets received from Moshe — held that it is not so. For they received the

blessings over all these things, each man from the mouth of another, and the blessing over tremors and thunder is "Blessed is He whose power and might fill the world" (Berachos 54a). If this were by nature alone, without the act being related to Hashem, what "His power and might fill the world" would there be in it, seeing that it would be a merely natural matter? The view of Chazal is therefore not so. These things, even though they emerge into actuality by means of nature, are nevertheless all of them acts of Hashem: by His power He brings them out into actuality through nature, and nature is His agent. This must therefore be ascribed to Hashem, and the intellect requires it, since it is not right to ascribe this act to nature alone. For if it were nature alone, why should this thing happen at all? One would have to say that the natural order could not be set right in any other way than by nature's producing this very thing — and that would be a shortfall in the power of the Agent. They therefore determined that He, may He be blessed, is the one who performed the act. And this is not agreed upon by the sages of the Talmud alone. It is agreed upon by the Men of the Great Assembly, among whom were a number of prophets, who instituted for it "Blessed is He whose power..."

Now that this act is from Hashem, the matter calls for examination. Everything that is a completeness of creation — the winds, and the other things created for the completeness of the world — is such that one blesses over it "Blessed is He whose power..." But this thing, the earthquake, has no completeness in it and no benefit to the world. And we have already said that it cannot be made to depend on the act of nature. From what side, then, does it come? The only thing to be said is that it comes because change and deficiency are found in the world; and when change and deficiency are found in the world, this thing too is found in the world, namely the quaking, as will be explained. For what is primary in the world is Israel, and they are the first effects from Hashem. That is why this nation is called "children" (Devarim 14:1), as we have explained at length: a son does not serve another but is for his own sake, unlike a thing that is not for its own sake but serves another. For this reason Israel is what is primary and first. And when this nation is under the nations, it is as though existence were entirely annulled, since a thing that is in actuality is for its own sake and is not under another. They are therefore reckoned as though they were annulled from the world and did not exist at all. Over a thing that is the annulment of existence there is weeping and the shedding of tears, as there is over the dead; and that is why he said that HaKadosh Baruch Hu sheds two tears. We have already said that many take this for hurling words against Heaven, when it is nothing but the very greatest honor of Heaven.

Know that wherever you find language of this kind in Scripture and in the words of the Sages, Heaven forbid that it should enter their minds to say that such a thing is found with the Creator — for who declares the glory of God more than they do? Rather, it is all from the side of the receiver. The view of Chazal, which is the view of the Torah, is that all these things are from the side of the receivers: He, may He be blessed, is present to the receivers according to how they are prepared to receive, and Hashem appears to them according to what befits the receiver — without the thing being so in Himself, but only that this is how a person receives from Him. This is a very great principle, and the Sages disclosed it in their inner and hidden midrashim. In the Midrash (Tanchuma Yashan, Yisro 16): "I am Hashem your God" (Shemos 20:2) — R. Chiya bar Abba said: according to each and every occupation and each and every matter HaKadosh Baruch Hu appeared to them. At the Sea, as a mighty man waging war; at Sinai, as a scribe teaching Torah; in the days of Shlomo, according to their deeds — (Shir HaShirim 5:15) "his appearance is like the Levanon, choice as the cedars"; and in the days of Daniel He appeared to them as an elder teaching, since it is fitting that Torah go forth from the mouth of an elder. Thus far. So they have explained that Hashem is described by descriptions according to the receivers — and all the more so that He acts according to how the receivers themselves are prepared. It is not that any change, or anything at all, or any being affected is found in Him; it is only that this is how He, may He be blessed, is present to the receiver. It is in this sense that all the descriptions applied to Hashem are used, and so we have explained the matter elsewhere.

That is why, of the generation of the Flood, it is written (Bereishis 6:6), "and He was grieved in His heart." There is no grief in Hashem, and Heaven forbid to say such a thing; it is said only because the men of the generation of the Flood were sinners (Bereishis 6:11–13) and were ready for destruction. When they are ready for destruction, grief is fitting, and therefore it says "and Hashem was grieved in His heart" — according to how He, may He be blessed, is present and appears to the created beings. It is in this sense that "and Hashem was grieved in His heart" is said: according to how He is with the created beings, according to what befits the receiver. So too the receivers receive this from Him, without the thing being so in Himself; it is all from the side of the receiver — this is how He is present to the receiver, according to what befits the receiver. Hashem is therefore present to existing things without favor, and is not present to them in the completeness of His glory, when that is what the receiver is prepared and fit for. And in the generation of the Flood, who were sinners and were ready for destruction, this is how Hashem was present to them; and that is "and Hashem was grieved in His heart." For as the condition of the receivers is, so is He, may He be blessed, with

them — and there is no change in this in the truth of His own essence. Just as He may act with one in one way and with another in another, so with one He may be present without favor, which is grief, and with another be present with favor, according to what that one is prepared to receive. For how could it enter a person's mind to say that He, may He be blessed, is present in the same way to the upper powers, who are fit to receive His glory, and to the lowly beings below? Rather, each one receives His glory according to the condition of his own level; and the upper powers, who are in their completeness, receive His glory as befits them.

Because Israel are among the nations — which is the annulment of their existence, as has been explained, and which counts as the annulment of the world — it is fitting that Hashem should be present to the world in this manner as well. And we have already said that the shedding of tears belongs to a thing that is an annulment of existence, since the shedding of tears is itself a loss; that is why there is weeping and shedding of tears over every destruction. Because Israel's being among the nations is the annulment of the world, Hashem is therefore present to the world in this manner of shedding tears. From this change nature is necessitated, and from nature the quaking of the earth arises, which is a great change — for change brings on change.

He said "two tears" in order to say that what is necessitated and follows from it could not possibly be a greater change than this. For sometimes something comes from Him, may He be blessed, that could have been greater — as it is written (see Shemos 8:15), "and the magicians said, It is the finger of God." The plague is called a "finger" because a greater plague was possible, and therefore he ascribes the plague to a part only, saying "It is the finger of God." But when the plague is at its utmost, and no greater one is possible, it says (Shemos 14:31), "and Israel saw the great hand" — for the hand is the whole, and there is nothing beyond it. So too here: when what reaches the receiver could not possibly be greater, the matter is ascribed to two eyes, just as it said "the hand of Hashem" where the blow is at its utmost. These tears are not material, nor a material matter at all. This is the way of the Sages: they consider only the essential nature abstracted from matter, and you will find this in a great many places, as will be explained further. His meaning is that a loss comes to the world from Hashem, and that is the tears. It is as it is with a person: when a person is in grief, and is not in joy and completeness, the shedding of tears arises from this — tears being a loss to the power of the eyes — and so it is found with the receiver. From this a loss is necessitated from Hashem, and so He is present to the receivers not in the completeness of His glory.

Had there been no receiver for this among the lower beings, the thing would have been the destruction of the whole world. But there is a receiver for it: the Great Sea, inasmuch as it is the element of water. Water is in itself a thing of loss, as it is written (see Yehoshua 7:5), "and our hearts melted and became as water," and (Devarim 15:23), "you shall pour it out upon the ground like water" — water is not a thing that endures. That is why he said He sheds two tears into the Great Sea: like is drawn to like. And because the change necessitated from Him, may He be blessed, is a change great in power, he said "and their sound is heard from one end of the world to the other." From this change nature is necessitated, which is the earthquake.

Their whole intent in this statement was only to give the reason for the earthquake, which is a change of great force: that this change has a cause from Hashem, as has been explained. This is why we bless "Blessed is He whose power and might fill the world" (Berachos 59a) — because this is necessitated from Hashem and is not a merely natural thing; there is a cause that necessitates nature. And the cause is this: that Hashem is not present to the world as He ought to be, because there is a change in the receivers, and so He is present in this manner. Even though the deficiency was not yet found in actuality before the change came upon Israel, the world is nevertheless prepared for deficiency, and from this side Hashem is not present to the world in the order that befits it. And when He is not present to the world in the order that befits it, there is a change here; and from this change nature is necessitated, which produces the quaking — for the quaking of the world follows upon the change that is necessitated from Hashem. There is nothing in this that departs from the order of the world. All these things accord with the intellect: that this quaking is from Hashem, like everything else, and that when there is anything in the world that departs from the order of the world, a change comes from Him to the receivers, and that change determines the nature that necessitates the quaking.

As for what Rav Katina said, that it should have made *guha guha*: we have already said above (at **He said "two tears"**) that his saying that He sheds two tears into the Great Sea was meant to convey that this is a complete change, and that is why he said "two tears." To this Rav Katina objected that on such an account the change is not found as it ought to be — "it should have made *guha guha*" — that is, the impression upon the receiver ought to have been greater than it now is. Rav Katina said this so that people should not be drawn after the necromancer; but the truth is certainly that it does make *guha guha*. That is to say, the impression and the change that are actually found are a change of the fitting measure.

As for the statement that He sheds two tears, and Rav Katina's statement that He claps His hands together, and likewise all the others: the meaning is that this is how He, may He be blessed, is present to His world. With Him there is no departure from order at all; everything with Him is in order. But when there is something that departs from order — as in this case, since Israel are what is primary in the world, and there is a departure from order in them when they are in exile — and He, may He be blessed, is joined to His world, then order is joined to a world that has departed from order. Thereby change and destruction come upon the thing that has departed from order, and that is the earthquake. And because this act is from Hashem, he said that the act proceeds from the eyes, which come first in the act. But Rav Katina held that since the whole matter arises from Hashem's having a joining and a connection to His world, the power that acts should not be placed so far off as to say that it comes from the eyes; rather the power of the act is lower than the eyes — the hands being lower than the eyes — and this power of the act comes from there. R. Natan held that this power of the act comes from the heart, which is nearer to the receiver, and therefore he said "He sighs a sigh," the sigh being in the heart. The Rabbanan held that even this is too far off, since the act arises precisely because He, may He be blessed, is near to His world — He being order itself — and when the world departs from order, change and destruction arise. One must therefore say that this act comes by way of what is near to the receiver. And Rav Ada held that it is better still to say that it comes from what is nearer yet to the receiver, and therefore he said that He presses His feet down beneath the Throne of Glory.

He mentioned five things, running from the Cause down to man, who is the receiver, corresponding to the five commandments that are on one tablet. For the first five commandments pertain to the Cause, and they reach down as far as the receiver, as we have explained in its place; and these are exceedingly deep matters. There are accordingly five aspects here. The first is entirely above, and is the most remote. The second is not so far above, but counts as above by preponderance. The third level counts as entirely in the middle, with no preponderance at all. The fourth counts as below by preponderance. And the fifth counts as entirely below. As for these five things: the first are the eyes, which are in the head and are entirely above. Then the hands, which are lower than that. Then the heart, for the sigh is in the heart, and the heart is in the middle. Then the knee, for in the chapter *HaManiach* (Bava Kamma 27b) they said there that kicking is done with the knee. Then the soles of the feet. Understand well that they mentioned five; all of this is words of wisdom. All of them came to explain that this thing is necessitated from Hashem Himself, from the side of His attributes: because there is a change in the world, an exceedingly great change,

there follows and is necessitated from Hashem, who is Himself order, a change and destruction as well, namely the earthquake. Understand this. And we have already said that all this is said only from the side of the receiver. Let this matter be a reminder between your eyes always, for much of the words of the Sages is built upon it — which [many] are not wise enough to see when they find in their words that He, may He be blessed, weeps. It is all said from the side of the receiver: that Hashem is not present to existing things in the completeness of His glory. And what we have said too — that the natural cause is not what is primary, but that Hashem is the one who supplies the cause of everything — is a clear matter.

Now see and understand. The Torah says (Bereishis 9:13–15), "I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature... and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh." Had this not been found in the Torah, and were it found only in the words of the Sages, those complainers would not have listened. They would simply have answered: how can the rainbow be a sign of a covenant not to destroy all flesh, when it is a purely natural thing? Explanations have already been given for it on natural grounds — that it is produced by the blaze of the sun — and if so, how can it be called a sign concerning the Flood? The words of the Sages are therefore trustworthy and true from every side: the divine cause stands on its own and nature stands on its own, for it is the divine cause that necessitates nature. And this is so not only in this matter but in everything, as was explained above. There is no need to dwell at any greater length on this statement. For when we examined this matter — the quaking, which is a departure from order — [we found] that when there is a departure from order in the world, as when Israel are among the nations, this is the annulment of the order of existence, which is a departure from order, as has been explained. For this reason the great change is found in the world as well, namely the quake: because Hashem is present to His world in this manner too, so that this great change comes about from Him. For when He, may He be blessed, who is complete order, is joined to a thing that has departed from order, a complete change is necessitated from Him.

In the first chapter of Chagigah (5b): "And if you will not hearken, My soul shall weep in secret places [because of *gevah* (גֵּוָה)]" (Yirmiyahu 13:17). R. Shmuel said: there is a place belonging to HaKadosh Baruch Hu where He weeps, and its name is *Mistarim*, "secret places." What is meant by "because of *gevah*"? Rav Shmuel

bar Nachmani said: because of the pride of Israel, which was taken from them. The Gemara then objects: is there weeping before HaKadosh Baruch Hu? Did not Rav Papa say that there is no sadness before HaMakom, as it says (Divrei Hayamim I 16:27), "Strength and gladness are in His place"? It answers: this is not difficult — the one speaks of the *batei bara'ei*, the outer chambers, and the other of the *batei gava'ei*, the inner chambers. But in the *batei bara'ei* is there joy? Is it not written (Yeshayahu 22:12), "And Hashem called for lamentation," and so forth? The destruction of the Beis HaMikdash is different, for even the ministering angels wept — thus far.

The difficulty here is the same as in the earlier cases: weeping does not apply to Him. The answer, too, is as before. These things are not said of Hashem, may He be blessed, from His own side. Rather, Hashem is present to the receivers in a manner that is not one of favor, and is not present to them in the completeness of His glory. When Israel are not in a state of completeness but in deficiency, as they are in exile, then Hashem is present to the world in that same manner — as was explained above, that Hashem is present to the world according to what the world, as receiver, is. There is no need to repeat this. And what he said, that there is a place belonging to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and so forth, is because one cannot say that all existing things are in deficiency, such that Hashem would be present to existence as a whole in a manner that is not one of favor. It is to Israel alone that He is present in this way.

The Gemara objects that it is written, "Strength and gladness are in His place," and it answers: this is not difficult — the one speaks of the *batei bara'ei*, the other of the *batei gava'ei*. Now know that every single thing has its own place and its own level in the world, and one place is not like another. He gave Israel the place in the world that befits Israel, and the nations have the place in the world that befits them. For there is a thing whose fitting place is in the innermost part of the hall (*traklin*) — that is, it has the inner level in the world — and there is a thing whose place is in the outer chamber of the hall, its level being an outer one. Everything according to what it is — so it has its place. It emerges that this world is like a house with differing places within it, inner chambers and outer chambers. And this is found very often, that the world is called a "house," as the verse says (Mishlei 9:1), "The wisdom of women has built her house; she has hewn out her seven pillars." They expounded this verse in the chapter *Echad Dinei Mamonos* (Sanhedrin 38a) as referring to the world, which was created in the [seven] days of Bereishis, as it appears there.

There is a distinction between the outer and the inner, for the inner is always given over to divine holiness — and this holds in many settings, since the inner and hidden is what is set apart for holiness. This is the sense of "the one in the *batei bara'ei*, the other in the *batei gava'ei*." *Batei bara'ei* is the name for a place not prepared for divine holiness, since the place of holiness is within; and this is very clear. A proof of it: the four banners stood at the four directions, while the *Ohel Moed*, the Tent of Meeting, which is the holiness, was within. This pattern is found everywhere. Such, then, is the meaning of "this is not difficult: the one in the *batei bara'ei*, the other in the *batei gava'ei*." For holiness pertains to Israel, who are holy, and they are not found in completeness once the Beis HaMikdash is destroyed. Hashem is present to them according to what they are, which is not in completeness, and there the weeping is found. In the *batei bara'ei*, by contrast, joy is found, inasmuch as there no weeping and no change at all is found. Only in what comprehends the inner excellence of the world — where the things that are divine and holy belong — is the weeping found, since the Beis HaMikdash, which is what is primary in divine holiness, was destroyed. This is the meaning of "My soul shall weep in secret places." It is known that the Land of Israel is at the center of the world, Yerushalayim at the center of the Land of Israel, and the Beis HaMikdash at the center of Yerushalayim; the Beis HaMikdash is therefore reckoned as being within, and so with all holy things. When the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed and the inner holiness was annulled, Hashem is present in sadness and in weeping in the *batei gava'ei*, to those that stand in relation to holy things. He is present to them according to what they are: because annulment is found in them, Hashem is accordingly present to them in weeping. Such is the explanation of this passage.

There is a further way to explain it. There are things that are necessary — they are the form of the world, and were they to change there would be annulment of the world. These are called *batei bara'ei*, since what is primary in the form of the hall, that on account of which it is called a "hall" at all, is the outer chambers: were it defective on the outside, the hall would be lacking in its form. But a deficiency on the inside is not a deficiency, for the thing loses nothing whatever of its form. So too we hold (Chullin 47b): [Aramaic: a deficiency on the inside is not called a deficiency] — it is not such that a deficiency within should count as a complete annulment of the thing. It follows that the inner chambers do not have this status, since they are not the form of the hall, such that you could say that were it defective within, the hall itself would be defective. This is the sense of "this is not difficult: the one in the *batei bara'ei*," where there is joy, "and the other in the *batei gava'ei*," where there is no joy. That is: *batei bara'ei* is the name for the existence that is necessary, and without which the form of the world would

be entirely annulled. It is called *batei bara'ei* because the form of the building on the outside is what is primary, as has been explained. It is not fitting that there be destruction in this, for then the world would be annulled — and Hashem created the world that it should endure. Therefore in the *batei bara'ei* there is joy, for no change at all is found there, and He, may He be blessed, is revealed and present to the world according to what the existent is. But in the *batei gava'ei*, which are not the form of the world, weeping is found, for there the world receives destruction, and He is present there according to what the receiver is. This is why in the *batei gava'ei* weeping is found over the pride of Israel: Israel's standing in their exaltedness and in their level above all the nations falls under what comprehends the thing that is not necessary but is rather a completeness of excellence. This therefore belongs to the *batei gava'ei*, since the *batei gava'ei* are not the form of the building; and so change is found in this, in a thing that is not necessary.

So too with all those things that are mere blessing and are not necessary — to such a thing annulment came. That is why the Sages, of blessed memory, said (Sotah 48a) that from the time the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, blessing ceased. And likewise the other things that were annulled: they are not necessary things but an added blessing and good, and to such a thing annulment came. All this is called *batei gava'ei* — what is not primary and is not the form of the world; this is what is called *batei gava'ei*. Hence Hashem is present in the *batei gava'ei* in weeping, for all weeping is over annulment and destruction. In the work *Gevuros Hashem* (chapter 23) we explained the matter there somewhat differently, yet all of these are entirely one matter once you understand them. These things have now been explained to you, and they are true and trustworthy as an explanation of the Sages' words. Do not wonder at there being many explanations of this matter, for all of them are sound and there is no doubt about them. Only, the first way is a way that shall be called holy, and it is straight before Hashem; and may He grant atonement on our behalf.

The Gemara objects further: in the *batei bara'ei* is there joy? Is it not written (Yeshayahu 22:12), "And Hashem called," and so forth? What it means is this: since it is written "and He called," the calling implies public proclamation, spreading to every place, both to the inner and to the outer. And it answers that the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash is different, for even the ministering angels wept, and so forth. The explanation of this matter is that the Beis HaMikdash is the completeness of the world as a whole, because His Shechinah is with existing things; and this is likewise the completeness of the angels, for they too are part of existence. Because the Beis HaMikdash is the completeness of existence as a

whole, Hashem is therefore present to existence as a whole not in the completeness of His glory, as we have said — which is why the expression used is "And Hashem called for weeping," and so forth. Even in the *batei bara'ei* there is weeping, since the Beis HaMikdash is the completeness of existence, and its annulment is the destruction of everything: for now Hashem is not with existing things as He was. That is the annulment of existence, for Hashem is the form of existing things, and their completeness comes about through the Beis HaMikdash. Once the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, it was no longer as it had been at first, and this counts as the destruction of existence.

As for the objection "and in the *batei bara'ei* there is no sadness" — at the outset it had already objected, "did not Rav Papa say that there is no sadness?", and that first objection refers to the *batei bara'ei*. But now that it has said that in the *batei gava'ei* there is continual weeping — for it said, "there is a place belonging to HaKadosh Baruch Hu where He weeps," which implies weeping without pause — "and He called" can be established neither in the *batei bara'ei* nor in the *batei gava'ei*. For if it speaks of the *batei gava'ei*, weeping is there always; and in the *batei bara'ei* there is no weeping at all; whereas "And Hashem called for weeping" implies only a single occasion. And even though the questioner knew that Rav Papa's statement, "there is no sadness before HaKadosh Baruch Hu," refers to the *batei bara'ei*, that is precisely what he is saying. For of necessity one cannot say of the statement "there is a place belonging to HaKadosh Baruch Hu where He weeps" that in one place there is weeping always while in another place the weeping is not continual but only occasional. That cannot be, since Rav Papa said, "there is no sadness before HaKadosh Baruch Hu," and one must therefore say that Rav Papa's statement refers to the *batei bara'ei*, where there is no weeping at all. If so, the difficulty stands: of what is "And Hashem called for weeping" spoken? If of the *batei bara'ei* — Rav Papa said there is no sadness there. If of the *batei gava'ei* — weeping is fixed there. And it answers: the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash is different, and so forth.

In the chapter *Keshem* in tractate Sotah (31a): "In all their affliction He was afflicted" (see Yeshayahu 63:9) — meaning that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is distressed in the distress of Israel, as is evident there. They cried out in protest at this: how can it be said of Hashem that He is distressed in their distress? But in light of what has been explained to you above there is no cause for wonder, for the intent is only that this is how He is present to the world. How could it be that Hashem should stand in the same relation to all existing things — so that to the upper powers, in whose palace all is glory (after Tehillim 29:9), and to the lower beings, who dwell in houses of matter, the glory of Hashem should be present alike?

There is a difference: to each He is present according to its level. And that very same difference is found among the lower beings. When Israel are in completeness, Hashem is present to the world in the completeness of His glory; and so too the reverse — when Israel are in distress, he said that He is distressed, meaning that He is present to the world not in the completeness of His glory but is present to them in sadness. From each state a particular thing is necessitated: when He is present to them not in the completeness of His glory, this necessitates that He have mercy upon them; and when He is present to existing things in the completeness of His level, from Him come good and completeness. In sum, all these things are said from the side of the receiver.

Nor should you say that if these things are said from the side of the receiver, then they are no excellence for the receivers. It is certainly a wondrous and exalted excellence that He, may He be blessed, is present in His world according to the state of Israel and according to the condition they are in. For Israel are what is primary in existence, and He is therefore present to the world according to what they are. They are the whole world, and Hashem is present in His world according to what they are, as has been explained very many times.

They further said in the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni I:945): when Israel do the will of HaMakom, they add strength and might, as it says (Bamidbar 14:17), "And now, let the power of Hashem be great." And when they provoke Him, it says (Devarim 32:18), "You weakened the Rock that bore you" — thus far. These are precisely the things we said above: that He is present to the world according to the receivers, who are specifically Israel. When they do His will, He is present to the world in that state and under that description, and this is the meaning of "And now, let the power of Hashem be great" — that the power of Hashem is magnified when Israel do His will. And when they do not do His will, He is present to His world according to the state in which Israel are found. In any case, all of it is from the side of the receivers, for from His own side no change whatever may be predicated of Him — only from the side of the receivers. Let this be a sign upon your hand and *totafos* between your eyes: that all these statements, and others like them, are said from the side of the receiver. Then not one of all the things they found difficult will be difficult for you.

The first chapter of Avodah Zarah (3b): R. Yehudah said in the name of Rav — the day consists of twelve hours. During the first three hours HaKadosh Baruch Hu sits and occupies Himself with Torah. During the second three He sits and judges the whole world entire; when the world is found liable in judgment, He rises from the throne of judgment and sits upon the throne of mercy. During the

third three HaKadosh Baruch Hu sits and sustains the whole world, from the horns of *re'emim* (wild oxen) to the eggs of lice. During the fourth three HaKadosh Baruch Hu sits and plays with the Leviathan, as it says (Tehillim 104:26), "This Leviathan You formed to play with" — thus far.

At this too they grew exceedingly bitter — at the statement that HaKadosh Baruch Hu sits and occupies Himself with Torah, and likewise at the statement that He sits and plays with the Leviathan. To them these things are play (*sechok*) and mockery. Yet this very statement bears witness, no less than the others, to the truth of the Sages' wisdom.

Know that there are opinions among the philosophers who have said that "Hashem has abandoned the land" (Yechezkel 8:12) — that He is removed from the lower beings. In this statement the Sages came to set forth the opposite of that view and of what those philosophers intend: that He, may He be blessed, is not removed from the world, and that His will is united with existing things. That is why it says, "During the first three hours He sits and occupies Himself with Torah." For the Torah is the order of existing things — how existing things are to conduct themselves — and the whole order of existence is comprised in the Torah.

This is very well known from the words of the Sages. In the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 1:1) they said: HaKadosh Baruch Hu looked into the Torah and created the world. The Torah says (Bereishis 1:1), "In the beginning God created" — and *reishis* (ראשית, "beginning") means nothing other than the Torah, as it says (Mishlei 8:22), "Hashem acquired me as the beginning of His way" — thus far. So the Torah is the order and the governing law of existing things. Of this there is no doubt: in the Torah it is set forth how a man is to conduct himself in his deeds, in the whole of his conduct, and in just the same way the order of all created things is in the Torah. Of this they said (Avos 5:22), "Turn it over and over, for everything is in it."

Only that this — the order of created things — is far from a man's apprehension: how it is intimated in the Torah. It is not stated in the Torah explicitly, but only in concealment and hiddenness. For the Torah sets things down as they are: what is hidden it sets down hidden, and what is revealed it states explicitly. In sum: the Torah with which Hashem, may He be blessed, occupies Himself is the order of existing things. Hashem knows the order of existing things, and He does not abandon their order so as to leave them wholly removed from Him — and this is what "He occupies Himself with Torah" means. For the Torah is nothing other

than the governing law and order of existing things, which He, may He be blessed, knows; and so Hashem has a connection to the order of existing things.

Yet this is still not a complete connection to existing things; it is only that He knows their intelligible order. In the second three hours the connection to existing things is increased, in that He judges existing things, as a king judges his people. This too is not a complete connection to them, since a judge acts upon the one who receives his judgment, and that is not a complete connection. Still, it is some measure of connection to existing things themselves, which was not so in the first three hours, where He had no connection whatever to existing things themselves, but only knowledge of the order.

In the third three hours the connection is increased further, in that He turns toward them to provide for them. This is an increase of connection beyond what obtained in the second three hours, when He was judging them, for a judge is separate from the one he judges. But His sustaining and providing for existing things — His turning toward existing things to give them endurance — is more of a connection than the former.

In the last three hours, however, He plays with the Leviathan. This play is the connection of will in its completeness, His will being united with them. There is nothing more connected to a thing than what is said here — that He plays with the Leviathan. Thus it goes on increasing, and this is fitting, as will be explained: the drawing near to existing things increases continually.

In the Gemara, however (Avodah Zarah 4b), according to one resolution the order is stated otherwise: in the first three hours He judges the world, and in the second three hours He occupies Himself with Torah. That view holds that His occupying Himself with Torah — His knowing their order — is a greater drawing near to existing things than His judging them. For a judge who judges is separate from the litigant and acts upon him, whereas by knowing their order He is more connected to them. That is why it states there, according to one resolution, [Aramaic: *eipuch* —] "Reverse them: in the second three hours He occupies Himself with Torah." In any case, in the conclusion it states as we said at the outset, that occupying Himself with Torah comes first, since that is only knowledge of the order — His knowing the order of existing things.

And because He, may He be blessed, connects Himself to existing things according to their completeness — for Hashem does not connect Himself to what is deficient — the Sages, of blessed memory, said in the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 13:3) on "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when

they were created, on the day that Hashem God made earth and heaven" (Bereishis 2:4): He mentioned the full Name over a full world. Hashem has no connection to anything deficient. And every single day HaKadosh Baruch Hu renews *Ma'aseh Bereishis*, so that each day counts as a creation in its own right. Therefore at the beginning of the day, when the creation is not yet complete, there is no complete connection — not until the end of the day, when it has been completed. Then Hashem plays with the Leviathan, which is a complete connection and a total union of will with His world, as will be explained. So it is to be explained, and this is without doubt a correct explanation.

There is, however, another way to explain it, and it runs together with the first. When it says that in the first three hours He sits and occupies Himself with Torah, this means that He contemplates how the world ought to be according to the Torah, which is the order of existence. In the second three hours He judges existing things, so that their existence should accord with the order that is fitting, and He acts upon them accordingly — and that is judgment. So you have it: the first three are the knowledge of how the order of existence ought to be, and the second three are His acting upon them and governing them according to the fitting order of existence. In the third three hours He gives them endurance by providing for them, which is the continuance of their persistence. And in the last three hours, once the world is complete, the world has a bond with Hashem.

For when He, may He be blessed, created His world, they said (Bereishis Rabbah 1:1) that He looked into the Torah and created His world. The meaning of "looked into the Torah" is as we said: the world was created according to the wisdom by which the order of existence ought to be, and that wisdom is the Torah. This is precisely what is meant by "in the first three hours He occupies Himself with Torah." And "created His world" corresponds precisely to the second three hours, in which He judges the world according to the fitting order. In the universal creation the term "creation" applies; in the particular creation of each and every day the term "judgment" applies, since they have already been created and He now sets their existence straight, so that their existence should be upright, in accordance with the fitting order. This is what they said (Shabbos 10a): every judge who sits in judgment even one hour, it is as though he became a partner with HaKadosh Baruch Hu in *Ma'aseh Bereishis*. So too you find that in *Ma'aseh Bereishis* the Name *Elokim* is mentioned, and that same Name belongs also to a judge; we have explained this in its place. His sitting and judging the world therefore corresponds to the creation itself.

In the third three hours He sustains existing things, as it says after the completion of *Ma'aseh Bereishis* (Bereishis 1:29), "Behold, I have given you every herb," and so on — this is the providing for existing things. In the last three hours He sits and plays with the Leviathan, which is the will directed toward existing things, just as it is written after the completion of *Ma'aseh Bereishis* (Bereishis 2:4), "on the day that Hashem God made" — He mentioned the full Name over a full world (Bereishis Rabbah 13:3) — which is the joining of the full Name to a full world. Thus all four of these things are found in the particular creation exactly as in the universal creation.

Consider one who builds a house. First he lays out his building as it ought to be. Then he brings it forth into actuality by building it. Then he gives it endurance, bracing it with nails so that it will hold and the building will not collapse when he stops building, but will stand as a structure that endures. And afterward he has a connection to his house. That is why it says that in the last three hours He plays with the Leviathan: play is union and complete cleaving with the one with whom one plays. All this comes to uproot from the hearts of men what the philosophizers say — that He, may He be blessed, is removed from the world.

As for the statement that it is specifically with the Leviathan that He plays: what they meant by it is that Hashem has the utmost union with His creatures. Certainly Hashem is not united with existing things, for He is separate from them; only His will is united with them, and that is what play essentially is, as will be explained. And specifically the Leviathan — for do not err about this creature and say that it is a creature like the rest of the corporeal creatures. That is not so at all. Rather, in saying that He "plays with the Leviathan," he meant the complete connection of will to this creature. The other created things also have a connection of will, each according to its own excellence; but this creature in particular, among all the rest, is singled out for the will.

For man, though he is the choicest of the lower existing things, is such that "man is born to toil" (Iyov 5:7), and this follows from the form of man. Even if he is a complete tzaddik, the tzaddik as tzaddik does not live in a state of will and repose. On the contrary, with the righteous the opposite is the case, and HaKadosh Baruch Hu does not display His will toward them in this world. And since HaKadosh Baruch Hu does not display His will toward them, it cannot be said that He, may He be blessed, plays with the righteous, for He does not display it to them. There is no creature singled out for the will except the Leviathan.

It is a known thing to those who understand that the Leviathan, by the importance and excellence of its creation — as Chazal recounted concerning it —

is fitted above all for the connection of will in particular. No proof of this is needed: the very name indicates the matter, for it is called *livyasan* (לוייתן), like "for they are a garland (*livyas chen*, לוית חן) for your head and chains for your neck" (Mishlei 1:9) — an expression of accompaniment (*levayah*, לוויה) and connection. For this creature is singled out to be the object of the will.

Play in its essence is nothing other than connection and union with a thing — nothing else — and that is why they said that He, may He be blessed, plays with the Leviathan. With a man, play occurs when his will attaches itself entirely to some one thing. Only that a man's will attaches itself solely to things that are pleasing to him, and those are matters of mockery — as our Rabbis, of blessed memory, said, [Aramaic:] "Levity is different, for it draws a man's mind more." This shows that a man's mind attaches itself to nothing as it does to levity: because levity is mockery, his mind and his will attach themselves to it all the more. The apprehension of intelligibles and the like is hard for a man, and there is nothing to which his will attaches itself except levity and play.

But play in its own essence is the union of the will with some one thing, and play in itself is not mockery. Were play disgraceful in its own right, this would indeed be a serious objection. But play is not disgraceful in its own right, for it is written (Tehillim 126:2), "Then our mouth will be filled with laughter" — the very word *sechok* — and if so, play is not disgraceful in its own right. It is only that a man's play is over trifling and empty things, since it is to such things that a man's mind and will are drawn, and that is a great disgrace. But play and joy in themselves are good, for they indicate completeness.

This is the difficulty raised (Shabbos 30b): it is written (Koheles 2:2), "And of joy — what does this accomplish?" and it is written (see Koheles 8:15), "So I praised joy." There is no difficulty: the one speaks of the joy of a mitzvah, the other of a joy that is not of a mitzvah. That is to say, joy is good when the joy is fitting in its own right and a man rejoices in it — then it is good. But when the joy is over what is vain and empty, that joy is not fitting, and it is itself vanity. So it is here: because they saw that a man's play is play over vanity and trifles, they supposed that this is the sort of play spoken of here. It would be fitting for a man's mouth to be filled with laughter at these people, who did not know how to distinguish between the sacred and the profane.

And they did not say that He rejoices with the Leviathan, because joy is not the complete will toward the thing one rejoices in, as play is — play being the complete will toward the one with whom one plays, as it is written (Tehillim 126:2), "Then our mouth will be filled with laughter." Understand these things.

The Gemara states (Avodah Zarah 3b): [Aramaic:] "And from the time the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, when there is no play before Him, what does He do? He sits and teaches Torah to *tinokos shel beis rabban* — the schoolchildren." We have already told you that this is from the side of the receivers: it is from the side of the world that there is no play before Him. And it states that He sits and teaches Torah to *tinokos shel beis rabban*. The meaning is that Hashem has a still greater connection to existing things in this, that He brings the intellect and knowledge of human beings forth into actuality.

This is a connection to them, like that of a master to his disciple: the master greatly wishes and desires to bestow upon his disciple, as they said (Pesachim 112a), "More than the calf wishes to suckle, the cow wishes to give suck." This is explained elsewhere — that the bestower desires to bestow more than the receiver desires to receive — and this is not the place for it. Understand, then, why they did not say that He sits and teaches Torah to adults: the small child is a receiver, and the category of bestower does not apply to him at all, whereas an adult might also be a bestower to someone smaller than himself. He, may He be blessed, desires specifically the receiver, one who is a complete receiver. And this too is the complete connection: when the receiver desires and yearns for the bestower, that he may receive from him, and the bestower desires and yearns to bestow.

This is the secret of the *keruvim* (the cherubim upon the Ark cover), [Aramaic:] *apei ravrevei*, *apei zuta* — the face of an adult and the face of a child — and it is written (Shemos 25:20), "and their faces one toward another." The *tinokos shel beis rabban* are *apei zutra*. And this is what they said in tractate Yoma (54a), that they would raise the *paroches* (the curtain) for the *olei regalim*, the pilgrims come up for the festival, and would show them the affection He, may He be blessed, has for Israel. It is all one matter.

The whole of what they intimated here is that Hashem has a connection of will to the world. All of it comes to uproot from the hearts of men what the philosophizers said — that "Hashem has abandoned the land" (Yechezkel 8:12) on account of the lowliness and baseness of this lower world. Chazal came, in their wisdom, to reveal that the matter is not as those men suppose. This is enough for those who understand and know.

In the chapter Rabbi Akiva (Shabbos 89a) it states: when Moshe ascended on high, he found HaKadosh Baruch Hu tying crowns onto the letters. He said to him, "Moshe, is there no *shalom* — no greeting — in your city?" Moshe said before Him, "Does a servant give *shalom* to his master?" He said [to him], "You should

have assisted Me." Moshe said to Him, "And now, may the power of Hashem be magnified, as You have spoken, saying" (Bamidbar 14:17). Here too, at first thought, the statement appears to contain something that ought to be distanced from Hashem, may He be blessed. But once you understand what has already been explained, none of this will astonish you.

The Torah that Hashem gave to Israel is the divine order that Hashem ordained from Himself, setting out in what manner they are to conduct themselves. And this order is without doubt above every order and every mode of conduct that could possibly exist, so that there is nothing beyond it. One cannot say that some higher and more honored order exists — for if it did, why would Hashem have diminished the completeness of existing things and their level?

This is the meaning of "when Moshe ascended on high he found HaKadosh Baruch Hu tying crowns onto the letters." The Torah is a divine order that Hashem gave to Israel, and no higher order than this one is possible. There are thus two things here, each an excellence in its own right: first, that the Torah's mitzvos are divine; second, that no higher level is possible. For it is entirely possible for a Torah to be divine and yet for a [still] greater excellence to remain possible — He did, after all, give a Torah to the *bnei Noach*, and beyond the Torah of Noach there is a still higher excellence, namely the Torah of Israel. That is why it says that he found HaKadosh Baruch Hu tying crowns onto the letters: the crown indicates the highest excellence, beyond which there is nothing further. This is precisely what a crown signifies — that there is no excellence above the king. And because the Torah is the most exalted of all, the letters in it therefore bear *tagin* (the crownlets written above certain letters), to tell you that there is no excellence beyond it.

Now the meaning of "He was tying crowns onto the letters" is that the letter of itself — as with the letters *sha'atnez gatz* (shin, ayin, tes, nun, zayin, gimmel, tzadi) — requires *tagin* (Menachos 29b), while the remaining letters do not require them. Even so, it is because the Torah is above all, as has been explained, that the letters in it — that is, the *sha'atnez gatz* letters, the ones fit for *tagin* — must have their *tagin*. *Tagin* are not required in a *get* or in any other writing, but only in a Torah scroll: it is in keeping with the Torah's excellence that its letters require *tagin*. So the *tagin* in the Torah declare that the Torah is a divine order beyond which there is nothing further. This is why HaKadosh Baruch Hu was tying *tagin* onto the letters — because this *tag*, this crown that He, may He be blessed, ties, has nothing above it.

And He said, may He be blessed, "Is there no *shalom* in your city?" That is to say: you think that man has no relation to this act, since this act is ascribed to Hashem, and man is no partner with Hashem. Giving *shalom* indicates partnership, and a servant does not give *shalom* to his master, because a servant has no partnership with his master. To this He said: nevertheless, you should have assisted Me — you should have said (Bamidbar 14:17), "And now, may the power of Hashem be magnified." For although there is no partnership with Hashem such that one might give Him *shalom*, which indicates partnership, still you should have assisted Me. The Agent acts only when there is a receiver prepared to receive the act. Therefore, "you should have assisted Me": there is assistance from the side of the receiver when he is prepared to receive, and if no receiver is to be found, the Agent will not perform even the beginning of the act.

So the receiver has an association with this act — and especially so with the *tagin*, which are the beginning of the Torah. The *tagin* in particular cannot exist without a receiver. For a *tag* is something fine, and it is the beginning of the Torah; and if there is no prepared receiver here, who is the subject that bears it, then no such beginning can be found here at all. Even though the *tag* is remote from man, being an exceedingly fine thing, and even though it is the beginning of the Torah, the beginning of the Torah is nonetheless for man's sake — he is the receiver, and he is reckoned the subject. Man is therefore an assistant to the beginning of the Torah, which is the *tagin*.

For this reason Moshe should have said, "And now, may the power [of Hashem] be magnified," inasmuch as he is the receiver and is reckoned the subject — and especially so with regard to the fine *tagin*, which require a receiving subject. Moshe is thus associated with the Agent as well: he is a prepared receiver, and he is an assistance to Him. For although a servant does not give *shalom* to his master, since there is no partnership or connection between master and servant, there is nevertheless a connection and a partnership between them from the side of this act, and there is assistance here. When there is a subject prepared to receive, that is called assistance — and it is not actual partnership. It was therefore fitting for Moshe to say, "And now, may the power of Hashem be magnified," for the magnifying of power in the world comes from the side of the receiver: when the receiver is prepared, then the Agent acts. This needs no further explanation.

And when you understand deep matters, you will understand that the crown in particular comes from the side of the receivers, for a crown requires a subject: the crown sits upon the letter, so the crown has a subject, namely the letter. The

tagin accordingly require a subject prepared to receive. In this Moshe was of assistance, for the receiver participates precisely [in] this, that he is the subject — since a *tag*, on account of its fineness, requires that it have a prepared receiver. Had there been no Moshe, the receiver who is prepared, He would not have been tying a crown onto the letter. That is why He said of this, "You should have assisted Me," as has been explained. This is not the place for it, for the matter is deep, exceedingly deep.

In the first chapter of Avodah Zarah (4b) the Gemara asks [Aramaic: "When is He angry?"], and answers: it was taught in the name of R. Meir — at the hour when the sun rises and all the kings of the east and the west place their crowns upon their heads and bow down to the sun, immediately HaKadosh Baruch Hu becomes angry. Know that wherever you find in the Torah the expression "burning anger" (*charon af*), you will find it in connection with the sin of *avodah zarah*. Thus it is written (Devarim 11:17), "and the anger of Hashem will burn against you, etc."; and likewise (Devarim 29:23), "what is this great burning anger?"; and (Shemos 32:11), "why should Your anger burn?" — and very many more like them. From this the Rambam, of blessed memory, arrived at the position stated in his book (*Moreh Nevuchim* I:36), that "the burning anger of Hashem" is found only in the matter of *avodah zarah*. Objections were raised against him, however, from (Shemos 4:14) "and the anger of Hashem burned against Moshe"; (Bamidbar 12:9) "and the anger of Hashem burned against them, and He departed"; and (Shemos 22:23) "and My anger will burn and I will kill you, etc."

But I say that the Rav's view is not that this expression is never found for any sin in the world other than *avodah zarah* — only that with *avodah zarah*, and with what is like it, the expression "burning anger" is found. This is because *avodah zarah* is a sin that stands opposed to His honor, may He be blessed: to make a god besides Him, so that the molten image becomes a rival to Him. That is opposition to Hashem, for all duality is opposition, and opposition brings burning anger; hence with *avodah zarah* there is burning anger. And so with everything of this kind. When HaKadosh Baruch Hu asked that Moshe go on His mission and Moshe opposed His words, unwilling to go (Shemos 4:13), that was opposition to Him, and it brings the burning anger of Hashem. So too "and the anger of Hashem burned against them, and He departed" (Bamidbar 12:9) — for in speaking against Moshe they were opposing Hashem, may He be blessed. Rashi, of blessed memory, explains (there, verse 8): inasmuch as he is My servant, even were it not Moshe [?]; and all the more so here, where he is My servant and he is Moshe. So too "and My anger will burn and I will kill you": one who afflicts an orphan and a

widow — and does not afflict a great man — plainly does so because he fears the arm of flesh and blood, while the orphan and the widow have no helper and are feeble in strength. Because of this he afflicts them, and does not fear Hashem, may He be blessed, who is "a father of orphans and a judge of widows" (Tehillim 68:6). That is opposition to Hashem, and of it Scripture says, "and My anger will burn and I will kill you." In any case, the expression "burning anger" is used according to the measure of opposition to Hashem. When a person transgresses His commandments — even the commandment of Shabbos — he is opposed only to the commandment; unless he is a *kofer*, one who denies that He commanded that commandment, which falls under denying Him, may He be blessed. In any case, "burning anger" is said primarily of something that stands opposed to Him.

And when you contemplate this world, which is the world of nature, you find things ordered one above another, in their level and in their order, up to the sun, which governs the lower world — as it is written in the Torah (Bereishis 1:16), "the greater luminary for the dominion of the day, etc." This is well known: the sun is called "king" among the host of heaven. And though He, may He be blessed, rules over all (Divrei Hayamim I 29:12), the sun nonetheless bears a name of dominion. Now when men do not pass beyond the world of nature to serve Hashem as they ought, but remain within the world of nature — not looking to Him who wrought and made all these, content with this world alone, and not binding this world to Him — there is *avodah zarah* here. It is otherwise when men serve worthless things, as Moshe said (Shemos 32:11), "Why should Your anger burn against Your people?" — which the Sages expounded to mean: had they bowed down to something of substance, You would have cause for burning anger against them; but since they bowed down to a thing that has no breath of life in it, anger is not fitting. This is set out at length in the words of the Sages. The sun, however, does bear a name and a dominion in the lower world, so that when men bow down to the sun this is a change in the order of the world: they sever the bond, when the sun must be bound to the King of kings of kings, who rules over all. They do not do this, but remain with the sun, as though it were the governance of the world.

And even if they do not literally bow down to the sun, that alone does not suffice. For when they forsake Hashem and do not serve the unique Name — seeing that all men are under the king, and the king is under the power of the sun — then once they forsake Hashem and do not serve Him, they are left of themselves under the sun, beneath which this lower world stands. In this they make the sun king: they do not accept the kingship of heaven over all, but remain with the sun. In itself this is *avodah zarah*, unless they serve Hashem and declare His unity —

He who created the sun. This is what the Gemara means by "at the hour when the kings place their crowns upon their heads and bow down to the sun." The explanation is this: men are under the king, and the king places his crown upon his head and bows down to the sun, for the king is under the dominion of the sun. And if the king and the rulers in the lower world do not accept the kingship of heaven, they thereby remain under the sun and accept the sun's dominion. Then Hashem is certainly angry, in that this thing exists in the world from the side of men — men who do not serve the unique Name and do not bind this world to His oneness, may He be blessed, and who in this bow down to the sun. When there is *avodah zarah* in the world, there is anger in the world. And there is no doubt that there are nations that do not accept His oneness; therefore it is impossible for the world to be without anger and wrath. Israel, to be sure, do accept His kingship — but that is by virtue of the supreme excellence Israel possess, so that they are not reckoned as being under the sun. From the side of this lower world, though, this world has a separation from Hashem, and therefore the anger falls upon this world.

However, what the Gemara says (Avodah Zarah 4b), that His anger lasts a moment, is a most wondrous matter. It is fitting that this world, the lower world, be bound to Him, may He be blessed, and that it not be separate unto itself — yet they make this lower world a beginning unto itself by way of the sun. The time of the anger is therefore a moment, which is a beginning, since no beginning admits of division at all. This is also why it falls in the first three hours [Aramaic: *bi-tlas sha'ei kamayasa*] (Avodah Zarah 4b), which are the beginning of the day; for the beginning of the day is the first three hours, since up to then is the time of rising, and it is the time of the oneness, when the kingship of heaven is accepted. He therefore said that there is in this world a certain side on which created things are not reckoned as belonging to Hashem — as though they were making this lower world a beginning, whose head is the sun — and so they depart from the oneness. It emerges that there is burning anger in the world in proportion to the deficiency that is in the world — the deficiency they produce by making the sun the beginning of the world of nature; correspondingly there is an hour of wrath in the world, and this is "a God who is wrathful every day" (Tehillim 7:12).

However, all the while Israel were in the wilderness, when the world was conducted by a governance that was not natural, this world was not called a "beginning." For when the world runs in its natural course, this governance has a beginning, and the head of the lower world is the sun, which governs nature. But when the world ran in a manner that was not natural — as when Israel were in the wilderness — the world then ran not according to nature, but by everything

that issues from the mouth of Hashem. Therefore there was no anger at all, for this lower world was raised up and cleaved to Him, may He be blessed, until the lower world was no beginning unto itself at all; and so there was no wrath here at all.

And as for its saying that the time is when there is a white streak in the cock [Aramaic: *surayka chivara*] — these words are true. With the cock, a change of time leaves its impress upon it by a special property (*segulah*). In the first three hours, which are the beginning of the world of nature — and this beginning has a separation from Him, may He be blessed, as has been explained — this causes the withdrawal of Hashem's will from the world, and a change follows from that. The cock has a discernment of this by that special property, just as it has a discernment by that property of every change of time. Where a thing works by a special property there is no difficulty and no cause for wonder at all, since it is simply a special property; and so there is no difficulty in the cock's discerning the change of time. Know, too, that the cock is called *gever* (גבר, "a strong man") in the Gemara (Yoma 20b), and the *gever*, precisely inasmuch as it is a *gever*, is aroused most of all at the time of anger. It therefore senses the change in time at the time of the anger that is in the world. From here on these matters are clear to one who understands them: "a God who is wrathful every day" — because there is in the world this thing, which is not bound entirely to the oneness of Hashem as it ought to be.

The first chapter of Rosh Hashanah (17b): "And Hashem passed before him and proclaimed" (Shemos 34:6). R. Yochanan said [Aramaic: *ilmalei mikra kasuv i efshar l'omro*] — were it not a verse written in Scripture, it would be impossible to say such a thing: this teaches that HaKadosh Baruch Hu wrapped Himself like a *shaliach tzibbur* (the one who leads the congregation in prayer) and said to Moshe, "Whenever Israel sin before Me, let them perform before Me according to this order, and I will forgive them." Thus far the Gemara. This the critics find hard to accept — that He, may He be blessed, should be joined to a human act; for in saying that "He wrapped Himself like a *shaliach tzibbur*," they described a human act.

First, though, you must consider what led Chazal to expound the verse in this way. It is because it is written (Shemos 33:19), "and I will call out in the Name of Hashem before you," and likewise "and Hashem passed before him and proclaimed" — whereas it should have said, "and thus shall you call out before Me." It was concerning this that R. Yochanan said that the proclaiming was in order to teach Moshe an act, and how he was to perform it. This is what Chazal, of

blessed memory, meant: He was teaching him what Israel should do when they stand in need of mercy. It was not to teach the prayer itself alone, but how they should conduct themselves when they pray. Perhaps you will object: why was it necessary to show him the act he was to perform? Is the matter so weighty that He had to show him the act itself? This is no difficulty. Moshe had said (Shemos 33:18), "Show me now Your glory" — Moshe asked that His glory, may He be blessed, be shown to him — and Hashem answered him (there, verses 19–20), "You cannot see My face, etc."; "Behold, I shall pass all My goodness before you, and I will call out in the Name of Hashem, etc." The explanation is that to see the glory itself is impossible; what was possible was that Moshe have a cleaving to His attributes. When a man has a cleaving to His attributes, then he cleaves to Him, may He be blessed, so far as is possible — and this is (there, verse 23), "and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

And because Hashem is present to man in the same measure that man is present to Hashem: if a man attends to his prayer and does not turn away from Hashem, then Hashem too is present to him entirely. As for their saying that "He wrapped Himself like a *shaliach tzibbur*" — the wrapping of a *shaliach tzibbur* consists in his having no inclination to right or to left, to any side whatever. That is what wrapping is, and then the calling out is wholly with intent, out of the depth of the heart and its truth. It is not so when he is not wrapped: then he may well turn to other things, and the calling out does not come from his truth. This is clear. The matter does not depend, however, on being wrapped in a *tallis*. Rather, when the calling out comes from a man's truth, with intent — that is what is called "wrapping," because he is removed from everything else and has no inclination to right or left. That is the essential nature of wrapping, and nothing else.

That is why Scripture uses this very term — *ataf* (אָטאָפּ, "to wrap, to be enwrapped") — of a man who calls out to Hashem from the truth of his thought, as it is written (Tehillim 102:1), "A prayer of the poor man, when he is enwrapped and pours out his speech before Hashem"; and likewise (Tehillim 107:5–6), "their soul within them was enwrapped; and they cried out to Hashem in their distress, etc." For the poor man, who lacks his livelihood and is in dire need of it, removes himself from everything, until he has no partnership with anything at all; then he calls out from his truth, and that is "and pours out his speech before Hashem." So too "their soul within them was enwrapped": because the trouble that came upon them had brought them into danger, they remove themselves from everything, turning their thought to nothing else. This too is what the Sages meant in saying that "He wrapped Himself like a *shaliach tzibbur*" and called out the thirteen attributes before him (Rosh Hashanah 17b). When a man directs himself entirely,

without turning to right or to left, Hashem too is present to him, and the man then cleaves to Him, may He be blessed, in His attribute of goodness. This is the essential nature of wrapping: that the calling out is with intent.

This has been explained to you very many times: it is the way of the Sages to speak of the essential nature alone, which is the thing itself. Here their intent is to say that a man should call out to Hashem without turning to anything else, and then Hashem too is present to him, so that the man cleaves to Him, may He be blessed. Because men are habituated to corporeality, they do not understand the Sages' words, which speak of the essential nature, without anything corporeal. There is no need to prolong the discussion further. Although these matters require more explanation, what can be explained has been explained to you; one who understands will add wisdom and knowledge, and will then understand words of wisdom and words of truth. And may He, may He be blessed, deliver us and enlighten our eyes. Amen, so may it be His will.

The last chapter of Ta'anis (31a): R. Chelbo said in the name of R. Eliezer — In time to come HaKadosh Baruch Hu will make a *machol* (a circle-dance) for the righteous in Gan Eden, and He will sit among them, and each and every one will point to Him with his finger, as it says (Yeshayahu 25:9), "And he shall say on that day: Behold, this is our God, we hoped for Him and He saved us, etc." Thus far the passage.

At this the critics point with the finger and say: "Here is a thing beyond all reason. The World to Come is separate from corporeality — how should there be youthfulness and young manhood in a place of holiness, so that there is a *machol* for the righteous?"

Now know that in these words the Sages came to disclose the abundant good stored up for the righteous in time to come, in Gan Eden, and they intimated it in a language of very great wisdom. For the *machol* belongs in particular to maidens, as it is written (Yirmiyahu 31:12), "Then shall the maiden rejoice in the *machol*, and young men and elders together." That the *machol* belongs to the maiden is evident to the senses. The reason is that the *machol* is joy in actuality, unlike joy in the heart, which is not in actuality but is only joy in the heart; whereas in dancing the joy is present in actuality entirely. And therefore it belongs specifically to maidens: because women, and maidens in particular, are not possessed of thought, as every man is possessed of thought to a greater degree. All thought holds joy back from emerging fully into actuality, for joy stands opposed to thought. Therefore in men the joy is in the heart, since they have something opposed to it that holds the joy back from emerging into

actuality. But the maiden has nothing to hold her back, for she is not possessed of thought, and so joy is found in her in actuality.

And because in time to come, in Gan Eden, the joy will be in actuality, that very thing is what is called "a *machol* for the righteous" — meaning that their joy will be in actuality, not like joy that is in the heart, which is not in actuality. And because the joy of the righteous in time to come is joy in Him, may He be blessed, as it is written (Tehillim 97:12), "Rejoice, O righteous, in Hashem" — therefore he said that He, may He be blessed, sits among them and each one points to Him with his finger. That is to say: the righteous have no joy except in Him. This is why each one points to Him with his finger: because He is their joy. So too the verse brought as proof: "And he shall say on that day: Behold, this is our God, we hoped for Him, etc. — let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation." The meaning of "let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation" is that He brought them out into actuality; their joy consists in this, that they are in actuality by Hashem, who is what brings them to completion. That is why they point to Him with their finger and say, "Behold, this is our God, etc." So much for the plain way of understanding what they said, that there will be a *machol* for the righteous in time to come.

And you should further know how to understand the matter of the *machol*. Know that joy is on the side of the soul: joy occurs when a man is in his completeness, and there is no completeness except for the soul, not for the material body. For the material body is in potential and not in actuality, and there is no completeness at all in what is not in actuality; the body has, moreover, the heaviness of nature. On the contrary — from the side of the material body, which is in potential, sorrow is what is found. Therefore, when a man dances, joy is greater in him, because the soul is in the completeness of its power, and then joy is found.

Therefore he said that HaKadosh Baruch Hu will make a *machol* for the righteous in Gan Eden. For when the righteous are in Gan Eden they will be removed from turbid matter, and the soul will prevail. It is not so with the wicked. Because while they were in this world their soul was drawn after the body, which is material, therefore even after they part from the body their soul is not separate from matter; and so, even when they part from the corporeal world, this *machol* — whose whole content is that their soul be removed from the body — will not be theirs. But as for the righteous, who prevailed over the body: in this world that came with great heaviness, since they had to rule over the body, which impedes them, and so they had no *machol* in this world — for in the *machol* the soul

prevails and the body is drawn after it. And this *machol* will be precisely for the righteous, because even in this world the soul of the righteous was not drawn after the body. Therefore in Gan Eden, where this turbid matter has been removed, this *machol* is found completely.

And he said that HaKadosh Baruch Hu sits among them and that they point to Him with their finger. For in this world matter is a screen dividing between Hashem and the righteous; it is what prevents Hashem from being present to them completely. But in this *machol*, which indicates the completeness of the soul, there will be no impediment of matter, since by then the matter that is the screen interposing between them and Hashem has been removed. And so they point to Him with their finger — for Hashem is present to them, revealed in actuality, to the point that one can say "This is it" (after Shemos 22:8). This is clear and correct.

And in order to set you firmly on the matter of the *machol* in its completeness, know further that in this matter of the *machol* the Sages came to explain to you the excellence of the righteous in time to come: that they will be separate from matter, just as He, may He be blessed, is separate and holy. Wherever He is called "holy," the meaning is that He is separate from everything that belongs to matter. Therefore they said that HaKadosh Baruch Hu will make a *machol* for the righteous in Gan Eden — that the righteous will be raised entirely above any combination with matter.

For this same reason, when we sanctify HaKadosh Baruch Hu, we dance and raise ourselves upward and say, "Holy, holy, holy" (Yeshayahu 6:3). For when one says that He is holy, the meaning is that He is separate from body — that is what holiness is, being separate from body, as is clear to those who understand. And when a man wishes to sanctify Him, may He be blessed, and to say that He is holy and separate from body, he must raise himself above the heaviness of the body. How could men sanctify Him while a man is with his body? Therefore he dances and lifts himself up, which is a removal from the body, and only then does he declare the *Kedushah* to Him, may He be blessed. This is clear; there is no need to prolong the discussion here.

The reason, however, that they said "He will make a *machol* for the righteous," and did not put it differently — "that they will have dancing" — is to teach this matter of elevation. For a *machol* is a turning and a circle, and there is no circle without a center. And it is known that the center, which lies inside the circle, is separate from the whole circle: the center stands by itself, inclining neither to the right nor to the left, neither forward nor backward, and for this reason the center

is separate from everything. Therefore he said that Hashem sits among them, inside the circle — for every single point on the circle faces the center point, which is separate from the remaining parts of the circle. And this is known: all the points on the circle face it by way of the lines drawn from those points to the center point, and they do not turn aside right or left. So too with the righteous and their excellence in this *machol*, which is a complete divesting of the material: they come to face Him, may He be blessed, connected with Hashem just as all the points on the circle are connected with the center, in that they face it and are drawn to it by the lines drawn to the center. This is what he means in saying that the righteous have a *machol*: an elevation above the material, so that they are drawn after Hashem, just as all the points on the circle are drawn to the center point. And with all this, He, may He be blessed, remains separate from the righteous, just as the center is separate from the circle, as has been explained.

And understand what he said — that they will have a *machol*, every *machol* being a turning round. He said this so that one should not suppose that each righteous man has his own distinct excellence, and that no one of them encompasses the whole of the cleaving; and therefore he said that they will have a *machol* that goes round in a circle. Had this not been a *machol*, each righteous man would have been marked out by a cleaving of his own, and would not have had cleaving from every side. But when he has a *machol* that goes round in a circle, he stands over against Hashem at every one of the parts that face the center point. From this one may learn that in time to come the righteous man has a connection to Hashem — not from some one respect, but from every respect — just as the *machol* that goes round in a circle encompasses the whole circle. Understand these matters; this is the *machol* the righteous have. And these are great and awesome matters, when you understand them.

And he said that each and every one points to Him with his finger, since anything one points to with the finger is a thing distinguished from the rest. He means that by virtue of this elevation the righteous have cleaving to His truth — to Him precisely as He, may He be blessed, is unique and separate from all existent things. That is why they point to Him with their finger: it is the recognition of His truth precisely as He is separate from all existent things. For the righteous possess the excellence of the circle, in which all the points on the circle are drawn to the center point; and this indicates that they are connected and drawn to His truth precisely as He is unique and separate from all, after the manner of the center point, as we have explained.

And so the meaning of the Sages' words about the holy *machol* has been explained to you. We have expounded many faces of it, and all of them are faces in accordance with halacha; not one of them turns away from the truth. Whichever way is more intelligible to you, you may choose. Yet the last is the way that ascends by the straight and true path; it is the bond of life, and that is the one you should choose. And although it is impossible to set down in writing matters as awesome as these — these words are but few on the page, and most of it is left to the wise man, who will add wisdom and knowledge — may He, may He be blessed, grant us atonement, and make us a tail to the tail of the righteous in this holy *machol*.

The chapter *Chelek* (Sanhedrin 95b): R. Abahu said, "Were the verse not written, it would be impossible to say it" — as it is written (Yeshayahu 7:20), "On that day Hashem will shave with a hired razor." [Aramaic: the narrative that follows, to the end of the quotation, is in Aramaic.] HaKadosh Baruch Hu came and made Himself appear to him as an old man, and said to him, "When you go to the kings of the East and the West, whose sons you brought and killed — what will you say to them?" He said to him, "That man [i.e., Sancheriv himself] sits in that very dread as well." He said to him, "What shall we do?" He said to him, "Go and change your appearance." "With what shall I change it?" He said to him, "Go, bring me shears, and I will shear you." "From where?" He said to him, "Go to that house [and] fetch them." He went and found angels, and they appeared to him as men grinding date-pits. He said to them, "Give me the shears." They said to him, "Grind one *griva* (a dry measure) of date-pits and we will give it to you." He ground one *griva* of date-pits, and they gave him the shears. By the time he came back it had grown dark. He said to him, "Go, bring fire." He went and brought fire. As he was blowing on it, the fire caught in his beard, and it went on to shear off his head and his beard. [They] said: this is the meaning of what is written (Yeshayahu 7:20), "and it shall also consume the beard." Rav Papa said: this is what people say — "You have shorn the Aramean and it pleased him; set fire to his beard, and still you cannot get your fill of laughing at him." He went and found a plank of Noach's ark. He said, "This is the great god that saved Noach from the flood." He said, "If that man goes and prospers, I will offer up my two sons to you." His sons heard, and killed him. This is what is written (Melachim II 19:37), "And as he was bowing down in the house of Nisroch his god, Adramelech and Sharetzer his sons struck him down with the sword." — thus far.

People are greatly astounded by this passage. Even though he spoke with the qualification *kivyachol* ("as it were"), they are nevertheless left perplexed as to how such things could be said of Hashem, may He be blessed. And if He wished to

do this to the wicked man, it could have been done through someone else, whoever that might be, rather than by His doing it Himself. Furthermore: if Hashem wished to repay him for his deeds, how is this act — the shaving, in that He was the one who shaved him — reckoned so great a punishment?

Know that in this passage he comes to explain to you the blow that Hashem brought upon Sancheriv: how He brought upon him a blow exactly proportioned to the punishment he deserved, so that His attributes are truth. For this wicked man reviled and blasphemed Hashem, as the verse writes (Yeshayahu 36:20), where he said, "Who among all the gods of these lands..." It was therefore fitting that he be repaid by this same measure — that he become an object of scorn, derision and reproach, as will be explained. And the second point: Sancheriv survived the blow with which the angel struck them (Melachim II 19:35). This is a great difficulty. The wicked man, who was himself the sinner, is the one left alive out of that great army — for R. Yochanan said (Sanhedrin 95b) that five survived of the army. Now Nevuchadnetzar and Nevuzaradan were certainly left alive because Hashem wished to give them the kingship, as the prophets prophesied concerning it. But the wicked Sancheriv — why was he left alive? One cannot say that Hashem wanted him to reign further; that is not so, for he was killed (Melachim II 19:37). If so, he ought to have been killed along with the army.

This is what they came to explain in this weighty passage, and they alluded to it in the verse (Yeshayahu 7:20), "On that day Hashem will shave with a hired razor." The explanation of the matter is that the wicked man was left alive so that he should receive, before his death, further baseness and lowliness — to the point that it would have been better for him to have died with that army, and to have died in honor, than to be given over to reproach and contempt; and after all this he was killed anyway. For it was fitting that he receive reproach and contempt: as he had reviled the living God, so should he himself become a reproach. That is also why his two sons were left alive, since it was through them that he was killed (Melachim II 19:37). His two sons in particular were fitted for this, and he was not killed by anyone else, because no one recognized him except his two sons — he had disguised himself, and only his two sons knew him. Greater still is the ignominy and disgrace of being killed by his own sons: he brought them into the world, and they took him out of the world. This is the main point of the passage. And this is the meaning of the verse (Yeshayahu 7:20), "And it shall be on that day that Hashem will shave..." — that is, he would alter himself and his honor and disguise himself before people. This was a great disgrace to him: he had been a great and honored king, and now his honor would be stripped away and he would change himself out of his royal state.

And the meaning of "On that day Hashem will shave with a hired razor... the head... and it shall also consume the beard" is this: nothing was left him of all his armies, and how should he not be afraid after all the deeds he had done? His disguising himself out of his royal state is called "shaving," because by shaving a man commonly makes himself unrecognizable and alters his appearance. And it is written, "Hashem will shave the head" — for he was changing himself out of the kingship, which is "the head." And it says "with a hired razor," because out of his great fear and dread he would exert himself with diligence, like a man who hires a thing and goes to great lengths to get it; so too he would spur himself on because of his great fear and dread. And it says that He would heap much disgrace and ridicule upon him, until everything in him that carried dignity and honor turned to disgrace and contempt. This is why it says "and it shall also consume the beard": he called his dignity "a beard," since the beard carries the dignity of the countenance more than anything else, and all his dignity would be stripped from him until he became an object of ridicule in the eyes of all — like the foolish man who makes himself ridiculous, upon whom people heap yet more scorn, as Rav Papa explained (Sanhedrin 96a). It is great ridicule and scorn to a man when his dignity, which is his beard, is taken from him. That is the sense of "you have shorn him and it pleased him; set fire to him," and so on. Therefore the stripping of all his dignity from the wicked man is called "and also the beard" — that is, the dignity of the countenance — "shall be consumed."

In sum, the meaning of the verse is that after the blow Hashem struck him, Sancheriv would alter himself with very great diligence, and this is a disgrace to him; and Hashem would heap disgrace and contempt upon him in accordance with his punishment, since he had reviled and blasphemed. And because Scripture expressed this under the term "shaving," Chazal followed the verse and expounded the matter in these terms. We have already said, too, that this is the way of the Sages: they speak from the essential nature. For the removal of his honor and his becoming an object of ridicule is the essential nature of shaving, since shaving the head is the removal of honor. This too is hinted in Scripture: when it spoke of the *yefas to'ar* (the beautiful captive), that she must put off the comely garment of her captivity, it said (Devarim 21:12), "and she shall shave her head." Therefore the stripping of the wicked man of his honor is called "shaving the head," and the taking away of the adornment of his kingship altogether is called "the beard being consumed." The thing by means of which this came about — which is like the instrument by which a thing is done — is called a "razor," since a razor is for shaving. The thing that causes all his dignity to be removed is called "fire," because it is the cause of the removal of the beard. And the cause of

that cause is called "darkness," since the darkness is what brings about the fire, which in turn causes the beard to be consumed, as will be explained.

And as for their saying that "HaKadosh Baruch Hu appeared to him as an old man" — its meaning is that Sanheriv supposed this counsel, that he should alter his honor, to be human counsel, and the act to be a human act. But in truth the counsel is nothing other than counsel from Hashem, and the act is the act of Hashem. And in saying "HaKadosh Baruch Hu appeared to him as an old man," he called the human intellect "an elder," for the elder is the wise man — there is no *zakein* (זקן, "elder") but one who has acquired wisdom (Kiddushin 32b) — and all his deeds are done by human wisdom. Therefore he said, "HaKadosh Baruch Hu appeared to him as an old man": Sanheriv supposed that this thinking, that is, the human intellect, was what gave him counsel, whereas in truth it was the counsel of Hashem.

And it says, "Come and I will shear you." We have already said that the whole intent of the verse is that he was disguising himself and altering his honor with exceeding haste. The thing that causes the removal of his honor is called "shears," since through shears a man alters and disguises his honor when he shears off his hair. And his need to exert himself to obtain that cause is expressed by his having brought the shears — which are the cause of the removal of his honor — from another house. And the fact that he had to exert himself very greatly, with great toil and difficulty, is expressed as "the angels appeared to him grinding date-pits." It is well known that there is no task demanding greater strength and more labor than this. He means to say: not merely that he had to exert himself to fetch it, but more than that — that he could obtain it only with great toil, like one grinding date-pits. And Sanheriv supposed that his obtaining it only with great toil was a human matter, that it had simply fallen out so by chance; yet it was ordered by nothing other than the upper powers. That is "the angels appeared to him as a man": this was not ordered by human custom but by the decree of the upper powers, that he should have great toil in this humiliation. And Hashem heaped disgrace upon his ignominy in order to strip away all his honor and dignity — as Rav Papa said, when the disgrace pleases the fool, you should heap more upon him and set fire to his beard. The cause of heaping further disgrace upon him is called "by the time he came back it had grown dark," for this is what caused the fire to be set in his beard. He has already called the added disgrace and contempt of stripping away his dignity "the beard being consumed"; therefore the cause of the cause of this is called "by the time he came back it had grown dark." And the cause itself of the removal of his honor and his adornment is called "fire," since it is the cause of the removal of his adornment and his dignity, as these matters

have been explained to you very many times. And this shaving is a shaving of intellect alone. You should understand this well; there is no need to elaborate further.

And it says, "He went and found a plank of Noach's ark." When such a flood came upon this wicked man — his whole army killed while he himself was left alive — he resembled Noach in a certain respect, for everything was swept away and he alone remained (Bereishis 7:23). Even though being left alive was to his own harm, since he would be killed in the end, he was nevertheless left alive. This is why he said that he found one plank of Noach's ark: he stood in some relation to Noach's deliverance — as Noach was left over from the flood, so was he left over from the flood. That is why he said that he found one plank of Noach's ark. And it says, "This is the god that saved Noach from the flood," because he supposed that the ark — made precisely to the measure Scripture prescribed in its breadth, its length and its height — was itself the cause and the deliverance. For the ark was made after the pattern and likeness of a certain thing, and through this he had his deliverance. And since a deliverance had likewise been granted to him, it says that he found a plank of Noach's ark — that is, a portion of it. And it says that "this is what saved Noach from the flood," because he thought that Noach had been saved by one of the powers to which worship is offered.

Because it was the practice of idolaters, when a great deliverance befell them — especially one such as this, that Sancheriv alone was left of the whole army — to offer up their sons to *avodah zarah*, his sons feared that he would do so. And that is indeed what he intended to do to them, and so they killed him as he was bowing down in the house of Nisroch (Melachim II 19:37). For the early idolaters would offer up even their own sons to *avodah zarah*, since they held that the *korban* cleaves to the one to whom the *korban* is offered; and when the *korban* is his own son, the cleaving to him is greater still, for his son is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Everything had been destroyed, and he too had deserved to be destroyed, and he thought that his god had done him this good turn; it was therefore fitting for him to offer up himself — and his sons are reckoned as himself. And if you object that this is bloodshed, an abominable thing — idolaters are not particular about that, for abominable deeds are no disgrace to idolaters. But He, may He be blessed, who hates bloodshed and finds it abominable in His sight, does not desire this; He desires only a *korban* that is within a man's own possession. And Hashem brought it about that he should be killed after all the contempt and reproach he had received. What we have said is enough to explain the words of the Sages.

In the first chapter of Berachos (7a) it is said: R. Yishmael said, once I entered to burn incense in the innermost chamber, and I saw Akatriel Kah Hashem Tzevakos seated upon a high and exalted throne. And He said to me, "Yishmael My son, bless Me." I said before Him, "Master of the universe, may it be Your will that Your mercy conquer Your anger, that You conduct Yourself with Your children with the attribute of mercy, and that You enter with them beyond the letter of the law." And He nodded to me with His head. The Gemara asks [Aramaic]: what does this teach us? — that the blessing of a commoner should not be light in your eyes. Thus far.

Now many are aghast at this statement: that a commoner should bless the One, may He be blessed, from whose blessing everything is blessed. But once you grasp what we have told you many times over up to this point, there is no difficulty here and nothing astonishing. For His glory is not present to us in completeness, according to the essential nature of His glory itself; and this is due solely to the deficiency of the existing beings, who are in deficiency, so that His glory is not present to the existing beings as it is in itself. Therefore, when He said "Yishmael My son, bless Me," this does not mean that He receives a blessing from His creatures — Heaven forbid to say such a thing. It means rather that through this blessing He will be present to the existing beings, who are His children, with the attribute of blessing: that He should not conduct Himself with His children with the attribute of justice, but should enter with them beyond the letter of the law.

This is called "blessing" because every blessing is an addition and an increase beyond the fixed measure. Blessing is not that He gives a man only what he needs — giving him his needs would not be a blessing at all; the matter of blessing is that he should have an addition beyond the measure. That is why he said, "May it be Your will..." — meaning that His attributes should be without a fixed measure, so that He enters with His children beyond the letter of the law. Then He conducts Himself with the attribute of blessing, which is a matter of doing more than is due. And this in particular is what is called a blessing to Hashem, may He be blessed — not the other blessing that He gives. When He gives plenty and blessing, which is a blessing to the receiver, that is not called a blessing to Hashem. But when the blessing is in His own attributes — that the attributes by which He conducts Himself with His creatures are beyond the letter of the law, and that His attributes are not bounded and measured — that is called a blessing to Him.

If so, there is no difficulty in how it can be said that He receives a blessing from man. He receives nothing from man, Heaven forbid; it is only as though He had

said, "May it be My will...", that He should be present to His children in blessing in this way. This is why He said, "Yishmael My son, bless Me" — that is, He asked that He conduct Himself with His children with the attribute of blessing. And this is one and the same matter with what they said, that Israel add strength and might above. None of these things are said of His own self; they are said only of how He is present to the existing beings. So "Yishmael My son, bless Me" means: bless Me, so that I am present in blessing to My children — and that is when I conduct Myself with My children beyond the letter of the law.

Perhaps you will still object: since He desires the blessing, who is there to restrain Him from acting and conducting Himself with His children with the attribute of blessing? Why, then, did He say, "Yishmael My son, bless Me"? For one who understands what blessing is, this is no difficulty. Blessing in itself is fitting from the side of the existing beings, for it is through the existing beings that He is present to the existing beings with the attribute of blessing. You can grasp this from the fact that all blessings come from another: Yitzchak blessed Yaakov (Bereishis 28:1), and Yaakov blessed his sons (Bereishis 49:28), and there is no one who blesses himself. Prayer, by contrast, a man prays for himself; and a man's prayer for himself is better than the prayer of others for him, as Chazal said (Bereishis Rabbah 53:14): the prayer of a sick man for himself is better than the prayer of others for him. The reason is that blessing, as we said, is an addition, and therefore blessing properly comes from another, who is an addition relative to the one being blessed. Accordingly, the one who is an addition brings an addition, and that is blessing. Blessing from oneself does not apply, since a man is no addition to himself. This is their statement (Berachos 7a), "Let the blessing of a commoner not be light in your eyes": blessing is what comes from the side of another, and it is from this side that blessing comes; and therefore even a commoner brings the blessing. Prayer, however, is a request for one's need, for what one lacks — and what a man himself lacks is called his need more than what others pray for on his behalf. From the side of another, then, blessing is the more fitting, since another is an addition and a blessing.

This is the sense of "Yishmael My son, bless Me." Blessing is fitting from the side of the existing beings, for they bring about the will that He conduct Himself with His children with the attribute of mercy. The existing beings are themselves blessing, inasmuch as Hashem bestowed them; and therefore it is through the existing beings, who are blessing, that the will comes from Him to conduct Himself with His children with the attribute of mercy, so that He is present to the existing beings with the attribute of blessing. It is not that He Himself needs to receive blessing from the existing beings — blessed is He, and blessed be His

name forever. It is only that His being present to the existing beings with the attribute of blessing comes from the side of the existing beings, who are themselves blessing, and who draw forth His will, may He be blessed, in will and blessing toward the existing beings.

He said that he saw Akatriel Kah Hashem Tzevakos, and so on. The meaning is that he attained the utmost level a man can apprehend. The *alef* (א) indicates that He is a beginning and primordial, for the *alef* is a beginning and a first. The name *kesser* (crown) indicates that He is separate from all existing beings and has no partnership with them — that is what the name "crown" indicates of Him, for a king, by being king and having a crown, is separate from the rest of the people. And the name *Kel* (לך) at the end says that this is not a commoner's crown but a divine crown, just as all the separate angels have the name *Kel* at the end. *Gavriel*, for instance: that is to say, his might is not a commoner's might but a divine might. *Refael* is appointed over healing, and that healing is divine healing, not the healing of flesh and blood; and so with all of them. The name *Kah* says that from Him everything is created and comes down in a chain of descent — that is what the name *Kah* indicates, for "in *Kah* Hashem is the Rock of worlds" (Yeshayahu 26:4): with the *yud* of His name He created the World to Come, and with the *hei* He created this world (Menachos 29b). Then he mentioned the name *Havayah* (the four-letter Name), for once He had created them and brought them forth into actuality they need the perpetuation of an enduring being, and this He gave them through the name *Havayah* — for the name of *Havayah* indicates precisely that: a continuous, enduring being. This is known to those enlightened in wisdom: it is from this name that the continuous being, enduring and abiding, is present. Then he mentioned the name *Tzevakos*, for from this name flows the multiplying of offspring after He created them; otherwise the world would not increase and they would not be fruitful and multiply. From this name flows the multiplying of offspring, and that is why He is called *Tzevakos*, from the word *tzava* (host), which denotes multitude. These holy names, then, indicate the order of the chain of descent, in its fitting and proper order, with nothing added and nothing lacking.

He reached this level when he entered to burn incense in the innermost chamber. For the incense in the innermost chamber, offered by the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur (Yoma 52b), is the preparation a man has for the most inward and highest cleaving. And Hashem said, "Yishmael My son, bless Me" — meaning that Hashem desires to be present to the existing beings with the attribute of blessing, and that there be in His attributes an addition beyond His attributes. For in all of this there was no mention of the addition beyond His attributes — that He

conduct Himself with them beyond the letter of the law — since that in particular is what is called "blessing." The name "Akatriel" gave no hint of an addition within His attributes; yet His conducting Himself beyond the letter of the law is an addition of blessing within His attributes. And since Hashem desires to be present to the existing beings with the attribute of blessing, He therefore said, "Yishmael My son, bless Me."

And he said, "May it be Your will that Your mercy conquer Your anger," and so on. This comes from the side of the created beings. It is for this reason that the creation of the world begins with a *beis* (ב), which is blessing — *berachah* (ברכה) — as has been explained elsewhere; for this world, bestowed by Hashem, is blessing itself. Therefore the existing beings, inasmuch as they are themselves blessing, bring the blessing forth into actuality entirely — that is, the conduct that goes beyond the letter of the law — and through them Hashem is present to His world with the attribute of blessing. This is the sense of "and He nodded to me with His head," and the sense of "let the blessing of a commoner not be light in your eyes." That is to say: do not wonder that a commoner should give a blessing, and ask what power he has; it is certainly fitting that blessing come from another. This is because another is an addition, and therefore it is fitting that blessing, which is likewise an addition, come through him. And so even the blessing of a commoner should not be light in your eyes, for every blessing is fitting to come through another.

But lest you harbor in your heart something that is not so, you must know that none of this pertains to the truth of His own self. From the side of His own self He is the source of blessing, and man has no bearing on that at all. It is only that He is not present to us in the completeness of His glory, because of the deficiency of the receiver, who is not prepared to receive His glory itself; and through this blessing, which is from the side of the receiver — who is himself blessing — the blessing comes forth into actuality, that His mercy conquer His anger, and He is present to the existing beings with the attribute of blessing. It is in this sense that these things were said, and there is no doubt of their truth. This is a key for understanding a great many hidden things of wisdom that are concealed from men. For they suppose that these things were said with respect to the truth of His own self, so that their sense would be that He receives some completion from the existing beings — Heaven forbid to say so, and Heaven forbid to think so. Rather, He is present in blessing to the receiver — who is deficient — through this blessing. Take this key in your hand.

Likewise, what Chazal said (Berachos 7a), that HaKadosh Baruch Hu prays, is this very same matter. Those words were said only with respect to His being present to the existing beings while they receive His glory in a deficient reception; He is not present to the existing beings at this excellence, that the good and the blessing be in actuality, because of the deficiency of the receiver. Rather, He asks that He conquer His anger. That is to say: in this respect He asks for the will that His mercy conquer His anger, but the will is not present to them in actuality entirely, since their excellence does not reach so far. This is why they said that HaKadosh Baruch Hu prays: the intent, as we said, is that the receivers are not at the level at which the will would be in actuality with them; rather, this is how He is present to them — that He wills and desires to conquer His anger. So too what they said (Berachos 6a), that HaKadosh Baruch Hu dons tefillin, is likewise from the side of the receiver. For certainly, from the side of His own self there is no adornment from another at all, since "in His palace all say Glory" (Tehillim 29:9). It is only from the side of His being present to the receiver that He has tefillin, and this is the adornment: that He is adorned and glorified by Israel, who are the effects. Nothing further at all should be written of this. Let no one entertain a doubt about these matters; rather, one ought to contemplate them and give his heart to their depth. And may He, may He be blessed, grant us atonement — for we have kept to the way of the Sages, to conceal and hide, so far as is possible, in these matters.

In Midrash Bereishis Rabbah (3:7): "Let there be evening" is not written here, but rather (Bereishis 1:5) "And there was evening." R. Abahu said: this teaches that He was creating worlds and destroying them, until He created these. He said, [Aramaic: "These please Me; those do not please Me."] R. Pinchas said: the ground of R. Abahu's reading is (Bereishis 1:31) "And Elokim saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good" — these please Me; those do not please Me. Thus far the midrash.

To some people this midrash seems utterly far-fetched: that He should create, and should see a world that is not good, and destroy it, and create another. Even of a craftsman of flesh and blood such a thing would be unfitting — how much more so of the Creator of the world, who neither faints nor grows weary, and who is not a man that He should relent. How is it possible to say such a thing? But people have not descended into the inner meaning of this statement, and have not grasped its secret.

The matter is this. You will find that with all the created beings which Hashem, may He be blessed, created, He was creating worlds and destroying them, and

said, "These please Me; those do not please Me." For at first He created the created beings; and at the hour they were created, when there was no other existence in the world, those created beings were what was primary in the creation, and the name "existence" rested upon them. Then Hashem created man, who is what is primary in existence, and said, "These please Me; those do not please Me" — and by this the rest of the existing beings were destroyed, once Hashem chose man, who is what is primary in existence. That is to say, the name "existence" no longer falls upon them. So it is in every work of Elokim. At first the nations were in the world, and they were the existence of this world, so long as the people whom Hashem chose had not yet come to be. But once Israel came to be, the nations were no longer the chosen, and from then on they are not reckoned as existence at all. This is what they meant by saying that He was building worlds and destroying them.

And this the Sages hinted at in many places. They said in the chapter *Rabbi Akiva* (Shabbos 89b): R. Abahu said, *Chorev* is its name, for from it destruction (*churban*) came down upon the nations of the world. The explanation is that when He chose Israel, the rest of the nations were destroyed, as it says (Yirmiyahu 50:12), "the last of the nations shall be a wilderness, a dry land," and so on — that they are not reckoned as anything. You will find this plainly borne out: before Israel arose there were prophets among the nations, such as Bilaam, Elifaz, and Tzofar the Naamathite, and others like them; but once Israel arose, there were no prophets among the nations. These things are clear, and this is what it means that the nations were destroyed. So too, at first all lands were fit for the holy speech, and once the Land of Israel was sanctified, all the other lands were disqualified from that speech. All of these, then, are instances of His creating them and destroying them.

And because Scripture says (Bereishis 1:5), "And there was evening and there was morning," and so on — where it should have written "Let there be evening and morning" — for the *vav* of "and there was" implies that something existed beforehand, since that is how the connective *vav* functions, joining a thing to what precedes it: it is on this basis that he said, "He was building worlds and destroying them." He means that Scripture is not speaking of the beginning of the evening of the first day; it speaks of the evening, but not of its beginning. And why does it not speak of the beginning of the evening? Because He was building worlds and destroying them — and these are the creation of things in which there is no complete creation, and which do not join with the rest of the world, since there is no real existence in them. Such are "unformed and void, and darkness" (Bereishis 1:2), all of which were created on the first day, as it is stated in the

second chapter of Chagigah (12a), and in which there is no complete creation. For although this was reckoned a creation at the time of their creation — since when the world was created it was unformed and void, so that this counts as a creation — nevertheless it was afterward destroyed, once the creation Hashem willed came into being. Then those upon which the name "existence" had rested were destroyed, because this creation has no connection with the rest of the created beings. We may also say that Scripture is speaking of something still further from being a creation and from being an existence than "unformed and void" is, and such a thing was certainly destroyed when the world was created.

And this too is what they said in the midrash (ibid.), that there was an order of times before this. He did not say "there was time before," because each and every one of these six days of Creation is a distinct time: this one is called "the first day," that one "the second day," and each is distinct in itself, this one not being like that one. But the time that was before this is an "order of times," not a distinct time. Had there been a distinct time, Scripture would have recounted it. It is only an "order of times" — that is, the matter of time as such, since time contains a before and an after. But it was not a distinct time, such that one could say there was an evening or a morning before it. That is not so; rather, "there was an order of times before," namely a before and an after, and this is what an "order of times" is. And this is as we said: the verse that says "And there was evening and there was morning" is not speaking of the beginning of the evening, for if it were, it should have said "Let there be evening." Rather, at first things were created which underwent destruction once the creation that is more primary came to be. For that creation is merely the matter of time, in which there was a before and an after — and this is what is called an "order of times"; there was no distinct time. But the creation "was unformed and void," a creation that is not discernible — as Rashi, of blessed memory, explained (Bereishis 1:2), that when a person comes to give it a name, saying that it is this particular thing, he is left bewildered (*toheh*, the root of *tohu*) and changes his mind, to call it by another name. There is no complete creation here. So too the time is not distinct, such that that time would be separate from another time. This is what is called an "order of times": in that time there was only the before and the after, and no distinct time such as the time of the six days of Creation was, each day standing by itself. That is why Scripture did not speak of it.

In sum: on the first day there were created beings that have no real creation, and this is on account of its being the beginning of the creation, so that they have no complete existence — just as Scripture states explicitly (Bereishis 1:2), "And the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." The

verse implies that at the beginning of the creation the creation was not yet complete, and there was no complete existence. This itself is what he meant by saying that He was building worlds and destroying them: the name "existence" rested upon them at the beginning of the creation, and afterward they were destroyed, and they are not included with the existence that is complete existence. For these things, which are "unformed and void" and the like, do not join with what is primary in the world. This is why it did not say "Let there be evening," which would have been speaking of the beginning of the evening; and that time is not on a par with the rest of time. And from this, all the matters in this statement [?] — although it is impossible to explain this statement fully, so surpassing is its depth.

Elsewhere, however, we explained that this statement is according to its plain sense: that He was building worlds and destroying them. For the *vav* of "and there was evening" is the connective *vav*, which joins one thing to another, and if there had been no order of times before, it would not be apt to say "and there was evening," but only "let there be evening." From this they learned that there was an order of times before this. R. Abahu then came to explain that the order of times that was before this means that He was building worlds and destroying them; and he joins the *vav* of "and there was evening" to that first order. The whole point of this is to say that this world was created at the highest excellence, and that what is not so great in excellence comes to exist earlier than what is greater in excellence, which is later in coming to exist. To those who know wisdom it is clear that this is so. That is why all the nations existed before Israel; and likewise, in the creation of the world, all the living creatures and the rest of things existed before man was created, and there is no doubt of this. So too in the creation of the world: since this world was created at the highest excellence, there must certainly be something earlier which is not so great in excellence. It is of this that he said, "He was building worlds and destroying them." He means that the excellence of this world and its level destroyed and annulled what is lesser than it — that which is prior in existence. In the creation of this world He was building worlds and destroying them, "and He said: These please Me; those do not please Me." All of this is hinted at in the expression "and there was evening." These matters are exceedingly deep, and there is no explaining further — only that the words of the Sages are supernal wisdom, and it is impossible to explain.

In Midrash Bereishis Rabbah (68:4): What has HaKadosh Baruch Hu been doing from the six days of Bereishis until now? He arranges pairings — the daughter of so-and-so to so-and-so, the wife of so-and-so to so-and-so. Thus far the midrash.

To people this seems far-fetched: to ascribe such an activity to Hashem, may He be blessed, from the six days of Bereishis onward. Yet when you examine these words you will find that they are correct, and indeed necessary. For the intent was only about what is *new* — about what He does from the six days of Bereishis onward. Hashem certainly created all created beings, and everything is His doing; it is only that "there is nothing new under the sun" (see Koheles 1:9). That is to say: as for the created beings He creates and makes each day, "there is nothing new under the sun," and everything runs its accustomed course. The decree that Hashem decreed in the six days of Bereishis, He decrees every day, and there is nothing new here. Now, the world in general runs its accustomed course, and therefore the question is about something new. To this he answered that He arranges pairings.

The explanation of this matter is that just as Hashem paired Chavah with Adam, so He arranges every day the pairing of a man with his wife. Every pairing is a new act, unlike the creation of man himself. Creation is certainly not reckoned as something new, since "the world runs its accustomed course" (Avodah Zarah 54b), and there is nothing new. But His joining *this* particular man to *this* particular woman is certainly something new, for each and every one must be joined to the distinct pairing that belongs to him, according to what makes the connection fitting between them; and every pairing is a distinct connection. This holds in a matter that is particular — such as the pairing of a man with his wife, since each particular man has his own distinct particular woman — and it does not hold in something that already existed only in a universal way, [for] one may say that the creation of the species as a whole has already taken place, and all of it lies within the power of universal nature. On this account, "there is nothing new under the sun": Hashem created the power of nature so that it should run its accustomed course forever, and the power of nature acts by the will of HaKadosh Baruch Hu and by His decree, so that the species of human beings should be brought into being. But "the daughter of so-and-so to so-and-so" — that is something new, and is not included in the creation of the species. That is why he said that Hashem arranges pairings.

You should know something further: a human being's pairing is not natural. Rather, the connection and the pairing come from Hashem. That is why the Name of Hashem is present in *ish* (איש, "man") and *ishah* (אשה, "woman") — the *yud* in *ish*, the *hei* in *ishah* (Sotah 17a) — because He is the one who joins them. There is no governance of nature in this matter at all; it is entirely His own act. Therefore it does not fall under the governance of nature. This explanation too is entirely sound.

This matter — the particular connection — is a wondrous thing. The Sages hinted at it (Sotah 2a): pairing them is as hard as the splitting of *Yam Suf* (the Sea of Reeds), as it says (Tehillim 68:7), "He settles the solitary in a home, He brings out prisoners into prosperity." The "solitary" are the joining of the particulars, and it resembles "He brings out prisoners"; and it is like the splitting of *Yam Suf*, in which He brought Israel out from within all-encompassing nature, splitting the sea for them — and the sea belongs to nature. This was the end and purpose of the redemption from Mitzrayim: that He redeemed them out of all-encompassing nature. And because He pairs each one with the pairing that befits him — and insofar as a thing is this particular thing, it stands divided off from another, while Hashem unites them and binds them together — this is as hard as the splitting of *Yam Suf*. For the splitting of *Yam Suf* divided and separated the sea, which is one and ought to be joined together, and Hashem split it and separated it. Whereas in the joining of man and woman, they ought by rights to be separate, each on his own, and He joins them so that they become one.

Now know further and understand these matters, for they hinted here at something exceedingly deep. Know that in the six days of Bereishis He brought all existing things forth into the actuality of existence by Himself, in His own glory, and not by way of an emissary — that is, nature — as was the case after the six days of Bereishis, when Hashem governs His world through the emissary, which is nature. And once He had created the world, He unites all existing things. Just as He brought them forth into actuality in the six days of nature, so after the six days of Creation He unites the existing things, until they are one and not divided. This is what he meant by saying that He arranges pairings: for the pairing is the oneness and the binding together of things that are separate, since it is fitting that the world be united in this way. This act is ascribed to Hashem specifically, and not to any natural agency, nor to any of the other agents. For inasmuch as He is one and there is none besides Him, He unites everything.

As was explained above, man is the singular being among the lower beings, and everything was given to serve him; hence man binds and unites the lower beings. And just as man unites the lower beings, so He, may He be blessed and exalted, unites man — for man is not completely one, since he has a pairing. The Sages have already explained (Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, chapter 12) that had he no pairing, they would say that he is a god among the lower beings; and therefore Scripture says (Bereishis 2:18), "It is not good for man to be alone," and so on — so that they should not say he is a god among the lower beings. So Hashem unites man, who stands divided from his pairing. This is what they meant by saying that He arranges pairings, and this act is ascribed to Hashem, as we have said. You

will understand this matter from the fact that after the completion of *Ma'aseh Bereishis* the unique Name is written, and He mentioned a full Name over a full world. For the unique Name unites everything; that is why it is written (Bereishis 2:4), "On the day that Hashem Elokim made earth and heaven."

And because he asked what HaKadosh Baruch Hu does after the six days of Bereishis — for although after the six days of Bereishis He gives life and puts to death, and everything done on earth is His doing — nevertheless he was asking what HaKadosh Baruch Hu does after *Ma'aseh Bereishis*, something that does not pertain to the six days of Bereishis. To this he answered that He arranges pairings. He means that although He created the world in the six days of Bereishis, the binding and connection of the world comes about through man, as has been explained; and the connection and binding of man comes about through Hashem, and in this way Hashem unites everything, as has been explained. During the six days of Creation this does not apply, for so long as everything had not yet been created, unity does not apply — since everything must be one. That is why he answered that from the six days of Bereishis until now He arranges pairings. It is as if he had said: after the six days of Bereishis the world needs to be bound and united, and its unity is something other than its creation. For creation is only the creation of the things themselves, whereas they are united by something other than themselves, since in themselves they are not one. Therefore all existing things are united through man, who is the one among the lower beings, and man is united through Hashem, who is completely one. And when he said that He arranges pairings, the intent is not the pairing of human beings alone. It applies to every matter of connection — He pairs this one with that one. He spoke of pairing a man and a woman only because this is the unity of the world in its fullness, as has been explained.

Although Chavah too was created during the six days of Bereishis, and Hashem paired them — so that pairing and connection would seem not to belong specifically to the period after the completion of nature — this is no difficulty. Adam and Chavah were created as one body and were divided only afterward. Hence even once they were divided they are one, and there was no such great need to unite them, since they were created as one body. It is for this very reason that Adam and Chavah, more than all other created beings, were created as one body: because they are divided, they have no connection and no pairing except through Hashem, who unites them. For this matter is above nature, and in the six days of Bereishis only nature was created, until after the creation; and therefore they were created as one body. This is decisive in favor of the words of Chazal, and their words in this midrash are likewise now explained.

In Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer HaGadol (chapter 3): From what place were the heavens created? From the light of His garment He took, and He spread it out like a cloak, and they went on extending further and further, as it says (Tehillim 104:2), "He wraps Himself in light like a garment, He spreads out the heavens like a curtain." And from what place was the earth created? From the snow beneath the Throne of Glory, as it says (Iyov 37:6), "For to the snow He says, Be earth." Thus far his words.

The Rambam, of blessed memory, wrote in his book, the *Moreh Nevuchim*, in chapter 2 of the second part, and these are his words: "I have seen, in those famous and well-known chapters called *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer*, statements than which I have seen nothing stranger in the words of any man who follows the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu, peace be upon him. And I am astonished: what did this sage believe? If he believed that it is false for a thing to come to be from nothing, and that nothing can come to be except out of matter from which what comes to be comes to be — then from where was the light of His garment created? And what has been gained by this answer? He is then bound to say that it is uncreated, and likewise that in the Throne of Glory there is something uncreated. That would be far-fetched, and it would moreover point to pre-eternity." Thus far his words.

Now I am astonished at the Rambam, of blessed memory: from where did he learn that R. Eliezer's intent in his chapters, when he asks about the heavens and the earth and from where they were created, was that the author of the statement was unwilling to allow a thing to come to be from nothing, and therefore inquired from where the heavens and the earth were created? For the matter is not so at all, and there is no difficulty here whatsoever. He comes only to state the truth: that the heavens were created from the light of His garment. For although HaKadosh Baruch Hu could certainly have created them from nothing, nevertheless they were created from something; and according to that from which they came to be, so is what is created from it and so is its essential nature. This matter is clear. He does not mean that a thing cannot come to be from nothing. And if the difficulty the Rav, of blessed memory, had in mind was rather this — what reason was there to say that the heavens were created from the light of His garment and the earth from the snow beneath the Throne of Glory, and what has the one to do with the other? — that indeed is a question. But the Rav, of blessed memory, did not raise that difficulty at all.

And in the Midrash on Parshas Bo (Shemos Rabbah 13:1) something of the same sort is said about the earth. These are its words there: Avnimos HaGardi asked

our Rabbis, "From where was the earth created?" They said to him, "No man is expert in these matters; go rather to Abba Yosef HaBanai, the builder." He went and found him standing on the scaffolding. He said to him, "I have a question to ask." He said to him, "I cannot come down, since I am a day laborer; but ask what you wish." He said to him, "How was the earth created at the first?" He said to him, "HaKadosh Baruch Hu took dust from beneath the Throne of Glory and cast it upon the face of the waters, and it became earth; and the pebbles that were in the dust became mountains and hills, as it says (Iyov 38:38), 'When the dust runs into a mass, and the clods cleave together.'" Thus far the Midrash. Here too, then, he says that He took the dust from beneath the Throne of Glory, even though the verse he brought as proof makes no mention of any Throne of Glory. So too, in the verse cited in *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer* the Throne of Glory is not mentioned, and yet he said that the heavens were created from the light of His garment and the earth from the snow beneath the Throne of Glory.

The explanation is this. This world is an effect of the Cause, who is Hashem, may He be blessed, and this effect has two aspects. The first aspect: because He is the Cause, the effect therefore has connection and drawing near to the Cause, just as a son has connection and affinity to the father from whom he came. So too Hashem, who is the Cause of the world — the world has a drawing near to the Cause. The second aspect: inasmuch as Hashem is the Cause and the world is the effect, the Cause is certainly separate from the effect, since the one is cause and the other is effect. These two aspects, which are distinct from one another, are present in the world as a whole. The heavens, which are effects, have in them the first aspect, for they have a greater drawing near and connection to Hashem, inasmuch as He is their Cause. The earth has the second aspect, that Hashem is separate from them, inasmuch as He is the Cause and the world is the effect. That is why he said that the heavens were created from the light of His garment: a garment has affinity and connection to the one who wears it, since it is the wearer's own garment, and it is from the standpoint of this aspect that the heavens were created. And he said that the earth was created from the snow that is beneath the Throne of Glory. He means the second aspect that existing things have — that He is separate from them and rules over them — and this belongs to the earth. That is why he said that the earth was created from the snow beneath the Throne of Glory: he means that the earth's beginning is from beneath His kingship, for inasmuch as He is a reigning King He is separate from everything, and it is from this standpoint that the earth was created. The earth is designated for this, since it is among the lower beings. Light and snow are both luminous; only that snow does not shine as fully as the light of His garment shines, [which is] complete light. And that which is light is existence, as you see in the Creation,

where light was created before everything else (Bereishis 1:3). In darkness nothing exists at all, and therefore existence is called light. So when he said "from the light of His garment," he means that the heavens came into existence from this existence — namely, that the Cause has a connection to that which is its effect; and this is what is called a "garment," as we have said.

Concerning this the Sages said in the Midrash: when HaKadosh Baruch Hu created His world, He donned ten garments. The reason is that the divisions of existence are ten, corresponding to the ten utterances (Avos 5:1). The garment of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, then, is from the standpoint of the created beings, who are joined to Him and cleave to Him, may He be blessed, for the effect is near to the Cause. And the fact that Hashem has affinity to the effect — this is what is called a "garment." The created beings divide into ten, and therefore HaKadosh Baruch Hu donned ten garments when He created His world. Accordingly, of the heavens, which have this aspect whereby the effect has drawing near and affinity to the Cause, he said that the heavens were created from the light of His garment — that is, that the heavens were emanated from this very thing, that Hashem, who is the Cause, is near to the effect; and it is from this standpoint that the heavens were emanated. The earth, by contrast, was created from the snow beneath the Throne of Glory, because the earth has no affinity to Hashem, inasmuch as it belongs to the lower beings, as it says (Tehillim 115:16), "and the earth He has given to mankind." It is in this way that the earth was created. That is why he said that the earth was created from the snow beneath the Throne of Glory: it is from the throne of His kingship, He being a King who rules over the created beings, that the earth was created. For there is no Cause without an effect beneath it, over which the Cause rules. Therefore the earth was created from the snow beneath the Throne of Glory — meaning that the earth came to exist from this existence, from His being the Cause. And because snow is luminous, it serves as a designation for existence, as was explained above; that is why he said that the earth was created from the snow beneath the Throne of Glory.

There is a further way to explain it as well. Glory is everywhere called light, as it says (Yechezkel 43:2), "and the earth shone from His glory," and (Yeshayahu 60:1), "and the glory of Hashem shines upon you." This is clear. And all created beings were created for His glory, may He be blessed, as it is written (Yeshayahu 43:7), "everyone that is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory." Now glory arises from two aspects. Take the parable of a king: he has glory inasmuch as he has great and eminent ministers who are close to him, who belong to him and who are his glory. The second: inasmuch as he is a king who reigns and rules over all, even over those who are far from him. Accordingly, "the light of His

garment" means: from the standpoint of the glory whereby everything is joined to Him, like the garment that is joined to the one who wears it. From this standpoint the heavens were created, as Scripture says (Tehillim 19:2), "The heavens declare the glory of *Kel*." And the earth was created from the snow beneath the Throne of Glory — meaning, from the standpoint of the glory whereby everything is under His authority and He rules over all. That is why he said "from the snow that is beneath the Throne of Glory." All of these accounts come to one matter; only that the first explanation is the clear one, as you will understand.

As for what the Midrash said, that the earth was created from the dust beneath the Throne of Glory — he means that the earth's beginning is from the standpoint that He, may He be blessed, is King of the world. His Throne of Glory indicates that He is King, and there is no king without those over whom he reigns, for there is no Cause without an effect. It is from this standpoint that the earth was created, being a complete effect and receiving His kingship. That is why he said "from the dust that is beneath the Throne of Glory." And he calls the earth's beginning "dust" because dust is exceedingly fine, and since every beginning is fine, he called the beginning "dust." He said that the earth's beginning is from beneath the Throne of Glory because of His being King — and there is no king without those who are under his kingship — while the earth is apt to receive His kingship and to be under the authority of the Cause, inasmuch as the earth is a complete effect. And as for what it said (Shemos Rabbah 13:1), that from the clods mountains and hills were made, he means that there is here a beginning that is not so fine; and this alludes to matter, whose beginning too is from beneath the Throne of Glory. We have already said that the effect has two aspects: the first aspect pertains to form and the second to matter — understand this well. That is why he said "and from the clods within it mountains and hills were made" — for these are corporeal and material, and there is no fineness in them, and this corresponds to matter. This is enough by way of explanation. So there has now been explained to you, in this statement, what it is possible to explain — for the statement is deeper still; but what is primary in it is what we have set out for you, and this suffices.

And with this this complaint has been removed — the complaint that we have found and heard from people. When a person examines these matters he will find that the words of the Sages are wholly words of wisdom; let him only set his heart upon them. And we know for certain that if they will set their minds to grasp these matters, the complaint will be removed, and they will draw those words nearer than they had held them at a distance. Let a man only examine these matters with an honest heart and judge them with upright judgment; then

he will find in them the knowledge of the holy ones, and will say: surely they are wiser than all the sages of antiquity — as will be explained in the complaint that follows this one. And with this we conclude our words in removing the fourth complaint. But if someone should say that there are further matters still, and that the complaint has not yet been removed, we answer that these are the matters we have heard and seen them complaining of, and what we have heard and seen we have removed. For in truth there is no end to words of complaint: one may say, "This is the thing I asked about," or "It was another matter I asked about." What we have heard, however, we have answered. And these matters answer for and testify concerning every matter of their kind, having been set forth to give a ruling upon the whole class. May our words find favor before every wise man and every man of knowledge.

The Fifth Well — deep waters. In its depths precious stones lie engraved, and those who know how to swim bring pearls up out of them. To the eye they look like smooth brook-stones, no different from pebbles and common stones that a man holds at a distance; yet they are stones that flash like lightning, and their brightness carries to the end of the world.

The Fifth Complaint. They complain of certain statements found in the words of the Sages which, to all outward appearance, have nothing substantial in them at all. On this they have complained a great deal, expounding the aggados so as to find fault. Here too we shall remove the complaint from them.

Let us say at the outset that they should have taken it to heart that there are matters in the words of the Sages which strike a man as far from reason, and which are obscure where they stand, while their secret is disclosed and set out plainly elsewhere — in the midrash of the *Sefer HaZohar*, for instance, and in the *Midrash HaBahir* of R. Nechunya ben HaKanah, and in the other books of wisdom, which lie treasured up and sealed away in the storehouses of the Sages. These disclose the secrets of Torah at which the Sages hinted. But love conceals blemishes that are in plain view, and hatred, its opposite, distorts the eye and leads the intellect astray.

Now, it is not fitting for a wise man who understands the truth to examine his opponent's words in hatred; even the sages of the nations kept far from this. For thus the Philosopher wrote in the book *Shamayim ve'Olam (De Caelo et Mundo, On the Heavens and the World)*, and these are his words: "We shall then begin by bringing the views of the ancients who differ with us in this, and bring their arguments as well; and this for two reasons. The first is that their arguments are doubts raised against the demonstrations that we ourselves advance, and part of

the completeness of a demonstration is the resolution of the doubts that come against it. The second is that our own statements will be more welcome and more readily received among the lovers of truth — all the more so when we first set out the argument of those who differ with us and only then refute it. In this we shall not be at fault, nor shall we be suspected of wishing only to establish our own view as true, taking no regard of anyone else's view and despising it — and all the more so when the party opposing us is absent from the disputation [?]. So then, if we bring our own view and our own arguments without the arguments of those who differ with us, the reception of our words among the lovers of truth will be weaker, the hearing they give them slighter, and the suspicion of us greater. One who wishes to judge by the judgment of truth ought not to provoke his disputant to anger, or to hate him; rather he ought to concede to him, to have compassion on him, and to speak with him gently. And the definition of conceding is that he concede to him in his statements, letting pass in them what he would concede to himself." Thus far the substance of his words.

Here, then, you see that he stated that hatred must not be allowed to upset the proper order (Rashi, Bamidbar 22:21) — that a man must not judge his adversary's words with the eye of envy, but with the eye of compassion. He must not seek to reject his words by force, but must deal with him as he deals with himself, as he concludes: "that he concede in the statements, letting pass in them what he would concede to himself."

And all these things Chazal said with still greater completeness, in the first chapter of Eruvin (13b): "Why did Beis Hillel merit that the halacha be fixed according to them? Because they are gentle and humble, and they would teach their own words and the words of Beis Shammai — and not only that, but they would put the words of Beis Shammai before their own." Thus far the quotation.

Now one must ask: what has this to do with the halacha being according to them? Because they humbled themselves, it hardly follows that the halacha should be as they say — for the halacha depends on their Torah being in accord with the halacha, and not on their making themselves small. Rather, all these things are an essential cause of a man's saying what is true and in accord with the halacha. Since they are gentle, their words follow the truth: when a man grows angry, that very anger shows that he wants to maintain his words by force and with a strong hand, and wants to win, and so he turns aside from the way of truth. Their being humble is likewise a cause of their having said things in accord with the halacha; otherwise, out of the desire to make himself great over his disputant, a man contradicts his adversary's words even though the truth is not with him.

So too with their teaching the words of Beis Shammai, and putting the words of Beis Shammai before their own: it shows that they did not hate their adversary's words, seeking to reject the words of others even when the truth was with those others. Since they would teach both their own words and the words of Beis Shammai, and would put the words of Beis Shammai first, it is evident that they did not aim to reject the words of others, and that their dispute did not belong to the party of those bent on victory. For one who belongs to the party of those bent on victory — his words do not follow the truth, since he is always seeking to win. None of these things was found in Beis Hillel, and therefore it is fitting that the halacha be according to them. Even though the words of Beis Shammai are good and upright, since Beis Hillel possess the disposition that makes it fitting for their words to be the halacha, the halacha is therefore according to Beis Hillel.

In this matter many men have fallen: hatred works upon them so that they see the level road that goes up to Beis El as a crooked road, while love levels the mountains into a plain for them. Had they only looked at the words of the Sages with the eye of intellect, free of envy, and set those words beside what the Sages said elsewhere — where they gave warning against departing from the truth even in the ordinary business of the world — and how, then, would they depart from the truth with regard to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, God forbid, ascribing to Him things that are not so!

When someone wishes to fault a sage's words within his wisdom, [and] says that an error befell him in some matter of wisdom, that is possible: a sage can err in matters of his own wisdom. But to fault them over things like these — things that not even the small in intellect and the weak in understanding would say — does reason really allow one to suppose them mistaken in such a thing, God forbid, or to suppose that they were seeking to speak what is false? It is not so. The error is the error of the one who thinks it, who did not judge them favorably: their words are just as it befits sages to speak their wisdom, in parable and figure. So the wise man said (Mishlei 1:6), "to understand a parable and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles."

And how should this not be so, when the very nature of wisdom requires it of itself — that one speak words of wisdom only by way of parable and figure, and in a remote manner? For all wisdom is inward, and is not revealed. And so it ought to be: words of wisdom are not to be made something trodden underfoot by every man devoid of knowledge, for that is the opposite of wisdom, since all wisdom is hidden. A wise man ought to treat each thing according to what it is.

You will find this same matter throughout the words of the prophets. Because their words were prophecy from Hashem and not the words of men, their prophecy was hidden, and they did not speak their words as one speaks of plain things — for speech about things ought to accord with what the [thing] itself is.

This same thing is found as well among the very ancient sages of the nations: their words too were exceedingly obscure, so much so that they set forth explanations of their own words. Anyone who has seen their words in their books will find this. Why, then, should they lay blame upon the words of the Sages? Indeed the words of the Sages are of still greater excellence: when the sages of the nations spoke their words by way of riddle and parable, their words held no explanation and no benefit that stood revealed to one who does not understand their riddles. But the words of the Sages follow upon the words of the Torah and the words of the prophets, which have both what is revealed and what is hidden, and which are likened to "apples of gold in settings of silver" (Mishlei 25:11) — the inward likened to the gold, the revealed to the silver, and both of them precious. So it is with the words of the Sages: they have what is revealed and what is hidden. The hidden is precious in wisdom, and the revealed is delightful and good to look upon.

And as they said in the second chapter of Chagigah (11b): "One does not expound the forbidden unions before three, nor *Ma'aseh Bereishis* before two, nor *Ma'aseh Merkavah* before one." The explanation of the mishnah is this. *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is the wisdom that reaches to Hashem, may He be blessed, Himself, for the *merkavah* means that His glory, may He be blessed, rests upon them, as with the holy *chayos* (the living creatures of the divine chariot). Because of the excellence of this wisdom, which is so much occupied with His glory, it is fitting to conceal it more. *Ma'aseh Bereishis* is the creation of His world, which He, may He be blessed, brought about Himself; it is a level below this, and therefore it falls under "two" — that before two one may not expound it. But the order by which the world is connected, one part with another — a matter that is not near to Hashem, that is to say, the connection of man — falls therefore under "three." And the forbidden unions are the connection of existing things one with another, according to what the connection of existence is; upon this the secret of the forbidden unions is built. For the forbidden unions concern the connection of a man to the one who is fitting for him, and this issues from the order of connection in existence [?]. This is not like *Ma'aseh Bereishis*, and therefore it falls under "three."

The levels of wisdom, then, are three. The first is the wisdom that has reached to the chariots of His glory. The second is words of wisdom bearing on His actions, which He performs Himself. The third is the wisdom of the order and connection of existence, one thing with another — in what manner connection is fitting for them; and this is called the wisdom of the forbidden unions. There is no higher wisdom that is not comprised within these three kinds of wisdom.

They forbade revealing these things even mouth to mouth. How, then, should a man write them down, and make matters as great as these a target for the arrow of every fool, who shoots the arrows of his folly at them? Therefore they, being faithful of spirit, covered the matter as was fitting.

Now that we have explained the statements that appear the strangest, and it has been made clear that they are complete with the utmost completeness — so that beyond doubt no complaint remains, and this stands as witness concerning the rest of the statements that are of their kind — we should explain some of the others as well, against which there is likewise complaint. And so we enter further still, into the innermost place, contrary to rule and contrary to right, to explain matters that they kept sealed away and that we shall disclose. Yet by two things it is atoned for us. The first: that our intent here is for nothing but the honor of Hashem, the honor of the Torah, and the honor of the Sages, to remove the complaint from them. The second: that we reveal a handbreadth and cover ten handbreadths.

This is a statement we have found that sages of the nations, earlier ones and later ones alike, used to raise questions about, since it seemed to them as though it were the kind of talk of old women, who say such things. It is in the chapter *HaSefinah* (Bava Basra 73b). Rabbah bar bar Chanah said: [Aramaic: "I myself saw that *akrukta* (frog), which was as big as the fortress of Hagronia. And how big is the fortress of Hagronia? Sixty houses. A *tanina* (serpent) came and swallowed it. A *pishkantza* (raven) came and swallowed the *tanina*, and went up and perched on a tree. Come and see how great is the strength of the tree." Rav Papa bar Shmuel said, "Had I not been there, I would not have believed it."] Thus far the quotation.

About this statement they think thoughts of iniquity, holding it to be extravagant talk. Yet it will become clear to you that in the very measure that they held it at a distance and called it extravagant talk, their words are exceedingly deep.

It is the way of the Sages to occupy themselves with the depiction of the world and with its order — how it is ordered and how its parts are bound one to

another, so that the world is bound and ordered together into a single whole. For it is fitting that it be one, since it comes from one Agent. The Rambam, of blessed memory, has already dwelt on this matter at great length in his book (*Moreh Nevuchim* I), chapter 72. Many men — namely the *minim* — laid it down as a founding principle that differing things cannot come from one Agent. And when they saw differing things in the world, and in particular the things the Torah said to hold at a distance, such as the *tamei* things the Torah forbade, they therefore thought thoughts of iniquity: as though such things came from some other agent beside Him, and as though that were why the Torah held these things at a distance.

Therefore Scripture says (Iyov 14:4), "Who can bring a *tahor* thing out of a *tamei* one? Not one." For when the *tahor* issues from the *tamei*, this indicates complete oneness; when the *tahor* issues from the *tamei*, they are one thing and are not divided. But when a man sees the division between *tahor* and *tamei*, his mind decrees that there is a division here. And so, for the sake of the unity of His Name, may He be blessed, the Sages came to explain that the matter is not so at all: the world is one, and comes from one Agent, who is Hashem, may He be blessed. If the Torah held those things at a distance, it is because they are distant and separate from what is primary in the world — namely existence — and this is why they are *tamei*, on account of their distance from the world; and the Torah forbade them to the *tahor* and holy nation. But for that very reason one must not say of them that they are removed from existence altogether, and make them wholly divided off. Rather they follow after what is primary, as every subordinate thing follows after what is primary.

The Sages, therefore, who know the hidden things of wisdom, divided this world into two parts. The first part is existence itself. The second consists of things that do not possess existence in themselves, but follow after the essence of the creation. The Rambam, of blessed memory, likewise wrote in that chapter that there are existents that are not the essence of the creation. And although he wrote things other than what has been explained here, in any case there are things that follow after the essence of the creation, so that they are bound to what is primary in existence, and the world is thereby ordered and bound together. Those that are not primary — the *tamei* things — have no connection to existence, which is *tahor*; outside the camp of existence is their dwelling and their ordering. And we have already said, in what has been explained, that the Torah is the convention and the order of existence. Since the Torah, which is the convention and the order of existence, held the *tamei* things at a distance, it follows that the *tamei* things are distant from existence and separate from them.

The parts of existence are three: one related to water, one related to fire, and one related to air. These three are elements, and they are called ד"ש in *Sefer Yetzirah* (3:3), and it is explained in many places that they are the elements of everything. The element earth is not counted with them, for a profound reason: this element, which possesses the absolute downward, does not join with the three elements that do not possess the absolute downward, and therefore earth is an element separate unto itself. This is not the place to explain it. The matter is clear: only ש"נ are counted as elements — namely air, water, fire.

You will find that there is a *tamei* creature related to water, such as the frog, which is in water; a *tamei* creature related to fire, such as the *tanin*, which is a serpent, and burns with its venom, and on that account is related to fire; and a *tamei* creature related to air — the raven, which flies in the air. These creatures, frog and serpent and raven, are all creatures separate in some respect from existence, since they are *tamei*. And he came to set out their order, so that they stand ordered together with the world, which is the essence of existence, until the world is one. And it is fitting that the world be one, since it comes from one Agent — not as those of an outside view supposed.

He said that he saw a frog as big as the fortress of Hagronia, which was sixty houses. The number sixty is a complete, universal number, and for that reason this number is found everywhere to express a multitude, as Tosafos explained in the chapter *HaSocher Po'alim*, on "sixty runners run." It is customary to take up this number to express a multitude, because this number is a complete, universal number. On this account, at the measure of sixty everything is nullified (Chullin 98a). For with the number fifty, if one is added to it, this counts as an addition to it, and the added one is not nullified. But when there is the number sixty, which is a universal, complete number, and one is added to it, the single unit is nullified beside a universal number, and the one adds nothing to the universal. And so he said that it was as big as the fortress of Hagronia, which is sixty houses.

Why sixty is a complete, universal number is not for this place to explain. But it is plainly evident that you will find this number wherever one wishes to name a universal number. And since he is speaking here from the side of the universal and not from the side of the particular, he said that he saw an *akrukta* that was like the fortress of Hagronia, which is sixty houses. He means that this is not like the number sixty elsewhere, for in the ordinary number sixty each unit is divided off by itself, whereas in the universal each is not divided off by itself, but is one whole. That is why he said that he saw an *akrukta* that was like the fortress of Hagronia, which is a single thing — and the fortress of Hagronia is as much as

sixty houses, and that is a universal number. And where he says here that he saw an *akrukta*, this is a female frog, as [the Rashbam] (R. Shmuel ben Meir), of blessed memory, explained. The wording certainly implies as much, since he did not say *tanin* (תנין). The reason they were all female will be explained shortly.

As for what he said — that he saw an *akrukta*, and a *tanina* came and swallowed the *akrukta*, and a *pishkantza* came and swallowed the *tanina*, and perched on a tree — the explanation of the matter is this. Know that this world resembles a single tree, which runs from what is primary in it, its root, out to the tree's end, and has many branches running one after another. So it is with the world: it runs from the First Cause, which is what is primary — and this is what they meant by *kofer ba'ikar*, one who denies what is primary (Sanhedrin 38b) — and its parts descend in a chain one after another, to the end of the chain of the parts of existence. There is a further existence that descends in the chain, which is not of the essence of the world but is subordinate to the world and follows after it, the world being existence itself; and this is on account of their baseness, which is why they are not what is primary in the world.

Since the parts of existence descend in a chain one after another, that which is more primary and more the essence of existence is always nearer to what is primary — namely the First Cause, which is what is primary of all, and which bears everything. The essence of existence is prior and first with respect to that which is not so primary. And this is why the chain of the parts of existence, one after another from the First Cause, which is what is primary of all, is called *ilana*, a tree.

There are things entirely separate from existence, which are not the essence of existence but are like accidental things that follow after the essence; just so, these things follow after the essence of the world. And although within the essence of existence itself there is likewise what is more primary, which is nearer to the First Cause, what is primary of all — and it is for this that it is called *ilana* — nevertheless they are all included under the name "the essence of existence," even though they differ, one being more primary than another. But there are things separate from the essence of existence, base things that are no more than like an accident following after the essence, and these are not included at all under the name "the essence of existence." And because the *tamei* things, on account of their baseness, have their dwelling outside the camp, as was explained above. Even so, they are bound and united with the essence of existence, so that all is one, and in this the world is one. Though they are separate from existence, they are not entirely separate — for if they were, existing things would be

divided. Rather they are one, since they issued from one Agent. They too, therefore, must be ordered and united with this tree, so that it is entirely one.

This is what he meant by saying that he saw an *akrukta*, and a *tanina* came and swallowed it, and a *pishkantza* came and swallowed it, and perched on the tree. The matter is this: just as it is in the tree itself, where that which stands more first with respect to the root receives what is more distant from the root, so that by this the whole tree is one and stands upon its root — so it is with these things as well. Although they are an existence that is not in essence, and follow after the existence of the world which is in essence, there is an order among them. That which is more distant and more separate from the existence of the world that is in essence is nevertheless subordinate to, and follows after, a thing that is not so distant — a thing that is related in some respect to the essence of existence — and that thing receives it; until the thing that is nearest of all follows after the tree, and the tree, which is the essential chain of existence, receives it. And so he saw an *akrukta* that a *tanina* swallowed, because the *akrukta*, the creature that is in water, is more distant from the essence of existence. A *tanina* came and swallowed it, because the *tanina* is nearer to existence, and it receives what is more distant. And so he said that a *pishkantza* came and swallowed it and perched on the tree — the tree that bears them all and is existence itself; and in this way existence is one.

As for his arranging the three elements in this order, the order of ם"שא, that is a thing known to the discerning. We have already told you that the more distant a thing is from the existence that is in essence, the more it follows after that which is nearer to what is in essence. Now what is in essence is the inhabited land, and the waters are entirely separate from the inhabited land. Then comes fire, which is nearer to the inhabited land, for fire is found in the inhabited land more. Then air, for the inhabited land is impossible without air. And so the *tanina*, which is related to fire, swallowed the *akrukta*, which is in water; the *pishkantza*, which is in air, swallowed the *tanina*, which is of fire; and the *pishkantza*, which belongs to the element of wind, perched on the tree. These matters are exceedingly clear, and whoever has wisdom and knowledge in the matter of the ordering of the world, the chain of existence, and its union will understand this.

As for his saying that they were all female and not male: their union and their binding is not from the side of form, for the male is form everywhere, and form does not receive form. Here he saw the chain of the world — how its parts are bound one to another; for it is in this respect that they have a binding, as he said that a *tanina* came and swallowed, and a *pishkantza* came and swallowed. This is

not from the side of form, for from the side of form each one is distinct unto itself in its own distinct form; form joins only to the subject that is distinctive to it. This matter is clear. The order of these three things is likewise known to the discerning: if you search out wisdom, then you will find the knowledge of holy ones.

The sum of the matter is that they wished by this to explain the order of the world — how it is ordered, one part with another, until it is ordered into one. They therefore explained that these existents, which are separate from the world, follow after the existence that is in essence, and are like an accident that follows after the essence; and an accident does not stand on its own. That is why he said, "See how great is the strength of that tree" — meaning that existents which are not in essence follow after the existence that is in essence. For "great is the strength": a thing that is in essence has a powerful existence. And that is why Rav Papa bar Shmuel said, "Had I not been there, I would not have believed it" — for this matter is certainly an object of intellect, and every wise man is with the object of intellect, and sees the object of intellect.

Now, to understand these matters in their truth, and the order of the chain of these elements, which are three: how could it enter anyone's mind to say that these words of theirs contain no wisdom? They are of three kinds; each one is female; each creature is related to one element; these are the elements of the world; and they are mentioned according to their own order — for this order, water, fire, air, is indeed their order, as is known to those who possess intellect, and this is not the place for it.

It is known that the chain of descent goes to the right, and also to the left, and to what lies before it as well. The *akrukta* is in water, and it is known that water is reckoned to the right. The *tanina*, which burns with its venom, is reckoned to the left. The *pishkantza*, which is in air, is reckoned neither to the right nor to the left. By this the chain is joined together: the chain of the right, which is the *akrukta*, is joined to the left, which is the *tanina*; the *tanina*, which is the chain of the left, is joined to a thing that is neither right nor left, the *pishkantza*; and then the *pishkantza* perches on the tree.

Understand these matters, you, if you are able to understand. And if you are not able, understand at least this much: that what is primary in this statement is that it comes to disclose to you the chain of descent and the binding of that chain, so that the world is one. When a man grasps these things with his intellect, he will then draw these words of theirs near, more than he had held them at a distance for failing to understand words of wisdom. These are the things the Sages wished

to explain concerning the order of existence, as befits sages. But because of the depth of the wisdom these matters hold, it is impossible to explain more than this, and this is enough. May He, blessed be He, atone for us for having opened a door to the treasury of wisdom and to the hidden stores of knowledge — for their ways are upright: the righteous walk in them, and transgressors stumble in them. And all these things, as we have already said, are received on the authority of books of the hidden things of wisdom, in which we came to grasp what is primary in the words of the Sages; and to them alone were the secrets of the Torah and of wisdom revealed.

In the chapter *HaSefinah* (Bava Basra 73b) Rabbah bar bar Chanah said: Once I was traveling in the desert, and I saw geese whose feathers were falling out from their fatness, and a stream of oil flowed beneath them. I said to them, "Shall I have a portion of you in the World to Come?" One lifted up a thigh for me, and one lifted up a wing for me. When I came before R. Eliezer, he said to me, "Israel is destined to be called to account for them." Thus far the passage.

This statement too concerns the honor of the Fashioner of all. In the world one sees a deficiency belonging to the righteous: the good ought to have been theirs in this world, yet it is not so found, and it is they who are in the greatest deficiency. It is about this that the Sages came to disclose that there is no deficiency in the work of His hands.

You should know that when the Sages came to describe the good that is to be the righteous', they described it under the name of *eating*. This is a most exalted matter to the wise who know the truth. Man, who belongs to the lower beings in particular, is brought to completion through receiving — and that is the very meaning of eating. Eating is nothing other than what a man receives, and by it his standing and his endurance are completed; for this belongs to the essence of man, that the lower beings must receive. That is why the good they are to receive in time to come is called by the name "eating." This is set out in the statement (Bava Basra 74b), "And the Leviathan too He created male and female" — though there too is not its place, for it is a deep matter bearing on the reward of the righteous, that their completion comes through receiving, and this he called eating.

And because that eating is not physical, he therefore relates this eating to a goose, which is a bird; for no bird has material, physical heaviness — rather it is related to the spiritual, since it flies in the air and is called "the bird of the heavens" (Bereishis 1:30). We have explained this in many places. And the matter is related in particular to the goose, as will be explained shortly. Spiritual eating and receiving is related more closely to the goose because the goose has its fat:

what is lean is deficient, but what is fat, by reason of its fatness, is not deficient. In the World to Come the receiving will be such that they will not be deficient — unlike this world, where a man is deficient even as he receives his food. That is why the receiving of the World to Come is related to this creature in particular, the goose.

This is also why he said, "I saw those geese, etc." — that he saw them in the desert. The desert is a place related to the attribute of judgment, and therefore physical things are not found there, only divine things. The Torah, after all, was given in the desert (Shemos 19:2), and so too the manna; for physical things do not stand up under the attribute of judgment, but only by virtue of kindness and goodness. And by the attribute of judgment it would have been fitting for the good abundance to be present in this world; it is only the receiver that is not fit for it. That is why he said, "a stream of oil flowed beneath them" — meaning that this world is fit, by the measure of judgment, to receive an abundance such as this.

We have already said that fat indicates utter completeness, the opposite of the lean, which is wholly deficient. When the body is complete the feathers fall away, just as hair grows when there is leanness, as it is written (Devarim 32:24), "*mezei ra'av*" (מזי רעב), wasted with hunger. The reverse of this is that here the hair is removed, when the thing stands in completeness. That is why he said that their feathers fell out from their fatness — which indicates a completeness that is total, with no deficiency.

And he said, "one lifted up a thigh for me, and one lifted up a wing for me." Know that of the good hoped for by the righteous it is written (Devarim 22:7), "that it may be good for you and you may lengthen days." The Sages explained (Chullin 142a): "that it may be good for you" — in the world that is wholly good, which is the World to Come, which is wholly good; and "that your days may be lengthened" (Devarim 5:16) — in the world that is wholly long and eternal. You will find, then, that the promise of the reward that is to come consists in two things. The first is the good — that they will have the good entirely. The second is that the good will not cease, but will be eternal. These two things include everything: the good that is at its utmost, and what is eternal.

This is what he said: "one lifted up a thigh for me, and one lifted up a wing for me." The *atma* is the thigh, and it is the pillar upon which the living creature rests; it is its endurance. This alludes to eternal endurance, as we have said. "And one lifted up a wing for me" — that they will have the spiritual level, removed from matter, which is the complete good, without pain. This is indicated by the wings specifically, for they are wings of *ruach*: it is by means of the wings that a

bird flies in the air, and therefore they are called "the wings of *ruach*" (רוח, both "wind" and "spirit") (Shmuel II 22:11). He thus alluded here to the spiritual abundance, which is eternal and without change, as he said, "one lifted up a wing for me, and one lifted up a thigh for me." This is what David, peace be upon him, alluded to (Tehillim 16:11): "pleasantness in Your right hand, eternally." Understand this, for it is a most wondrous matter.

He made of this two things — "one lifted up a wing for me, and one lifted up a thigh for me" — to say that they are two distinct things. He also began first with the thigh, which is the level that is not so exalted; for you will find many base physical things that endure as well. He therefore mentioned the thigh, and afterward the higher level, which is the wing. In the Torah it is the reverse, for it is written (Devarim 22:7), "that it may be good for you and you may lengthen days" — the Torah mentions what is primary, the higher level, first.

And when I came to R. Eliezer, he said, "Israel is destined to be called to account for them." For had they merited it in this world, and had their deeds accorded with judgment and justice, and had they not turned aside from the line of judgment, they would have been fit for the good. We have already said that the good would be found in the world completely, in actuality, as he said before this — that "a stream of oil flowed beneath them." It is only from the side of the receiver that there is an impediment. Israel will therefore be called to account for this, because they departed from judgment. Because the excellence of Israel in this world is not as great as it ought to be by judgment, they will be called to account for this.

The sum of the matter they alluded to here: according to the excellence of the world and its ordering, it is fitting that the good abundance be found in the world in completeness. But there is a deficiency in the existents, in that they do not have the level they ought to have, and for this they will be called to account — since this impediment is on the side of the receiver. From here on, understand; a man will understand of himself, for it is impossible to write more than this. All of it is alluded to in what Scripture says (Tehillim 16:11), "fullness of joys in Your presence, pleasantness in Your right hand eternally": corresponding to the pleasantness he said, "one lifted up a wing for me," and corresponding to the eternal he said, "one lifted up a thigh for me." Understand this.

These things are faithful witnesses, testifying and declaring words of truth and uprightness about the greatness of the Sages' wisdom and their apprehension. Let no one hold this apprehension to be a small thing, for it is the apprehension of exceedingly deep matters, and it testifies to the surpassing wisdom that the sages

of Israel possessed — and still more to the precious figure their words carry. Everything we have said until now they gathered up into a figure that is precious, brief, and exceedingly honorable, as a man will see if he takes to heart the pleasantness of that figure in each and every word of it. And their whole intent is to praise and glorify the Creator and Fashioner of all. We have now explained a number of statements for you, since one cannot expand upon all the statements that are hidden from men. If Hashem, may He be blessed, grants us the merit, the remaining hidden statements among the statements of the Talmud will be explained as well.

They said further that there are things found in the Talmud which — not that they are things with nothing substantial in them — a person ought not to say at all, and still less to set down in a book, because they are disgraceful matters. **In the chapter *HaSocher es HaPo'alim*** (Bava Metzia 84a): a certain noblewoman said to R. Yishmael the son of R. Yosi and to R. Elazar bar Shimon, "Your children are not yours" — that is, their bellies were so large that they could not have relations with their wives. They said to her, (Shoftim 8:21) "for as the man is, so is his strength." [Aramaic: And some say: love presses the flesh aside. R. Yochanan said, the organ of R. Yishmael is like a skin holding nine *kav* — a dry measure. Rav Papa said, the organ of R. Yochanan is like a skin holding five *kav*; and some say, three *kav*. That of Rav Papa himself was like the baskets of Harpanya.] Thus far. It seems strange that such things should be written in the Talmud. Now you will already find in Tosafos why these things were written, but you should know that Tosafos wrote for those who cannot grasp words of wisdom, whereas the truth is that these matters are the secrets of wisdom. Two things deserve attention here. The first: in these statements the one who speaks always had this same matter in himself. R. Yochanan testified about R. Yishmael the son of R. Yosi, and this matter was found in him as well; likewise Rav Papa testified about R. Yochanan, and this matter was in him too. That is not accidental. The second: the earlier generation always has the greater measure. R. Yishmael the son of R. Yosi was of the class of the Tannaim; R. Yochanan, the end of the Tannaim; Rav Papa, the end of the Amoraim. The measure keeps diminishing, and this too is not accidental.

Indeed, this too they said for the honor of Hashem, may He be blessed, and for His glorification. For many of the wise — those who investigate the existents with their intellect — say that the connection of a man with his wife is man's disgrace, his shame and his humiliation, to the point that they said, in absolute agreement, "the sense of touch is a disgrace to us." The Sages came to remove this view, for the mind cannot bear it: that the foundation of everything, which is the

endurance of the world — being fruitful and multiplying — should be built upon something disgraceful and shameful. More than this: it is no honor to Hashem that a thing which is the foundation of the world should rest upon something base and shameful, and when the foundation is unsound, everything built upon it falls. This view must therefore be rejected, for there is nothing base whatever in the connection of a man with his wife. And this is certainly the view of the Torah, as it is written (Bereishis 2:25), "And they were both naked ... and they were not ashamed." Plainly, then, the thing was no disgrace at all — for had it been a disgrace, why were they not ashamed? And if you say it was because they had no knowledge, the mind cannot bear that either: that Adam, who gave names to all the created things (Bereishis 2:20) — which shows the surpassing greatness of his wisdom — should not have known that this is base for a human being. About this the Rambam, of blessed memory, wrote (*Moreh Nevuchim* I:2) that it is as though one said: a certain man sinned, and because he sinned he was set as a star in the heavens. So it is here. How can we say that before he sinned he had no knowledge, and that after he sinned he acquired knowledge and wisdom? Rather, the matter is as we said: there is no baseness in this at all in itself, but only because a man directs himself toward his desire and his inclination, and from that side the thing is a disgrace. Therefore, before he sinned and inclined toward his desire and his inclination, there was no disgrace in it at all. Only when the inclination entered him, and he was clothed in material desire, did it become a disgrace — from the side of the desire. And in the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 14:5) on "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Tehillim 51:7): even the most pious of the pious — it is impossible that there should not be in him one side of iniquity. David said, "Did my father Yishai intend to bring me into being? He intended only his own need." So even with the most pious of the pious, this act is for his own desire, and therefore it is a disgrace; whereas before that, this act was like any of the other acts. And as for what Scripture says (Bereishis 3:11), "Who told you that you are naked?" — the meaning is: who told you that you should mind being naked, that there is shame and disgrace in it? So Rashi, of blessed memory, explained. Once he inclined toward desire, it then became fitting for them to cover the flesh of nakedness. This is what they said there on this matter, "for as the man is, so is his strength" (Shoftim 8:21) — meaning that this organ accords with a man's might. That indicates its importance, not its baseness, for might ought not stand in affinity with what is base and disgraceful: might, which is a completeness, does not befit a thing that is disgraceful in itself. The matter is rather as we said above — there is no disgrace in the thing itself; on the contrary, in itself it is no disgrace, since it is the foundation upon which everything is built. But one who clothes himself in

his desire and uses it for his desire, as is the case with every man, that is a disgrace and a shame — not from the side of the act itself.

And the statement before this, where they differ — one saying "love presses the flesh aside," the other saying "for as the man is, so is his strength" — this disagreement too is no small matter. For according to the one who says "love presses the flesh aside," the connection of a man with his wife is such that they become entirely one thing. And do not say that this connection is something corporeal, as with the other living creatures; it is not so. Man and woman have the power of connection from Hashem, as is hinted in the words *ish* and *ishah*: His name is joined in partnership with them, the name *Kah* — the *yud* in *ish*, the *hei* in *ishah* (Sotah 17a) — to say that Hashem joins this pairing and makes them one, and therefore set His name between them. This is the connection of man and woman, and therefore a higher power joins them. Concerning this he said that love, which is the essence of the connection and which comes from Hashem, presses aside the corporeal flesh; for surely the power of connection ought to overcome the corporeal flesh, which stands against it. The other holds "for as the man is, so is his strength": the organ of *tashmish* — marital relations — has the power of a man, since this organ itself is the difference between man and woman, and the name *ish* belongs to it more than to anything else, so that it has a more distinctive power. Understand the view of the one who says "love presses the flesh aside": he means that the power of love, which is the connection of male and female, is so great that it presses the flesh aside. And the second says that the power of a man, insofar as he is a man, is so great that it presses the flesh aside. Both intend that there is in this connection a power that is above nature and overcomes the nature opposed to it. It is thus made clear that there is no baseness or disgrace whatever in the essence of the creation. The opposite is true: what people take to be base and disgraceful is nothing of the sort, and on the contrary, what is found in it is a thing of praise — might and power. And if this organ truly is a shame, that is from the side of the man himself, who turns to the desire of intercourse and, in this act, is drawn not toward that for which man was created, the endurance of the world, but after his desire and his inclination. On that account it is indeed base, disgraceful and shameful, as has been explained; but this is not from the side of the essence of the creation.

Now he comes to explain how great its power and its abundant might are, and what dominion this organ has. For people regard this organ as utterly contemptible and low — and it was not for that that the Fashioner of all created it. Concerning this he said, "the organ of R. Yishmael the son of R. Yosi is like a skin holding nine *kav*." Know that this belongs to the secrets of the formation, as

they said in tractate Nedarim (32b) on "wisdom is a stronghold to the wise more than ten rulers that are in a city" (Koheles 7:19): what are the "ten rulers"? Two eyes, two ears, two hands, two feet, the head of the body — the male organ — and the mouth. On this reading the verse means that the intellect a man has is a stronghold, and stands at a higher excellence than the ten limbs that rule in the human body; for the body is everywhere called a "city," as is explained elsewhere. From this too you can understand that the way of the Sages is not what people suppose, since he counted this organ among the ten rulers, which are the important limbs. And more than this: all the limbs come in pairs, whereas the head of the body and the mouth — these two alone — are single. This is as we said: through this organ a human being is a man, and the man counts as form, as we said. So too the mouth, by which he is a living speaking being; this too counts as form. Yet they differ, for the mouth is for speech, and speech is of intellect, as we have said in a number of places, while the head of the body is flesh. The mouth, in which speech resides, certainly counts as form; and the head of the body counts as form because through this organ he counts as a man, and the man counts as form. In this it completes all the limbs, which are nine. But the mouth, which is the tenth, is not included in that count, for we have already said that the mouth itself counts as form, and it completes the whole from the side that the speech of intellect comes from it. He therefore counted the head of the body and the mouth together, since these two limbs are a completion for man from two aspects. Man's limbs serve him insofar as he has intellect, and from this aspect the mouth is his completion, since in the mouth is speech, which is of intellect. From the second aspect — insofar as the limbs serve man as a corporeal man — the head of the body is their completion, for this organ is man's completion.

Therefore he said, "the organ of R. Yishmael is like a skin holding nine *kav*." All these are very great matters, and it brings them all forth into actuality, until it is entirely in actuality. He said that the organ of R. Yishmael the son of R. Yosi was like a skin holding nine *kav* because the number nine befits it for the reason we have given: it is the completion of all nine. He said that the organ of R. Yochanan was like a skin holding five *kav*, and this is because R. Yochanan is an Amora, a level below this. He means that it is what completes the last five limbs, the two hands and the feet; there was no completion here of all nine, only of the last five. "And some say, like a skin holding three *kav*" — he means that one should assign it the completion of the last two only, and therefore he said "like a skin holding three *kav*." This whole matter that he mentioned here comes only to speak of the essential nature of this organ: that it has the importance of form, and brings man forth into actuality and to completeness. And since, with any two levels one above the other, it is through the lower that the upper is in actuality — the upper

one holding a level above it — R. Yochanan therefore testifies about R. Yishmael, bringing R. Yishmael's organ into the open, and Rav Papa brings R. Yochanan's organ into the open, each one in turn being the greater completion. It is always the one who has less completion who brings the one above him into revealed actuality, and therefore each testifies about the one above him. And he said that the organ of Rav Papa was like the baskets of Harpanya, meaning that everything turns toward it, because it is form, and everything is drawn after the form, which is the completion of all. This is what he meant in saying that it is like the baskets of Harpanya: everything turns and is drawn after it, as befits the form, which completes everything.

And in the Midrash Zohar (I:18a) on "And God said, let the waters be gathered" (Bereishis 1:9): [Aramaic: By way of a straight line, to bring it by a straight way. For from the secret of that first point everything issues forth in concealment, until it arrives and is gathered into the supernal palace; and from there they issue forth in a straight line to the remaining levels, until it reaches one place that gathers all together as one whole, and it is called "one place." And what is it? *Chai Olamim*, the Life of the Worlds. And up to the bond of the unity of the upper world, to be unified in a single level, and so on — until this, which is *Chai Olamim*: there they are gathered, and the upper world is bound in its unity, and for that reason it is called "one place," since all the levels and all the limbs are gathered there, and the whole becomes one, without any separation at all.] He said further there (Zohar HaKadosh I:33a): R. Yosi said, "to one place" (Bereishis 1:9) — this is the place of which it is written (cf. Yeshayahu 54:10), "and My covenant of peace from Him shall not be removed," for it takes and casts into the sea. Thus far. All of this is alluded to in what he said, "like the baskets of Harpanya" — which is so named because everyone turns toward it — as has been explained in this hidden midrash. You have here what to understand and to know.

And know that it is by this organ that man counts as being in actuality. For we have already said that through this organ he is called *ish*, and the *ish* has the level of form, and through this he counts as being in complete actuality. This is the secret of *milah*, circumcision: the *orlah*, the foreskin, must be removed, which is like a covering over this organ. The *orlah* is an impediment, so that man is not present in actuality, since whatever has a covering and a sealing is not present in revealed actuality. Through this organ he is an *ish*, and the *ish* counts as form, and through the form he is in complete actuality; therefore the covering and sealing, which is the *orlah*, must be removed, so that he will be a man in actuality, as befits the form, which is present in actuality. And *milah* was commanded to

Israel specifically, because Israel has the excellence and the level of form, as has been explained many times over, and it is therefore fitting and necessitated to remove the *orlah*. These matters are now exceedingly clear; there is no room to doubt any of them, so that these deep matters are seen as plainly as the sun at noon. For they came to remove the corrupt view of those who say that this organ is in itself something to be shunned, and that baseness and shame reside in it. If so, this would be a disgrace to man, who was [created] in baseness and shame, and it would indicate a diminution of man's completeness. Therefore the Sages came and uprooted these notions, as one will see who understands them. Matters are not as those men said. Rather, all the works of Hashem are true, and there is no disgrace or contempt in them — and least of all in man — but everything is in completeness. The Sages therefore did not refrain from writing this in the holy book, for this too is holy and sanctified; these are among the secrets of the Torah concerning man and his image, which the investigators, out of their own opinion and intellect, despised — and his image along with him.

And when you understand this, you will understand the excellence of the divine image in man. The philosophers saw and looked at nothing but nature, like the physicians, who know and understand nothing but nature, and therefore they did not grasp this creature, man; for the formation of man in particular is entirely a divine matter and not a natural one. And now, how are the holy stones poured out at the head of every street, flung down and trampled under men's feet, given over to be trodden upon, until a man holds them in such contempt as to tread upon them [?]. Yet they are precious stones, more than onyx and jasper, their form of sapphire. Their wisdom is not like the wisdom of the sages of the nations. For the sages of the nations, wise though they were, had a wisdom that was human intellect; but our Sages — their wisdom is inner wisdom, the secrets of wisdom, what they knew by the tradition received from their teacher, and their teacher from his teacher, back to the prophets and to Moshe Rabbeinu, peace be upon him. Therefore: my eye, my eye runs down with streams of tears; give yourselves no respite — how have precious words come to be reckoned as vanity, a thing no one desires! And were it not that men who have no business expounding the secrets of wisdom would abuse them, it would have been fitting to add further explanation to these matters, so that all the peoples of the earth might know that there is no wisdom apart from theirs. May He, may He be blessed, grant us atonement. Amen.

The chapter *HaBa al Yevimto* (Yevamos 63a): R. Eliezer said, what is meant by what is written (Bereishis 2:23), "This time, bone of my bones"? It teaches that Adam came upon every domestic animal, wild beast and bird, and his mind was

not settled until he came to Chavah. Thus far. The meaning is not, God forbid, that he lay with them, for HaKadosh Baruch Hu had already commanded him concerning the forbidden unions in the verse (Bereishis 2:16) "and He commanded," as the Sages expounded (Sanhedrin 56b). Its meaning is rather this: man is the form of all the kinds, and he gives them completeness, and every form is connected to that of which it is the form. This is what he meant in saying that he came upon every domestic animal, wild beast and bird — for it is known that the form is likened to the male, as we said before this, and the receiver of the form is likened to the female, and the connection of the form with that of which it is the form is called a coming of male with female. And he said that although man is the form of all created things, and is called their *ish*, in this he has no rest and no stillness, since man is a complete form to his wife alone, and to her he is a distinctive form. When his mate, to whom he is form in particular, was not yet present, that connection in which he came upon all the living creatures was called [a coming], since a coming is the connection that fully befits him. But when it was granted him to be form to his mate, to whom he is a distinctive form in particular, he then said (Bereishis 2:23), "This time, bone of my bones," and the first coming was then removed. He is form to all the existents as well, but a distant form, and there is no complete form there; and that was removed once he is a distinctive and near form, which is to his wife, to whom he counts as a distinctive form. Then his mind was settled. Had they known how to understand this in its depth, they would say that all the sages of the nations are reckoned as nothing and emptiness against the lightest of their words.

The chapter *Eilu Megalchin* (Moed Katan 18b), and in Midrash Tanchuma (Korach, *siman* 10): "And they were jealous of Moshe in the camp" (Tehillim 106:16) — this teaches that each and every one was jealous of Moshe on account of his own wife, as it is written (Bamidbar 16:4), "And Moshe heard, etc." What report did he hear? That they suspected him with a married woman — an *eishes ish*. Thus far. This matter is to them like a thorn in the side, though these are secrets of wisdom and of hidden things. From the standpoint of the matter itself it would be fitting not to explain this, and not to disclose more than the Sages themselves disclosed of it; nevertheless, in order to show for all to see their wisdom in Torah and in every branch of wisdom, this statement must be explained.

For as to what the Sages, of blessed memory, said — "it teaches that they suspected him with an *eishes ish*" — they alone knew the secrets of the Torah and of wisdom. They knew the level of Moshe: that he was the form of all Israel, to the point that they said of him (Mechilta, Shemos 18:1), "Moshe is equal to Israel," and

this because he was a form to Israel. There is no doubt that a form, insofar as it is form to the whole, is equal to that of which it is the form; and this is clear. When a man contemplates this, many gates in the Torah that are locked fast will be opened to him through it. You find this in Moshe, who married the daughter of Yisro (Shemos 2:21), and she was not of the children of Israel, while his brother Aharon married Elisheva the daughter of Aminadav (Shemos 6:23), from a family of *nesi'im*, the princes of the tribes. And the Sages already said (Bava Basra 109b) that this caused a deficiency in Moshe's offspring, as is explained in their words. It is not fitting that this should be by accident — God forbid to say such a thing, that the affair of Moshe, the master of all the prophets, was accidental. Rather it is fitting that Moshe's match came from Hashem, may He be blessed, for Moshe's match is surely no less than any other match, which comes from Hashem, as it says (Bereishis 24:50), "The matter has come forth from Hashem." And forty days before the formation of the child a *bas kol* goes forth: the daughter of so-and-so is for so-and-so (Sotah 2a). How then could it be that Moshe should be matched into another nation? But when you understand, there is a necessitating cause for this. It is this: Moshe was equal to Israel, as they expounded (Shemos 18:1), "And Yisro heard all that *Elokim* had done for Moshe and for Israel" — Moshe is equal to all Israel (Mechilta, *ibid.*). They further said that a preacher once expounded before the congregation: there was a woman in Mitzrayim who gave birth to six hundred thousand in one womb. [Aramaic: The congregation laughed at him.] He said to them: this is Moshe, who was equal to the six hundred thousand of Israel. Now then, since it is written of every woman who is a match to a man (Bereishis 2:18), "I will make him a helper corresponding to him" — and *kenegdo* (כנגדו), "corresponding to him," implies one like him and equal to him — how could one woman drawn from the universal, who is only a single particular, be a helper to one who is equal to the entire universal? There is no relation and no equality between them at all; for how could a single particular be like and equal to one who is as the universal itself? But when he married the daughter of Yisro — even though the daughter of Yisro is not of greater excellence than a daughter of Israel — it is nevertheless apt to say, "I will make him a helper corresponding to him." For Moshe is from Israel and Yisro is from the nations, and Israel together with the nations are the universal of mankind; in this it is apt to say, "I will make him a helper corresponding to him." Had he married from among the daughters of Israel, however, "I will make him a helper corresponding to him" would not apply at all, since Moshe is equal to the universal. This deserves to be understood.

And this is the meaning of the statement that each one was jealous of Moshe on account of his wife, and likewise of what they said, that they suspected him with an *eishes ish*. For they were saying that Moshe is a form to all Israel — and it has

already been explained that a form is not a form to a form; rather a form has its match with matter. Since the husband is reckoned as a form and the wife as matter, it follows that Moshe has connection and affinity with their wives, who are as matter, for that is the connection of form to matter; and this is what their suspecting him with an *eishes ish* amounts to. It is impossible that one who is form to the universal of the nation should not stand at the level of form to their wives as well — hence they suspected him with an *eishes ish*. Yet this is certainly not fitting according to existence; it is a change in the order of existence. For it is fitting that each man be a form to his own wife, without any other form having an affinity with his wife. And if you should say: if so, what was their sin in this, since in truth Moshe is a form to the universal of Israel? — this is not so. Moshe is certainly a form to Israel, but he is a separate form, holding no partnership with that of which he is the form; only a separate form. So there is no *eishes ish* here, for he has no affinity or connection whatever with their wives; rather he is like the separate form. It was because they supposed that Moshe's excellence was such that he was in partnership with them that they suspected him with an *eishes ish*. This is the great sin they sinned: they thought that Moshe's excellence was not separate altogether. On that view there certainly would be an *eishes ish* here, for Moshe would then have the status of the material form, which has affinity and connection with matter, and by that he would be coming upon an *eishes ish* — inasmuch as he would be form to one who already has another form, since each man of Israel is a form to his wife, and their wives accordingly have a distinctive form of their own. This is what is called each one suspecting him with regard to his wife.

And likewise they said in the first chapter of Bava Kamma (16b) concerning Yirmiyahu the prophet, that they suspected him with a harlot, or that they suspected him with an *eishes ish*. For Yirmiyahu had a level that was not particular, just as Moshe had a distinctive level that was not particular. This is what they said in the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni I:919): "A prophet from your midst, from your brothers, like me, shall He raise up for you, etc." (Devarim 18:15) — this is Yirmiyahu, who was like Moshe: just as Moshe was a prophet to Yehudah and to Israel, so too Yirmiyahu was a prophet to Yehudah and to Israel. Of the other prophets, therefore, they never said such a thing at all, since they were not reckoned a form to the universal of Israel in the way that Moshe Rabbeinu, peace be upon him, and Yirmiyahu were prophets to all Israel and in this are reckoned as a form to the whole. As for David the king and the other kings — although they were kings over Israel, a king certainly has no partnership or connection with the universal. Such is the nature of every king: he is separate from the people, and "they suspected him with an *eishes ish*" does not apply to

him, since he is separate from the people. Only the prophet, who does not have this separateness, for he is in partnership with them and is their completeness, to the point that he is reckoned their form. Therefore with Moshe Rabbeinu, peace be upon him, who is a prophet to the universal of Israel, this counts as *eishes ish*; for the connection he has with Israel is the match of an *eishes ish*, or the match of harlotry. And there is a difference between the level of Moshe and the level of Yirmiyahu. Moshe was the form of Israel completely, and therefore each one suspected Moshe with regard to his own wife. But Yirmiyahu's excellence is not so great: he was only a form in some measure, and there is no complete form here. That is what is called coming upon a harlot — he was joined to Israel in some respect, like a man who consorts with a harlot, where there is no complete connection but only a connection in some respect. Therefore this is not called *eishes ish* but harlotry.

Know further — and this is the primary interpretation, and you will know how far their words reach — that Hashem is the final form of Israel. That is why Hashem is called an *ish*, a husband, to Israel throughout the twenty-four books: Hashem is called Israel's *ish*. For this no proof need be brought at all, since Hashem is the final form of Israel, and we have explained this in several places. And just as the name *Kel* (לֵא), with which Hashem sealed the name Israel — *Yisrael* (יִשְׂרָאֵל) — indicates, so it shows that He, may He be blessed, is their final form. Accordingly, in what they said (Bamidbar 16:3), "for the entire congregation, all of them, are holy" — that they had heard from the mouth of the Almighty *Anochi* ("I am Hashem your God") and *Lo yihyeh lecha* ("You shall have no other gods before Me") (Shemos 20:2–3) — the meaning is that Hashem is their God, and He, may He be blessed and exalted, is a distinctive form to them. If so, "why then do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?" (ibid.) — that Moshe should be as a form to Israel. And this is fully a case of *eishes ish*. They said the same concerning Yirmiyahu. Only that according to [Aramaic: one of the opinions], his view is that Israel in that generation did not have the excellence they had in the days of Moshe, when Israel belonged to Hashem completely. Therefore Moshe's wishing to rule over them all, while the completeness of their form comes from Hashem — that is what counts as *eishes ish*. But in the days of Yirmiyahu, when Hashem had abandoned them and was removing His Shechinah from them, Yirmiyahu's being a prophet who rebuked them and ruled over all Israel counts only as coming upon a harlot, and is not *eishes ish*. We have already treated this at length as well in the work *Gevuros Hashem*; see there.

And this is what Moshe said (Bamidbar 16:15): "I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I done harm to any one of them." Its meaning is that had

Moshe been in partnership with them, he would certainly have taken someone's donkey, using what was theirs. But because Moshe is separate from them, he did not use what was theirs. The principle of the matter is this: a thing that is not separate from another uses that other, whereas a thing that is separate has no use of another. He also alluded, in saying "I have not taken one donkey (*chamor*, חמור) from them," that Moshe, who is the form of Israel, does not have the status of the material form, which uses matter (*chomer*, חומר) because it has a cleaving to matter; rather Moshe has the status of the separate form, which has no cleaving to matter and no connection with it at all. That is why he said, "I have not taken one donkey from them." And he said, "nor have I done harm to any one of them," meaning that he has no partnership with them at all. For those who are in partnership together do harm to one another, because the one enters into the bounds of the other, being partners together. This is well known: things that are in partnership together do harm to one another, since each enters the bounds of its fellow. Therefore Moshe said, "nor have I done harm to any one of them" — and this because they were not in partnership together, Moshe being separate from them. It was not as they were thinking when they suspected him with an *eishes ish*, that he had connection and affinity with them, which would be *eishes ish*. Now what can be said on this has been made clear to you, and these are words precious and more honored than much fine gold, than the finest gold of Ofir. Therefore give praise and thanksgiving to the sages of the world, who by their wisdom disclosed to us the secrets of this Torah; may their memory be for the life of the World to Come.

The chapter *HaKones* (Bava Kamma 60b): The Rabbanan taught, "When dogs cry out, the Angel of Death has come to the city. When dogs play, Eliyahu has come to the city. And this applies only where there is no female among them." Thus far the Gemara. This is like a thorn in their eyes: what has the dog to do with the Angel of Death — and still less with Eliyahu, that it should sense such a thing? In truth there was never any cause for astonishment here. A lack of knowledge is no question at all, and it does not even require an answer, since those who are small in intellect do not know or apprehend what those who are great in intellect know; therefore it is no question if we fail to understand their words. And no man can deny their wisdom, as we see from their words — words very many indeed on the mitzvos of the Torah, which they explained to us, and without which we would know nothing. So too in their rulings, which are exceedingly true and just; no man can deny this. If we now fail to know and understand their words, the fact that these critics have not grasped their words is no question. A question is in order only where one raises a contradiction against their words — not where the trouble is the questioner's own deficiency of knowledge. [For if it were, there

would be a contradiction against the Torah of Moshe: only little by little do we come to know the reason of a matter, and for the rest we rely on faith in Moshe. And so it is with all created things.] Accordingly this ought never to have been brought as a question at all, and it needs no answer. Nevertheless we will not conceal the truth.

Know that when a man does apprehend their words, he will know with true knowledge that they knew the secrets of wisdom, and the division of the kinds, and their ordering and how they are bound together — exceedingly so, and all of it in the manner of divine wisdom. Their words did not proceed in the way of nature, by heat and cold, dryness and moisture; everything followed the order of intellect, and this is what befits divine sages. They knew the matter of existing things, and they knew that man is king over all the lower created beings. The dog is the opposite of this: it is the most base and lowly of all animals, and it is far from man. This too has already been explained above, where we treated it at length. The matter would not be right were we to say that all animals that do not speak are included under one single matter — "and the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Yeshayahu 65:25). And even if it is true that they are all one matter as against man, still there is in some of them something [of completeness] — not a completeness that has an ultimate end, for it does not reach so far, but there are among them those in which some aspect of completeness is present. The dog is the most base and lowly. Our Sages, of blessed memory, called the dog the poor one among the animals, as it appears in the chapter *Mi Shehecheshich* (Shabbos 155b), where they said, "Rav Papa said, [Aramaic: There is none richer than a pig, and none poorer than a dog]." Thus far the Gemara. The verses attest to its lowliness: when they mention a base creature, it says (Shmuel II 3:8), "Am I a dog's head?" and (Iyov 30:1), "whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock." And the thing is well known among people, so that everyone tells of it.

And now you must know this. Granted that man is the highest in excellence of all the lower beings, and that he is nearer to the spiritual level than any other created being — so near that He, may He be blessed, speaks with him — nevertheless, where the spiritual beings have not been sent to speak with man, one cannot say that he receives perception from spiritual beings more than the other created beings do. On the contrary: the animals come first. To this the Sages testified in their faithfulness, for the donkey perceived the angel (Bamidbar 22:23) and Bilaam did not, and they said about this (Rashi there), "From here we learn that permission was granted to a beast to see more than a man." This was because the angel was not sent in the first place to speak with Bilaam, but only to

be an adversary to him on the way (ibid., verse 22). Now in keeping with the level of man's form, he has a form of consequence, unique to him, which is not found among the angels — namely, that he is in the image of Elokim (Bereishis 1:27); and from this side he is distinct, separate from the angels. Because of the distinction between man and the spiritual beings, he does not receive perception from them as the animals do; for owing to the lowliness of their form, no distinction applies to them at all, and so they do receive perception. Therefore it says (Bamidbar 22:31), "And Hashem uncovered Bilaam's eyes" — as though there were a closure between him and the spiritual beings, so that the spiritual beings had to be revealed to him. And the more complete the form is, the more it has a distinctness of its own, and the greater the distinction between him and the spiritual beings. For there is no doubt that the donkey's seeing the angel was not prophecy, and no spirit of prophecy rested upon her. It was rather by reason of the disclosure of the angel's power within the physical world that the donkey received this. Even though it is an animal, in the end the imaginative soul received that image when the power of the spiritual beings was disclosed among the lower beings. And even where the receiver does not see, he still perceives a change and receives a change. As Scripture says (see Daniel 10:7), "And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, and the men who were with me did not see it; but a great terror fell upon them, and they fled into hiding." So we see that the receiver receives and perceives change.

And this is what he said: "When dogs cry out, the Angel of Death has come to the city." For you find crying and howling in this animal more than you find it in any other animal, as is apparent to the senses. There is no doubt that this does not follow from its matter; it is rather a *segulah* — a property belonging to a thing by its own nature — that follows from the form. Because of the lowliness and the deficiency that cleave to this form, it has a *segulah* for just this, that it cries out and howls, exactly as anyone in whom deficiency and privation are found cries out and howls. That is why they said, "When dogs cry out, the Angel of Death has come to the city." For the Angel of Death is the one whose portion is destruction and change in the world. And it is no wonder that a power should be found whose portion is destruction and deficiency: just as the star *Ma'adim* (Mars) is found, whose portion is ruin and destruction, so a spiritual power is found that is appointed over privation and destruction. Therefore, just as the crying is found in this animal — and it is because deficiency and privation cleave more closely to this animal — so too, when the power over privation is disclosed in the world (for there are times, an hour and a season, in which this power rules more in the world, as is known to all, since the times are set apart for particular powers), therefore he said that when the Angel of Death comes to the city — that is, when

the hour is disposed to the dominion of this power — dogs cry out and howl, as this power rules in the world. So this animal has perception of the matter in two respects. First, because it is base and lowly in form, it perceives more, as was explained above. Second, because it is disposed to howling and crying out; and from this power that rules in the world, howling arises, so that it is disposed to the perception of this matter in particular.

And just as this animal perceives when the power from which destruction comes holds sway, so this animal perceives the power from which peace and endurance come. For whoever perceives the one of two opposites perceives the second as well, since the perception of opposites is one: whoever perceives heat perceives cold. Therefore the play of this animal is proof that at that time and in that hour the power of peace and the power of life hold sway. For Eliyahu, of blessed memory, is the opposite of the Angel of Death: the Angel of Death is the one from whom deficiency and destruction come, while from Eliyahu, of blessed memory, peace and life are found. When the time is one in which this power rules in the world — the power of life — play is therefore found in creatures set apart for howling and crying out. All these things are *segulah* alone, what each and every kind is endowed with. Even so, these matters remain secrets of wisdom and understanding, exceedingly deep. For play too, to one who understands these matters concerning dogs, is likewise a *segulah* of theirs, as is plain to the eye: play is found in this kind alone and in no other kind of animal. Therefore the sages of truth testified to this in the chapter *Metzias HaIshah* in Kesubos, where it says, "the difference between them is a case where she plays with dogs," as it appears there. So we see that play is greater in dogs than in the rest of the animals, and this is evident and well known. But there is no explaining further, for these are words of wisdom in the order of existence. The principle of the matter is this: when a given power rules in the world, there are things among the lower beings that rise up answering to it, and when it rests, they rest. This is the wisdom of existence — a matter of wisdom exalted higher and higher.

In the chapter *Eilu Megalchin* (Moed Katan 18a): [Aramaic: "Avital said in the name of Rav: the Pharaoh who lived in the days of Moshe was an *amah* (a cubit) tall, his beard an *amah*, and his *parmashtako* (his male member) an *amah* and a *zeres* (a span) — to fulfill what is said, 'and He sets over it the lowliest of men' (Daniel 4:14)."] Thus far the passage. In their view this is a joke and a mockery: that any man should be of such a description. But for one who knows the words of the Sages, this is no difficulty at all, since everything they said here they said only of his own essential, particular form. For in every man there are two things. The first is the natural form, which encompasses the whole species — as when

you say that every man has hands and feet and the like, and you will find no man in whom this is lacking, from the side of the natural form of the species. But every man also has a particular form, in that he is this particular man; for no one man is like another. This is why they said, "Pharaoh who lived in the days of Moshe was an *amah*," and so on. From the side of the particular form in which he is distinct, it is fitting that he should have this form — even though there is something that annuls it from the side of the universal form of the species, which annuls the particular. Sometimes the reverse occurs: they said that a certain man was so-and-so large, and assigned him a great measure. This too comes from the side of his particular form — even though there is something that annuls it from the side of the universal form, since every man is created within nature, and nature necessitates that a man's measure cannot be so small and cannot be so large. And should you ask: if so, what is the meaning of their saying "he was an *amah*, and his *parmashtako* an *amah* and a *zeres*," seeing that it is impossible for him to have had this from the side of the universal form? There is no difficulty. They came to set out his particular form. Since from the side of the particular form, in what is distinct to him, he was so small — then even though this extreme is not actually found, nonetheless, to whatever extent deficiency was possible, he was deficient; for his particular form decreed smallness so far as smallness was possible. So too in the opposite case: where greatness of measure belongs to a man from the side of his particular form, then even though it is impossible for him to be so large from the side of his universal form, he had in him whatever addition was possible from the side of his particular form.

What befell these questioners is what befell one of those who gaze at the stars of heaven. By that wisdom he found that a certain Jew had a *mazal* indicating an exceedingly great kingship, and he stood waiting for that hour to arrive. When he saw that it had not come true, he pronounced that the wisdom of those who gaze at the stars is vanity and falsehood: "for I found that this man had a star indicating kingship, and it did not come about." Another of those who gaze at the stars answered him: "You are mistaken on two counts. First, the kingship of Israel does not depend on *mazal*, but only on the will of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, when He wills it. Second, perhaps what you saw was the *mazal* this particular man has in himself; but when you consider the *mazal* from the side of the universal, you will find that from the side of the universal there is no kingship for Israel, for the universal prevails over the particular. Therefore he will have no kingship, but will only be as important a man as is possible for Jews." It is the same here. Because they said that Pharaoh was so small, people say it is an error. But in itself there is no error here, for this belongs to the particular in him; it is only that there is something that annuls it from the side of the universal, which is

universal nature. Whatever smallness was possible from the side of the particular was indeed found in him.

As for their saying "he was an *amah*," and so on — had he been an *amah* while his beard was not so large, this would not be "the lowliest of men." On the contrary, he would have resembled a mighty man, and this would not be called "the lowliest of men." But now that his beard was an *amah*, and likewise his *parmashtako* an *amah* and a *zeres*, it emerges that his body was excessively small; and this is what is called "the lowliest of men" — lower than he ought to have been. As for what he said, "and his *parmashtako* an *amah* and a *zeres*," which is larger than the body: this means that his disgrace exceeded his own essential form. All of this reflects how his form departed from the order of the world, to the point that disgrace followed upon his form — something that ought not to be.

This comes to make known that Israel, who were redeemed and acquired the highest excellence over all, were fit for that highest excellence only out of the greatest lowliness. This belongs to the attribute of Hashem, may He be blessed, who raises and exalts man out of the greatest lowliness. For Israel were enslaved in the utmost subjugation, and he ruled over them in their bodies and in their property, while he was a man who stood at the utmost lowliness — and he ruled over Israel. Therefore Scripture says, "and He sets over it the lowliest of men" (Daniel 4:14); and this was the cause of the redemption, and of Israel's being exalted over all.

And for this reason as well. Had Pharaoh been a man belonging to the order of the world and to its governance, he would not have opposed Hashem by refusing His word after all the signs and wonders that Hashem performed. For the order of the world would have tipped him toward not departing so far from the order of the world. Granted, one does find a wicked man who does not heed the words of Hashem — but not to this degree, that after Hashem performed the signs and wonders he still did not listen. Rather, he himself stood outside the order of the world; he was not included in the order of creation; he was "the lowliest of men," as it says (Daniel 4:14), and he is not included among created beings at all. This too was a cause of his refusing Hashem, for every lowly man wants to display his power and his excellence, and therefore he contended against Hashem by not sending Israel out. Had his condition belonged to the order of the world, he would not have done this. For a man who possesses a nature and stands within the order of the world — how should he contend against his Maker? But it was apparent in his very being that he was not a natural man in accord with the order of the world; therefore he departed from the order of the world to contend

against HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and refused to listen to what was said to him by the word of Hashem. This is why it also says there (Moed Katan 18a), "the Pharaoh who lived in the days of Moshe was an *amgushi*." An *amgushi* is a sorcerer, and sorcerers contradict the heavenly retinue (Sanhedrin 67b), for they oppose the decree of Hashem. This was so of Pharaoh, and on this account he was unwilling to heed the decree of HaMakom. This is not the place to elaborate, for the intent here is only to explain the point of astonishment in their words.

In the chapter *Eilu Tereifos* (Chullin 63b): Why is its name called *ra'ah* (ראה, "to see" — Devarim 14:13)? Because it sees exceedingly well. It was taught: it stands in Babylon and sees a carcass in the Land of Israel. Thus far the passage. This seemed to them impossible according to nature. But according to the intellect there is no difficulty at all. Just as the sense of sight has the power to command a star at the far end of the world, so too, when a creature is exceedingly sharp of sight, why should its sight not command a great distance? And since there is variation among existing beings with respect to sense — one sees better, another not so well — why should there not be one species whose sense is at the utmost sharpness? So there is nothing here to astonish. All the more so, since this is proved by its being called by the name *ra'ah*. How else could the bird be called by the name *ra'ah*? For every name given to a species certainly and beyond doubt indicates its essential nature, since it is written (see Bereishis 2:19), "and He brought them to the man to see what he would call it." If names were whatever the namer pleased, what wisdom would there be in this, that Scripture says of the man that he gave names to all? Anyone can give names. You will find this in the words of the Sages: every name indicates the essential nature of the thing. If so, how can it be called *ra'ah* — do not all living creatures see? This is the force of what he said, "Why is its name called *ra'ah*" — that it sees more than the rest of the living creatures, and so on.

But if you do not wish to say this, we have already explained to you, in these matters and their like, that even where such a thing is found in the words of the Sages, what is meant by it concerns its essential nature alone. For every living creature has an essential nature of its own, in that it is this particular creature. And this creature, which is called *ra'ah*, has a sense of sight at the utmost sharpness — such that, by the power of that sense of sight, it stands in Babylon and sees a carcass in the Land of Israel. Even though there is an impediment to this from the side of matter, in the end the essential nature of its sense of sight, when abstracted from the material, is such; for the statement is made about the sense of sight from the side of its own essential nature. For a man is said to be "a living being that speaks" even if he is mute and cannot speak. This is because,

from the side of the abstracted essential nature, he is "a living being that speaks." Even though he has an impediment from the side of matter that annuls speech, he is nonetheless said to be "a living being that speaks" in his own essential nature, abstracted from matter; and it is from that aspect that this is said of him. Even though he has an impediment from the side of matter, so that he does not speak, he is still said to be "a living being that speaks." So too here: even though it has an impediment from the side of matter, so that it does not actually see so far, this is said of its essential nature in itself, which is abstracted from matter. Because of the great sharpness it has from the side of its essential nature, it is said of it that it stands in Babylon and sees a carcass in the Land of Israel — for they spoke only of the matter of its essential nature. Every living creature has two aspects. The first is from the side of the power itself, abstracted from matter; the second is when that power is in matter. From the side of the first aspect, when it is abstracted from matter, it is said of the creature that it stands in Babylon and sees a carcass in the Land of Israel. This matter has already been explained in a great many places besides. These are true and lucid words, which no one who has wisdom will refuse to accept.

The chapter *Bameh Behemah* (Shabbos 56a). The Gemara says: "Rav Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of R. Yonasan: anyone who says that David sinned is doing nothing but erring, as it says (see Shmuel I 18:14), 'David was successful in all his ways, and Hashem was with him.' Is it possible that sin came to his hand while the Shechinah was with him? Rather, how am I to uphold the verse (Shmuel II 12:9), 'Why did you despise the word of Hashem, to do what is evil'? — that he sought to do it, but did not do it. [Aramaic: Rav said: Rabbi, who comes from the house of David, turns the matter about and expounds it in David's favor.] 'Why did you despise the word of Hashem, to do what is evil' — this evil is different from all the evils in the Torah. For of all the evils in the Torah it is written of them 'and he did,' whereas here it is written 'to do' — that he sought to do it but did not do it. 'Uriah the Hittite you struck down with the sword' (ibid.) — you should have judged him in the Sanhedrin, and you did not do so. 'And his wife you took for yourself as a wife' (ibid.) — you have a valid taking of her in marriage; for Rav Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of R. Yonasan: everyone who goes out to a war of the house of David writes a *get kerisus* (a bill of divorce) for his wife. 'And him you killed by the sword of the children of Ammon' (ibid.) — just as you are not punished for the sword of the children of Ammon, so too you are not punished for Uriah the Hittite. [Aramaic: What is the reason? He was a rebel against his kingship, for he said to him (Shmuel II 11:11), 'and my lord Yoav and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open field.' Rav said: when you examine David, you find nothing in him except the matter of

Uriah, as it is written (Melachim I 15:5), 'except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.']) Thus far the passage. Here too they are astonished, because of habit and because of the plain sense of Scripture, from which it is open and well known that David sinned. And so these words do not enter their ears.

But these words are not contradicted by Scripture. For here it is written (Shmuel I 18:14), "David was successful in all his ways, and Hashem was with him." Since Hashem, may He be blessed, wished to be with David — as it is written, "and Hashem was with him" — it follows that whomever Hashem is with, Hashem certainly and beyond any doubt grants that he not become separated from Him and not come to sin. This is the meaning of "Is it possible that sin came to his hand while Hashem was with him?" That is: anyone whom He, may He be blessed, desires to be with — how should he come to sin? For He, may He be blessed, does not allow him to turn away from Him. Hashem desired David, since through him would come the building of the Beis HaMikdash, and the kingship of the house of David, and a number of other things that are the foundations of the world; and reason does not allow that he should sin with so great a sin as this. That is why it says that he sought to do the evil and He did not allow him — that He, may He be blessed, was the cause of his not sinning.

But as for Scripture's recounting the episode of Bas Sheva (Shmuel II 11:2-27), that David sinned, and that he also killed Uriah the Hittite: this is because David himself was not scrupulous about the sin. For even though everyone who goes out to a war of the house of David writes a *get kerisus* for his wife, that is on this condition — that if he does not return within those days, it should be a *get*. Why would a man divorce his wife without such a condition? And certainly David did not know that Uriah would not return. At the moment he came to her, then, he was not relying scrupulously on the divorce, since he did not know at that time that Uriah would not return. At the very least she was a doubtful *eishes ish*, so that David was not aiming at any ground of permissibility whatever. So too when he gave the order that Uriah be killed (Shmuel II 11:15): it was not because Uriah had rebelled against the kingship, for had that been so, he would have judged him in the Sanhedrin, as it says (Shabbos 56a). Rather, because Hashem foresaw the sin with Bas Sheva, and foresaw as well that he would kill Uriah in a forbidden manner, Hashem brought this about. He, may He be blessed, wished to be with David, and therefore Hashem caused Uriah to rebel against the kingship of the house of David, so that he became liable to death. And so, in truth, David did not sin in killing him. All of this was from the side of Hashem, who wished to be with him, and who therefore brought this about. From the side of David himself it was not so — and therefore Scripture ascribes the sin to David, as

though he had committed the sin. With this the difficulties raised by Tosafos are resolved.

A parable for this. Reuven comes upon Shimon to rob him, and his hand is already on the money to take it. Shimon thinks to himself: he is going to take it in any case, so what have I gained by this? And he resolves in his heart — let it be his as a gift. Now the truth is that Reuven is not a robber, since it was given to him as a gift. Yet Reuven is called a robber, since he came to take the money by robbery. And as for its not being robbery, the cause of that is the robbery itself: because he came to rob, Shimon resolved in his heart to give it to him as a gift. Had the cause been something else, one could say that in the end it was through some other cause that there is no robbery here. But the robbery itself is the cause of his not being a robber — because he came to take and to rob his money, Shimon gave it to him as a gift. And this is certainly reckoned to him as though he were a robber, for from his own side there was no impediment to keep him from sinning. So too here: when he came to Bas Sheva, his intent was only to sin. HaKadosh Baruch Hu foresaw that he would sin in any case, and brought it about that he should not sin — by Uriah's rebelling against his kingship and thereby becoming liable to be put to death — and all of this so that David should not sin. That is why Scripture recounts of him that he sinned. Scripture itself proves this: why else would it vary its wording and write (Shmuel II 12:9) "to do what is evil" rather than "and he did"? To say that he was only seeking to do it, and that HaKadosh Baruch Hu did not allow him, because the Shechinah was with him. These words are fitting according to the grammar of the verses, and according to intellect as well, and there is no doubt about them.

And if you should object that this is not counted as rebellion against the kingship — his saying (Shmuel II 11:11) "and my lord Yoav" — since why should he not call Yoav "lord," seeing that Yoav truly was his lord? It is certainly outright rebellion. He should have said "and your servant, my lord Yoav," for that is what you find everywhere. This is all the more so in the present case, where Yoav was waging a great war, so that the king had reason to think that they would give Yoav the greatness — along the lines of (Shmuel I 18:7-8) "Shaul has struck down his thousands and David his ten thousands," and Shaul was incensed. And there is no difference between rebelling much and rebelling a little: anything that is against the king is called rebellion. It is only that when David put Uriah to death, his primary intent was not this, but only that he might take Bas Sheva. That is why he did not put him to death through the *bais din*: the *bais din* would have perceived what was happening — that it is not David's way to be so scrupulous about his own honor as to put an important man to death for so small a matter as

this, that he said "and my lord Yoav." For that reason he did not put him to death through the *bais din*. And this is what it means (Shabbos 56a) in saying that he should have judged him in the *bais din*: for had he judged him in the *bais din*, one could say that he put him to death on account of the rebellion. As it is, however, it is proved that he put him to death only on account of Bas Sheva.

So too with what they said (ibid.), that he would write a *get kerisus* for his wife: this is a thing necessary in itself, for such is the law for one who goes out to war, since there is no testimony available in war. Is it not necessary under the law that every man write a *get kerisus* for his wife? For otherwise, should he die in war, there would be many thousands of *agunos* (women left bound and unable to remarry), and there is cause to fear a great mishap. Therefore this matter is necessary — that every man wrote a *get kerisus* — and there is no doubt about it. If so, you are forced to say that there was no *eishes ish* here, since Uriah died in the war (Shmuel II 11:17). Reason grants this, when one weighs the matter in honest scales. And since reason and intellect grant it, how could they not have written a *get* for their wives conditionally, on account of the great mishap? The language too indicates as much. So there are here two trustworthy witnesses testifying to their words, and nothing further is needed.

And in the chapter *Ben Sorer uMoreh* (Sanhedrin 70a), on the verse (Bereishis 9:24) "And Noach awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him," the Gemara says: [Aramaic: Rav and Shmuel — one said that he castrated him, and the other said that he sodomized him. According to the one who says he castrated him: since he ruined him with regard to a fourth son, he cursed him with regard to a fourth son. The one who says he sodomized him derives it from "and he saw" and "and he saw": here it is written (Bereishis 9:22) "And Cham the father of Kena'an saw," and there it is written (Bereishis 34:2) "And Shechem the son of Chamor saw her." Granted, according to the one who says he castrated him, that is why he cursed him with regard to a fourth son. But according to the one who says he sodomized him, what is different about a fourth son? Let him curse Cham himself! Both this and that occurred.] Thus far the passage.

This is a matter over which they complain, because reason does not accept that Noach — who was "a righteous man" (Bereishis 6:9) — should have had so disgraceful a thing done to him. After he was saved from the Flood (Bereishis 7:23), which was a great and mighty wonder, should this disgrace and degradation be done to him, that his son either castrated him or sodomized him? All of this befell them because these complainers went into the words of Torah

only in passing, and not with the investigation grounded in intellect. Our Sages, by contrast, possessed that investigation. For if nothing had happened to Noach beyond Cham's seeing his father's nakedness, would he have cursed and reviled his son on that account — when every man by his nature gives his life for his son? Would he curse his son over a chance thing that befell him, that he saw his father's nakedness? And there was no one in the world but Noach and his sons. The verse proves this as well, for it says (Bereishis 9:24) "what his youngest son had done to him" — and what "done to him" applies here? Therefore they explained the verse in their wisdom: that he did him a great shame and deficiency, according to the one who says he sodomized him.

And let it not be difficult for you — would Cham commit a deed of disgrace and shame such as this? This is no difficulty for one who grasps the matter of Cham. The deeds of his offspring testify to it. Kena'an and Mitzrayim were his offspring, and the faithful Torah testified specifically about these two, the offspring of Cham, concerning their abominable deeds in licentiousness, as it is written (Vayikra 18:3) "Like the practice of the land of Mitzrayim in which you dwelt you shall not do, and like the practice of the land of Kena'an to which I am bringing you..." So the verse testifies about these two concerning their deeds in licentiousness and sexual immorality. From this you may know how deeply Cham their father clove to licentiousness and sexual immorality, seeing that both of these came forth from him. And from this you may know how deeply Cham clove to licentiousness — for there is no baseness and shame like this, to sodomize one's own father. Intellect and reason require all this of anyone who understands and knows the particular power of Cham.

And according to the one who says he castrated him: he holds that Cham was the cause of privation and of the curse. Noach was prepared and suited for the generations of the world to come forth from him, and this son caused that no further generations of the world should come forth from him, and castrated his father. He did this to his father because he wanted to stand in his father's place. That is why he cursed him with regard to a fourth son as well: there is no withholding of blessing from the world like this one. From Noach the whole world came forth, and Cham was withholding the blessing from Noach, so that he should beget no further generations; and therefore he cursed him as well.

Now these two sages each spoke a great wisdom. According to the one who says he sodomized him, Cham clove to the greatest baseness, in that he sodomized his father. According to the other, Cham clove to what is most accursed, and therefore castrated his father: he withheld from his father — who was suited and

prepared for the generations of the world to come forth from him — and Cham was withholding the blessing from him. In this he clove to privation and to the curse, and there is no curse like this one; therefore he said that he castrated his father. He clove to licentiousness as well, so that he was ruined in his body and in his soul. Licentiousness belongs to the body; and he clove to privation as well, in castrating his father — and in this he was ruined in his body and in his soul.

And one may also say that the verse is according to its plain sense, and that they came only to explain what this thing — Cham's seeing his father's nakedness — brought about. For since the verse says (Bereishis 9:24) "and he knew what his youngest son had done to him," this language proves that it was a very great deed. Had it not been a great deed, why would it say "what he had done"? Seeing is not reckoned a deed. That is why it is written "and Noach knew": Noach in his wisdom knew this great deed that Cham the father of Kena'an did in seeing his father's nakedness — for by that seeing he sodomized him. Licentiousness is everywhere called "seeing": (Vayikra 20:17) "and he sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness" — so licentious coupling is called "seeing." And here, where it is written "and Cham saw," this seeing was entirely a thing of licentiousness. Not all seeings are equal: given the greatness of Cham's power in cleaving to licentiousness, his seeing was altogether an act of licentiousness, and this was reckoned as his having sodomized him. All of this is known from the very power of this man — that Cham clove to sexual immorality and licentiousness to the point that his mere seeing counted as licentiousness; and therefore he said that he sodomized him.

And according to the one who says he castrated him: he holds that this seeing castrated Noach and annulled Noach's power to beget. For this organ, of itself, is such that it ought not to be exposed, and the uncovering of nakedness is the annulment of its power; therefore he said that by this seeing he castrated him. So too they said in the chapter *Chelek* (Sanhedrin 92a): "Anyone who looks upon nakedness — his bow is emptied, as it says (Chavakuk 3:9) 'Your bow is laid utterly bare.'" And we have explained that they mean this: when a man looks upon his own nakedness, the strength and power of this organ are taken from him. It is fitting that this organ be covered; therefore the uncovering of nakedness annuls its power, and when a man looks upon nakedness his power is taken from him. This is why it said "his bow" — that is the organ — since the seed shoots like an arrow, as our Rabbis, of blessed memory, said (Chagigah 15a); and that power is emptied out and taken from him. Therefore he said that he castrated him by this, that he saw his nakedness. For we have already said that not all are alike in

this matter: given the greatness of Cham's power in licentiousness, this was reckoned to him as sodomy and as castration alike.

The principle of the matter is this: the sages of Israel, who grasped the matters of the Torah, opened for us the gate of heaven in matters such as these, so that we might grasp the words of Torah — for every single one of the words of Torah stands at the height of the world. But "the righteous walk in them, while transgressors stumble over them," and for these men the light became darkness. And you should know that we have set out only a little of this. For as to grasping the depth of this matter, what they hinted to us in this incident — it is impossible to explain what they hinted to us in this incident. We have only removed from their words the crooked speech of those blind of intellect, who complain against words of wisdom and understanding, and who make the sweet bitter and the light darkness. In the merit of this, may Hashem, may He be blessed, illumine our eyes with wisdom and reveal to us the hidden things of His Torah. Amen, and may it be His will.

In the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 8:1), on the verse "You have formed me behind and before" (Tehillim 139:5), Reish Lakish said: "behind" — to the work of the last day; "before" — to the works of the first day. This accords with Reish Lakish's own view, for Reish Lakish said of the verse (Bereishis 1:2) "and the spirit of Elokim hovered over the face of the waters" that this is the spirit of Mashiach, just as you say (Yeshayahu 11:2) "and the spirit of Hashem shall rest upon him." If a man is meritorious, they say to him: you preceded the angels. If he is not meritorious, they say to him: a gnat preceded you, a fly preceded you. Thus far. About this they raise a question: why, and on what account, did He create Mashiach during the six days of Creation? And how is it even possible that he was created then — for what deeds are his until the day he is revealed, speedily in our days?

But as to the question why he was created during the six days of Bereishis: know that the Torah has hinted to us that it is not that He, may He be blessed, merely acted upon this world; rather, His action upon the world was directed toward an intended purpose. For an agent who acts with no intended purpose does not deserve to be called an agent at all, since he acts to no purpose. And the purpose that Hashem, may He be blessed, intended in the creation of the world is what the verse says (Mishlei 16:4): "Hashem made everything for His own sake." So too the Sages said about this (Yoma 38a): everything that HaKadosh Baruch Hu created in His world, He created only for His glory, as it says (Yeshayahu 43:7) "everyone that is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory, I have

formed him, indeed I have made him." It emerges, then, that the purpose in the creation of His world is His glory. And because the purpose for which He, may He be blessed, created the world is His glory, one can only say that the time in which the will of Hashem is fulfilled is the era of Mashiach. For of that time it is said (Zecharyah 14:9) "and Hashem shall be King over all the earth; on that day Hashem shall be One and His name One" — not as things are now. Then all that Hashem created will be wholly for His glory, and He will reign over all. So too R. Yochanan said in the chapter *Chelek* (Sanhedrin 98b), [Aramaic: "The world was created only for Mashiach"] — and this is exactly what we have said. And since this purpose was intended at the very beginning of Creation, it is necessary to say that at the beginning of Creation He created the world in this manner: that the world stands prepared for this, that in the end Mashiach should come forth into actuality. For every agent, at the outset of his action, looks to how his action will reach its purpose. Therefore one can only say that he acts at the outset of his action in order that it should come to its purpose.

And this is what the verse says (Tehillim 139:5): "You have formed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me." The explanation of the matter is this: man was created both last and first with respect to *Ma'aseh Bereishis* — if he is meritorious, they say to him, you preceded the ministering angels; and if he is not meritorious, they say to him, a gnat preceded you. Thus far. That is to say: man was created last because everything compounded comes after that which is more simple. This is known to all — whatever is simple is the more prior. And there is nothing more compounded than man, for this man is a being of intellect, compounded of body and intellect, and that is the greatest compounding of all. The simple, meanwhile, is certainly of greater excellence, precisely in that it is simple. Therefore, if a man does not acquire the excellence of intellect — which is to say, the Torah — then the gnat, which has no intellect, is prior to him by virtue of its simplicity. And if he is meritorious they say that he precedes the angels, and this is because he is the purpose of all the creatures that HaKadosh Baruch Hu created in His world, as will be explained further at length. The purpose is prior to everything, since everything was created for the sake of the purpose; therefore man, who is the purpose, is prior to all. And this is why the spirit of Mashiach was created on the first day: man is the purpose of all the creatures in the world, and the purpose of the whole world is Mashiach, as has been explained to you above (in the passage beginning "But as to the question").

As for his saying that the spirit of Mashiach was created on the first day, its meaning is as we have said: the world was created in such a manner that it would arrive at this purpose, which is Mashiach. Therefore the spirit of Mashiach was

hinted at in the beginning of Creation, since what is primary in the world was created for the sake of Mashiach, who is what is primary in the world, as we have said. And the spirit of Mashiach is "the spirit of Elokim" (Bereishis 1:2). That is why it is written, after heaven and earth were created, "and the spirit of Elokim hovered over the face of the waters" — for this is the completion of heaven and earth, and it is the purpose of Creation.

There is a further point here of great depth. Man is the last compounded being, as has been explained, and the simple is prior to the compounded. Therefore man, who is the last compounded being, was created last of all, as has been explained. But the spirit of Mashiach is entirely separate: even if he has a body, his spirit is separate from the body. And since his spirit is separate, it is therefore simple; and therefore his spirit was created first, before everything. This is clear to those who have understanding in wisdom.

Nor should one ask: if so, why was the spirit of Mashiach created before the angels — is he more separate than the angels? For as to the angels having been created on the second day (Rashi, Bereishis 1:5), with heaven and earth created before the angels, this has already been explained in the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 1:3): had the angels been created on the first day, people would say that Michael was stretching out its southern side and Gavriel its northern, and that they are divinities to the world. Therefore the world was created first, on the first day, and only afterward were the angels created. The meaning is this: the world is one, and it is fitting that a world that is one be created on the first day, which is "day one" — as it is written (Bereishis 1:5) "and there was evening and there was morning, day one," where it does not say "the first day," as it says "a second day" (Bereishis 1:8). But the angels are not one, for there is Michael and there is Gavriel; therefore creation on a day that is one is not fitting for them. And he said that had they been created on the first day, people would say that Michael was stretching out its southern side and Gavriel its northern, and that the two of them combine in a single act, as though they were one — and therefore they were not created on the day that is one. But Mashiach, since through him the whole world will be one and the world will no longer be divided, it is fitting that he be created on day one, which is the day that is one. This is the plain reason that Mashiach was created on the first day, which is one. And because each thing is created at the time distinctly its own and fitting to it, therefore Mashiach — for whom no time is distinctly his own and fitting except the first day — was created on day one.

The Sixth Well — mighty waters, rising higher and higher and gathering strength, covering the hills and the heights of the mountains. It became a bursting stream, going forth on every side: a mighty vessel and merchant ships. None cross the breadth of its bounds, and strangers do not reach its depths.

The Sixth Complaint — they say that human wisdom was hidden from the Sages, that is, those branches of wisdom that proceed by the human intellect. And their charge is not merely that it was hidden from them, but that what they said in these matters was strange in the extreme. Were that so, it would indicate a deficiency of knowledge and a distancing from the truth. Such a thing is the very opposite of what the Sages themselves warned against. It is stated in the chapter *Chavis* (Shabbos 145b): "Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister'" (Mishlei 7:4) — if the matter is as clear to you as your sister, who is forbidden to you, say it; and if not, do not say it. So we see that they warned that a sage must not say things that are not clear — and all the more so that he must not say things that are strange and far removed, things that even to the eye appear strange.

The interpretation of "Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister'" is this. The word *achos* (אחוס, "sister") is from the language of *ichui* (אִיחּוּי, "joining"). Scripture is saying that wisdom must be entirely joined to a man — that is, clear to him with certainty; and then that matter stands in his intellect and in his knowledge in complete connection. But matters that are in doubt, and all the more so when they are far removed, have no connection with him. This is "Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister'": you have no connection greater than your sister, and therefore her prohibition is obvious, since the forbidden unions are those who are close to a man, and it is for that reason that they were forbidden. He is saying: if the matter is as close to you as your sister — for this forbidden union is the closest of all, a man's sister being with him wholly as one flesh. But father and son, or father and daughter: inasmuch as the one is the father and the other what is generated from him, there is a distinction between them, and they are not equal. Brother and sister, however, are equal, and that is why the words *ach* (אח, "brother") and *achos* are from the language of *ichui*. Therefore: if the matter is clear to you and close to you, like your sister who is forbidden, speak the wisdom; and if not, do not speak. So we see that they warned that one must not say things that are not clear — all the more so things that are strange and far removed from human understanding.

And the branches of wisdom concerning which they said that the Sages spoke strangely are natural science and mathematical science. It has already been explained to you what it was that brought them to this, to think such a thing of

the Sages. It is what they found in the Sages' own words: that they gave causes for natural things that come to be in the world, and it seemed to these critics that such causes are too far removed for the thing in question to be a natural cause. On this account they said of the Sages that they were remote from these sciences.

But the truth is not so at all. The Sages did not come to speak of the natural cause, for the natural cause is a small and lowly thing; that befits the natural philosophers, or physicians, not the Sages. They, of blessed memory, spoke rather of the cause that necessitates nature. And whoever denies this denies the faith and the Torah, as was explained above: the Torah said of the sign of the rainbow (Bereishis 9:16), "And I will see it, to remember the everlasting covenant," while the natural philosophers gave a natural cause for the rainbow, as is known from their words. The matter is rather this. The cause the Torah gave is the cause in this sense: everything has a natural cause that necessitates it, and above that natural cause there is a divine cause, which is the cause of the cause — and it is of this that the Sages spoke. Man's form and the number of his limbs have a natural cause; there is no doubt that this has a natural agent. Nevertheless that cause has a divine cause of its own, and it is of the cause of the cause that it says (Bereishis 1:27), "And Elokim created man in His image; in the image of Elokim He created him." Therefore those who suppose of them that they, of blessed memory, wished to do away with the natural cause, and who on that account would have none of the cause that they, of blessed memory, did give — this is baseless.

But even as to the cause of the cause that they, of blessed memory, gave, these critics did not fathom the Sages' words so as to understand them, for they were far removed from it. This is because they took those words according to the first understanding, without setting their heart to understand the truth of the matters — for the Sages' words are in what is hidden and concealed. And therefore they spoke insolently against them. So too with the causes the Sages gave in mathematical science: those statements are not a first cause, but the cause of the cause.

In the second chapter of Sukkah (29a): For four things is the sun eclipsed — for an *av bais din* (the head of the rabbinical court) who died and was not properly eulogized; for a betrothed maiden who cried out in the city and there was none to save her; for *mishkav zachar* (lying with a male); and for two brothers whose blood was shed as one. And for four things are the luminaries eclipsed — for those who write forgeries; for those who bear false witness; for those who raise small livestock in the Land of Israel; and for those who cut down good trees. Now these causes that the Sages gave for the eclipse of the luminaries, in the critics'

view contradict what the senses plainly show. For it is known that the eclipse of the luminaries depends on the course of the luminaries — on their conjunction and their opposition, on their receding and their approaching, in longitude and in latitude. If so, how can one say that the eclipse of the luminaries depends on things of this sort? A man knows the time of an eclipse in advance, since eclipses go by calculation. How, then, could the Sages make the eclipse depend on sinful deeds? Here too the critics are mistaken. It is not the way of the Sages, of blessed memory, to do away with the proximate cause — certainly the eclipse of the luminaries depends on the course of the luminaries. What they, of blessed memory, gave was the cause of the cause. Had there been no sin in the world, this would not happen at all. There is no doubt that the eclipse of the luminaries is a great baseness and a deficiency in the world; and had sin not been found in the world, the order of Creation would not have yielded an eclipse of the luminaries, which is a baseness and a deficiency, as everyone agrees. You find the same in *Ma'aseh Bereishis*: had man not sinned, man's place would have been in Gan Eden and his food the fruits of Gan Eden. Because he sinned, Hashem, may He be blessed, ordered man's condition otherwise, as the Torah relates (*Bereishis* 3:18), "Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you." So Hashem ordered the governance of man according to his level and his excellence. And because these sins pertain to the world, therefore from the beginning of the world's creation Hashem did not give them a light that would not be subject to eclipse. Without sin this arrangement would not have been; in the end, it is on account of these sins that the eclipse of the luminaries occurs.

Perhaps you will say: if so, man is under necessity to sin. This is no difficulty. There is no doubt that the world at large is not made up wholly of the righteous — not until the time when there is fulfilled (*Devarim* 30:6), "And Hashem will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed," and so on. Then the eclipse of the luminaries will be no deficiency at all, for then it is said (*Yeshayahu* 24:23), "And the moon shall be abashed and the sun ashamed," and so on; and it says (*Yeshayahu* 60:19), "The sun shall no longer be your light by day ... and Hashem shall be for you an everlasting light." But in this world, the world is not clean of sin.

The principle of the matter is that Hashem ordered the world at the level fitting for human beings, since all existing things serve man according to what man is. Therefore, on account of the sin found in the world, He gave them a light such as befits them. That is why they said there (*Sukkah* 29a): "Our Rabbis taught: When the sun is eclipsed, it is a bad *siman* (sign) for the whole world. A parable — to what may the matter be compared? To a king of flesh and blood who made a

banquet for all his servants and set a lantern before them. He grew angry with them and said to his servant: Take the lantern away from them, and seat them in darkness." Thus far the Gemara. The explanation is this. The king honors his servants and makes them a banquet in their honor; and when he grows angry with them because they rebelled against him, he takes the light away from before them, for the light is the honor of the banquet. So too HaKadosh Baruch Hu: when He is angry with the world on account of the baseness of their sin and their deficiency, He takes away their honor, since the light is the honor of the world. That light is the honor of the world is clear, as they instituted in the morning prayer: "A blessed Kel, great in knowledge, prepared and wrought the rays of the sun; the Good One fashioned honor for His Name." So too at the beginning of Creation, Hashem created the luminaries in accordance with what is fitting for this.

As for explaining why it is for these four things in particular and not for other sins — this is not the place for it at all. My intent here bore only on the question, where their words were found astonishing; and it has already been made clear to you that there is no difficulty here at all, and that these statements are no deficiency. But to explain why this comes about through these particular things is not part of what we are about. We did not come to give a reason, only to remove the question that arises against their words. And if the matters are remote from ordinary understanding — why on account of the sin of these things specifically — that very fact indicates how hidden their words and their wisdom are. Had they said it was on account of *avodah zarah* and the like, of the transgressions that are common and familiar, you might have said that they chose those sins that in their own view are the greatest. As it is, you can only say that their words were spoken out of wisdom and knowledge.

When you examine their words, you will know that they grasped the secrets of existence and knew the truth of existence. It has already been made clear to you above that nothing is more fit to be called by the name "existence" than light, while its opposite, darkness, is certainly privation. That is why the beginning of existence was light: light is more fit for existence than anything else. If there is no light, existing things stand in privation, which is darkness. Now privation cleaves to all existing things, and this does not depart from the order of existence, since it is so by nature. Therefore the darkness that is night, which is a natural privation, contains nothing of privation insofar as it is natural. But there is also a darkness that is an unnatural privation, such as the eclipse of the luminaries — for although the eclipse of the luminaries accords with the order of the world, it is nonetheless an annulment and a destruction of existence, that is, of light, as the

very name *likui* (לִקְוִי, "a being stricken") indicates. Such a thing cannot come about unless the world is of itself prepared for privation, departing from the order in the respect that there is sin in it. Their light too, therefore, was of this character, that it admits an unnatural privation. For the light stands in relation to the world: according to the world's level and excellence, the light shines upon it. And because man has deficiency in him, and on that account inclines of himself toward privation, privation pertains to the world's light as well.

This, then, is the meaning of "for an *av bais din* who died and was not properly eulogized." The *av bais din* is fit for honor at his death, for the dead man has departed from the body; and when he has departed from the body and only the soul remains, he is fit for honor. And specifically the *av bais din*, because he is appointed over judgment — and there is nothing that possesses absolute existence as judgment does, for judgment is something necessitated to be, and everything necessitated to be possesses absolute existence. That is why, when the world was created, throughout *Ma'aseh Bereishis* the name "Elokim" is used, which is judgment (Bereishis Rabbah 33:3); we have explained this in a number of places. On the basis of this secret they said (Shabbos 10a), "Anyone who sits in judgment for a single hour is as though he had become a partner with HaKadosh Baruch Hu in *Ma'aseh Bereishis*." Therefore, when the *av bais din*, who is the master of judgment, dies and is annulled from the world, and is not properly eulogized — for had he been properly eulogized, the death of the *av bais din* would not be reckoned an absolute annulment, since he certainly has existence in the World to Come. This is evident when he is properly eulogized and honor is done him: it indicates that he has departed from the body, and wherever a man has departed from the body and the soul, which is separate, remains, honor is due. Even the elder, when merely his body has weakened, is fit for honor, as it is written (Vayikra 19:32), "You shall rise before the hoary head," and so on; and all the more so when the body has departed entirely is he fit for honor. This indicates that there is no privation here, only the removal of the body, and that is why he is fit for honor. But when he is not properly eulogized and no honor is done him, this indicates absolute privation — and he himself is an *av bais din*, the master of judgment, to whom absolute existence pertains. Therefore the luminaries, which in particular are the things most fit for existence, are eclipsed as well. Do not say that the sin itself is what causes this. Its meaning is rather that the world contains a certain aspect, and it is by virtue of that aspect that they fail to eulogize properly an *av bais din* who has died — which is absolute privation; and by virtue of that same aspect the world too is prepared for the privation of the luminaries.

Next he said (Sukkah 29a), "and for a betrothed maiden." This privation is from the side of deeds. With every sin, it is unfitting that the deed exist at all, and therefore one who commits the sin inclines toward absolute privation; and in proportion to the magnitude of the sin — to how unfit it is to be done — the deed is reckoned as inclining toward privation. Everywhere, when the Sages wish to convey the extreme severity of a sin, they say that a man had relations with a betrothed maiden. The reason is that one who has relations with a betrothed maiden sins against sanctity: the maiden is *mekudeshes* (מְקֻדָּשֶׁת, "consecrated") to another, and he has relations with her nonetheless — and so he sins against sanctity. This is unlike one who has relations with a *be'ulas ba'al* (a woman who has entered full marriage), who is already his wife, where there is no designation of *kiddushin* (betrothal) present. Even though the original *kiddushin* have not lapsed from her, nevertheless the designation "betrothed" does not apply to her, only *be'ulas ba'al*. That is why the death penalty in the case of a betrothed woman is more severe than in the case of a *be'ulas ba'al*. Because of the magnitude of this sin, it is absolute privation. So too *mishkav zachar*: it is unfitting even by what is customary among living creatures, and therefore this act is absolute privation. So too two brothers whose blood was spilled like water — to shed the blood of two brothers as one is an utter privation of existence. It emerges that all these sins are a privation of existence, to the point that they incline entirely toward privation.

Therefore, in all these sins, the one who commits them receives death and privation in accordance with his deeds. And because of the low level of existing things, in which this is found — namely unnatural privation, for all these things are unnatural privation — it is fitting that the light, which is existence, should be eclipsed and should receive an unnatural privation, as has been explained. We have already said that everything stands in relation to man: according to man's level, He gave him servants. The sun and the moon serve the world, of which man is what is primary. Had man's level not been one of privation such as this, the world's light would not receive privation; but because man's level is this baseness and this deficiency, the light, which is existence, receives eclipse and privation. We have already explained that the Sages came to reveal only this — that there is an aspect in the world by virtue of which the world inclines toward privation. Were this aspect not in the world, this being prepared for privation, the world would not be fit for an eclipse of the luminaries. Therefore for these things the sun, which is the great luminary (Bereishis 1:16), is eclipsed, and the light, which is existence, receives privation. The principle of these matters is that all of them stand in relation to privation, and this belongs to the level of the lower beings; and therefore, at their level too, there is an eclipse of the luminaries.

So that you may understand a little of the words of holy men — though it is not fitting to expand on these matters, since we have already removed the complaint from them, still we will not conceal what can be explained in their words. It is this. Man is compounded and joined of four things. The first is the body. The second is the soul. The third, greater than all, is that he possesses the divine image: when he is joined of body and soul, which are his parts, then through the two of them together he has the image of Elokim, as it is written (Bereishis 1:27), "And Elokim created man in His image." We have expanded on this in a number of places, and the matter is simple. The fourth is that his wife too enters in as a counterpart to the man, for he is called "*adam*" only together with his wife, as it says (see Bereishis 5:2), "Male and female He created them ... and He called their name *adam*." When in one of these parts he inclines to the utmost toward privation, there is absolute privation here, for these four things are his existence. The *av bais din* who died is the taking of the soul, and he was not properly eulogized; thus from the side of the soul they incline toward privation, and this is the absolute privation. And specifically an *av bais din*, for the reason explained above. That is one part. "And for a betrothed maiden" — this privation is from the side of the body, for all illicit sexual conduct is from the side of the body, as we have explained in a number of places. Chazal alluded to this concerning the *sotah* (the wayward wife) (Sotah 14a): she performed the act of an animal, so her *korban* too is of barley (Bamidbar 5:15), which is animal fodder. It is known that all illicit sexual conduct is material, in that a man is drawn after his material desire, and this needs no proof. Therefore, in the case of a betrothed maiden who cried out in the city and there was none to save her, this sin and this privation are from the side of the material body: he sins with a maiden upon whom *kiddushin* rest, and he sins against them, being drawn after matter — and this is absolute privation from the side of matter. As for two brothers whose blood was shed as one, the sin is from the side of man's image, since man was created in the image of Elokim, as it says (Bereishis 9:6), "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of Elokim He made man." And one who sheds the blood of two brothers as one — you have nothing beyond this. "And for *mishkav zachar*" — Hashem gave man a female for his joining, whereas this man joins himself to a male; and from the side of man's completion you have no sin and no privation greater than this. These four things are therefore absolute privation, and so, in the respect that this sin is found in the world, an eclipse of the luminaries — which is likewise absolute privation — is fitting for the world. Understand these matters, for they are very clear.

Likewise what he said (Sukkah 29a), "for four things are the luminaries eclipsed," rests on the difference between an eclipse of the sun and an eclipse of

the other luminaries. The sun is the very essence of light, and when the sun is eclipsed there is here an utter privation of existence; but as for the other luminaries, their eclipse is not called an utter privation, only a privation in some respect. That is why they said (ibid.), "for four things are the luminaries eclipsed: for those who write forgeries" — these are falsified legal documents, and a forgery has no existence at all, since the man wrote what does not exist. Likewise (ibid.), "those who bear false witness" — one testifies about a thing that does not exist at all. Likewise (ibid.), "those who raise small livestock in the Land of Israel" — they ruin the Land of Israel, which is what is primary in existence. And likewise those who cut down good trees ruin the very thing that is existence. So all these things are a privation of existence in some respect, whereas the former ones are things that are absolute privation in the utmost degree, such that there is nothing beyond, as we have said. These are a privation of existence in some respect and are not privation to the same degree. Thus these statements are, by wisdom, most precisely measured: in their wisdom the Sages knew which sins stand in relation to the privation that pertains to the lower beings, and it was according to their level that the light was given. There is no need to expand on these matters here, for this is not their place.

What testifies to the interpretation of the matters they mentioned here is wisdom of the most wondrous kind — so much so that it is impossible to expound their words, given the magnitude of the apprehension contained in these four things. For why did they say in both cases "for four things is the sun eclipsed" and "for four things are the luminaries eclipsed," specifically the number four? Because there are four extremities in which there is privation, since each and every one of them is an extremity. In each of these four things the sinner inclines toward one extremity, in which the privation lies, and therefore the luminary receives privation. These matters are among the hidden things of wisdom, and this is not their place.

There was no need to write of this at all, for it is no difficulty, as has been explained above. The question was only about their saying that the eclipse of the luminaries comes on account of sins, the objection being that the eclipse of the luminaries goes according to calculation and not according to human deeds. And so we said that the luminaries serve man according to his level and his excellence. There is no doubt that were man at the level of a king, his servants too would be according to what he is; and when man's ways are in baseness, his servants too are in that condition — and this cannot be denied at all. As for their saying "for four things is the sun eclipsed," this means that according to man's level and excellence he has a sustainer, namely those that rule over the world.

Because there is in the world an aspect of privation, as explained above, the world is fit for a privation of light that is not according to nature — because among the lower beings there is a privation that is not according to nature and not according to the order of existence. What is at issue is not the severity of the sin, but that these sins incline toward privation; and therefore the privation of light is found in them as well.

In the chapter *Mi Shehayah Tamei* (Pesachim 94b): Our Rabbis taught — the sages of Israel say, the galgal (the celestial sphere) is fixed and the mazalos revolve; and the sages of the nations say, the galgal revolves and the mazalos are fixed. Rabbi said: there is a refutation of their words — we have never found *Agalah* (the Wagon, Ursa Major) in the south, nor *Akrav* (the Scorpion, Scorpio) in the north. Rav Acha bar Yaakov objected to this: [Aramaic: perhaps it is like the spindle of a millstone; or else like the hinge of a door.] Thus far the Gemara.

Now, the critics explain the Sages' words, "the galgal is fixed and the mazalos revolve," to mean that the mazal circles about in the rakia with no galgal at all. There is no doubt that the intellect cannot accept such a thing, and, as will be explained shortly (see below, s.v. **They further argued**), it is impossible in any way to say that the star revolves of itself. All the more so, since on that reading the Sages' words would contradict one another: those men would face a difficulty from what is stated in the chapter *HaSefinah* (Bava Basra 74a), in the passage "Come and I will show you where the earth and the rakia kiss," where it says that it is the galgal of the rakia that revolves. So the Sages themselves say that the galgal revolves and not the star.

I am astonished that they explained the words of the Sages in this way. When the sages of the nations said "the galgal revolves and the mazalos are fixed," one cannot explain this to mean that the star is entirely at rest; surely its meaning is that the motion is not from the star but only from the galgal, and that the star rests quietly within the galgal while the galgal carries the star around with it. Just so, when the sages of Israel said "the galgal is fixed," the galgal is not entirely fixed; only that the motion comes about through the star, and the galgal turns by means of the star. The difference between them is this: for the sages of the nations, the star in the galgal is like a nail in a ship, moving along with it; in the view of the sages of Israel it is the reverse — the galgal resembles a cart, and the cart goes by the motion of the horse that draws the cart after it. So they say that the star moves and the galgal is drawn after it.

Rabbi, however, answered this. If the matter were so, and what causes the motion is the galgal, then, seeing that the galgal is spherical, and that no sphere

has a starting point, since it is uniform on all its sides — one side of it being as another — what is this, that the galgal always moves from east to west and does not move from south to north? Such a thing we have not seen; rather, always *Agalah* [in the north] and *Akrav* [in the south]. And when we say that what causes the motion is the galgal, it is uniform on every side. Why, then, should there be motion from east to west rather than in any other direction? A thing that is uniform and has no starting point at all ought to move in every direction. This does not follow if we say that what causes the motion is the mazal and not the galgal. For just as every star is distinct in itself — this star acting in one way and that star in another, each one distinguished in something particular to it — so you must say that it is a star's own distinctness that this one remains in the south and that one in the north. That is why *Agalah* is not found in the south, nor *Akrav* in the north. But if what causes the motion is the galgal, which is uniform and has no distinctness at all, why was the motion not in every direction, and why should the motion be a distinct one? And if you say that this is impossible — that the motion should run from east to west and then from south to north, since its motion must be uniform — that is no answer at all, for we will ask: why was the galgal distinguished by this motion from east to west, and not distinguished by a motion from south to north? This difficulty is no small one; it is a great question against those who say that what causes the motion is the galgal, which is uniform and has no distinct starting point.

Rav Acha answered this: it does not follow with absolute necessity — of a galgal that is uniform on all its sides — that it should not be distinguished by one motion rather than another. For even if the sphere is simple and has no starting point in it, the sphere nevertheless has a diameter upon which the galgal moves. And so we can say that although the galgal itself is uniform on all its sides and is distinguished in no direction, still the diameter upon which the galgal moves — which passes through the middle of the galgal, and upon which the galgal's motion takes place — may be said to be distinguished, lying in this direction and not elsewhere. This is what he meant by "perhaps like the spindle of a millstone": the millstone turns upon the iron rod that passes through the millstone, and just so the galgal turns upon the diameter that passes through the galgal. And every circle of the galgal passes over it, like the spindle of a millstone, the millstones turning upon the iron that passes through the millstones.

And further, "like the hinge of a door." That is to say: even though the galgal itself is uniform on all its sides and is distinguished in no direction, perhaps it is because the galgal has two poles, at rest and abiding, at the two sides of the galgal, upon which the galgal moves. If so, we can say that these two poles are

distinguished, lying on this side and not on another. This is what he meant by "perhaps like the hinge of a door": the door turns upon two abiding pivots, and so too the galgal has two abiding pivots at rest, upon which the galgal moves, and they are fit to be on this side specifically.

Do not object: why was it distinguished in this way, and why should the diameter upon which the galgal moves not run from east to west, just as it was distinguished to run from south to north? And likewise the two poles of the galgal — why should they be on this side and not on another? This is no difficulty at all. The question arose only where the motion belongs to the galgal as a whole; and where the motion belongs to the galgal as a whole, there is nothing here in which the motion is distinguished toward one side rather than another, as we said. But once we have said that the motion takes place upon a distinct thing that is at rest and abiding, and that this thing does not belong to the galgal itself, there is no difficulty at all, for this diameter that runs from south to north is certainly distinguished. This is clear to every wise and discerning man who acknowledges the truth; they will say that all these words are words of true wisdom, that they penetrated to the depths of wisdom. This very matter proves it — that Rav Acha pressed his objection from "the hinge of a door" and from "the spindle of a millstone," for these two things resemble the pole of a sphere and the diameter of a sphere, which are at rest and abiding, and upon which the sphere turns.

Now let us return to explaining the words of the Sages, for their words follow the intellect very closely: it is more fitting to say that what causes the motion is the mazal, since it is what acts, than to say that it is the galgal. Therefore it is very clear that, by reason and by wisdom, it is more fitting that the motion be from the mazal than that we should say the motion is from the side of the galgal. Their words do not mean that the galgal is entirely fixed, only that what causes the motion is the mazal and that the galgal is drawn after it, as has been explained; and there is no difficulty here.

They further argued that we see that a star standing on the great circle is swift in its motion, since it is what circles the great circle, while a star far from that circle is slow in its motion. This is no difficulty if we say that the galgal revolves and the star is fixed, for there is no doubt that the great circle of the galgal is swifter in motion, and therefore the star standing there is swift in its motion; while the star far from that circle is slow in its motion, because that circle is slow in motion. But if we say that the motion comes from the star, why should the star standing on the great circle of the galgal be swifter in its motion? We answer this: it would be difficult if the stars revolved separately, without their galgalim —

then why should this one be swift in its motion and that one slow? But since they revolve within their galgalim, there is no difficulty, for the motion that belongs to the star comes about only by means of the galgal. The galgal is to the star as the body is to the soul: the body certainly bears the soul, yet even so the soul can move it only as befits the body. So too the star, through which the galgal has its motion: the motion is according to what befits the galgal. All the more so, since the star is like the part of the galgal in which it stands; and therefore it is fitting that the motion be according to what befits the galgal. For that the galgal should be a thing drawn of necessity after the star — this cannot be a matter of necessity in them [?]. Rather, the star moves by means of the galgal with a circular motion, because circular motion befits a sphere. Therefore the star standing within it has a circular motion, like the galgal through which the motion comes, as we said. So this is what befalls a star that is fixed within a galgal: the star that is on the great circle moves more swiftly, and the one far from the great circle moves more slowly — and there is no difficulty whatever in this. On the contrary, reason yields precisely this. The matter does not depart from inference and intellect; it is all very well ordered, and this suffices here on this subject.

Further, there (Pesachim 94b): Our Rabbis taught — the sages of Israel say, by day the sun travels below the rakia, and by night it travels above the rakia; and the sages of the nations of the world say, by day the sun travels above the rakia, and by night below the rakia. Rabbi said: their words appear more correct than ours, for by day the springs are cold and by night the springs are boiling. Thus far the Gemara.

The critics take the intent of the Sages, of blessed memory, to be that the sun passes through the galgal — this being what they meant by saying that at night it travels above the rakia. If so, the rakia would have to be torn open for the moment, with the sun passing through the galgal; and such a thing is among the things that are impossible. The senses, too, refute it, since the sun sets only with respect to the horizon: for those who have another horizon, the sun has not set at all. No man possessed of reason can deny this.

Now these men are ready to pass judgment on the words of the Sages, and yet they have not grasped those words in the least. Had it been the Sages' view that at night the sun passes through the galgal and travels above the galgal, they would not have said that the sun travels "above the rakia," but "above the galgal" — as they said just before this (Pesachim 94b), "the galgal is fixed and the mazalos revolve." But the matter of the galgal and the matter of the rakia are each a thing in itself. The term "rakia" applies to that which is the rakia over the lower beings;

that is what is called "rakia" in the words of the Sages, and it is the "rakia" spoken of in the Torah. The name "rakia" is never applied to the galgal at all.

Accordingly, the Sages' view, when they said "by day [the sun] travels below the rakia, and by night it travels above the rakia," means this: by day the sun is present in the world — the rakia being the beginning of the lower beings — and by day the sun travels below the rakia and is together with the lower beings. But at night the sun is separate from the world, and of this it is said that the sun is above the rakia, that is, above the "rakia" which is the beginning of the lower beings. Then we say that the rakia divides between the sun and the lower beings, since the sun is not present with the lower beings. There is no doubt that the lower beings have a limit of their own, and that limit is the rakia. This explanation is perfectly clear. It was because they supposed that the Sages' words concerned a rakia that is the galgal that the statement struck them as something strange.

But you must know that the Sages did not speak of that at all. They meant only this: Hashem, may He be blessed, divided between those things that are on the earth below and those that are not on the earth but above, and it is the rakia that divides between them. Therefore the sun, which Hashem set by day to give light upon the earth (Bereishis 1:17), travels below the rakia, and the rakia does not divide between the sun and the lower beings. At night, however, when He did not set the sun to give light upon the earth, the rakia — which Hashem set to divide between the upper powers and the lower beings — divides the sun from the earth. And the sages of the nations say that the reverse is the case: by day the sun travels above the rakia, so that the rakia divides between the sun and the lower beings. So it ought to be, for otherwise the sun would act upon the lower beings excessively and they would have no endurance. Therefore, when the sun is over the earth it travels above the rakia; and when it is night and the sun is separate from the earth, there is no dividing by the rakia here.

This is why Rabbi answered, "and their words appear more correct than ours, for by day the springs are cold and by night they are boiling." From this you see that at night the sun is not separate from the lower beings, and that is why the springs are boiling. By day, though, the springs are not boiling as they are at night, because Hashem set the rakia, which divides between the upper powers and the lower beings, precisely in order to divide — and therefore the springs are cold by day. But on what we ourselves say, that at night the sun travels above the rakia, the rakia would be dividing between the sun [and the lower beings], and the sun would not act upon the springs. And this is true: the waters themselves are apt to

boil at night, inasmuch as the sun travels over against the sea and rules over the element of water — and by day the reverse.

The words of the Sages have now been explained to you. But these men do not understand the true nature of the *rakia*. For Scripture says (Bereishis 1:6), "Let there be a *rakia* in the midst of the waters, and let it divide between water and water," and it says further (see there, verse 7), "And Elokim divided between the waters which were below the *rakia* and the waters which were above the *rakia*." All of this is hidden from them, and they know nothing whatever of it, for those men have a share only in what is revealed and what is perceived by the senses. How, then, can they answer against matters hidden and concealed, when they do not know what the *rakia* even is? This is not the place to explain the matter of the *rakia* at greater length, and it will be explained further on.

There (Pesachim 94b): The sun travels along four paths. In Nisan, Iyar and Sivan it travels among the mountains, so as to thaw the snows. In Tammuz, Av and Elul it travels over the inhabited land, so as to ripen the fruits. In Tishrei, Marcheshvan and Kislev it travels over the waters, so as to dry up the rivers. In Teves, Shevat and Adar it travels over the desert, so as not to dry up the seeds.

The explanation of this is that "the sun travels" means that it acts, for the sun has four operations. And because the sun has four *tekufos* (the four quarters of the solar year), corresponding to these he said that "the sun travels along four paths" — meaning that it has four operations. In Nisan, Iyar and Sivan it travels among the mountains, to thaw the snows, because at that season the sun draws near to the inhabited land, and this is the beginning of its operation: to thaw the snows. For it has not yet come far enough into the inhabited land to ripen the fruits, and so it first acts to thaw the snows and lessen the cold. Afterward, in Tammuz, Av and Elul, it travels in the inhabited land — that is, it acts upon the inhabited land to ripen the fruits. Then he said: in Tishrei, Marcheshvan and Kislev it travels over the waters, to dry up the rivers. That is, the sun goes and grows distant from the inhabited land, and travels over against the element of water, and acts upon the waters with dryness; for otherwise the waters would prevail. And in the last three months it travels in the desert — that is, it does not draw near to the inhabited land. Had it drawn near to the inhabited land it would have dried out the seeds, and when the time of ripening came there would have been no moisture in them at all, and the fruits would not ripen.

Rava said (Pesachim 94a): The world is six thousand *parsah*, and the thickness of the *rakia* is a thousand *parsah*. One of these is received tradition, and one is *sevara*. He reasons in accordance with what Rabbah bar bar Chanah said in the

name of R. Yochanan: How far does an average man walk in a day? Ten *parsaos*. From dawn until sunrise, five *mil* (a talmudic mile); from sunset until the emergence of the stars, five *mil*. It emerges that the thickness of the rakia is one [sixth] of a day's journey. Thus far.

From this statement the critics have inferred that the Sages, of blessed memory, held that at dawn the sun begins to emerge from the galgal, and that likewise, when it sets, it passes to the inside of the galgal. Granted that, according to the conclusion, nothing of this stands at all, since the Gemara raises an objection against it, as appears there — still, on their reading the Sages did think to say so at the outset. But one must not say at all that anything of the kind ever entered their minds, a thing the senses refuse.

But as for what they said, that the world is six thousand *parsah* and the thickness of the rakia a thousand *parsah* — do not suppose that they assigned this measure to the world as it is measured by corporeal measure. Know rather that the Sages did not speak of that at all; for a matter that does not reach the essential nature of the world and the truth of its essential nature is a matter of which they did not speak at all. When they said that this world is six thousand, they meant that the essential nature of this measure belongs to the world, without regard to corporeal measure. The Sages considered only the essential nature, not the corporeal.

This is one of the foundations of wisdom, and the matter has already been explained in a number of places. For the Sages sometimes give a small measure, and that measure is not from the side of what is revealed to the senses; they said so only from the side of the thing's essential nature. So they said (Moed Katan 18a) that the Pharaoh of Moshe's day was so small, and so — speaking of him from the side of his essential nature; and you will find many such cases. So too the reverse: they state a large measure, and this is from the side of the thing's very essential nature, while even if the thing is small, that smallness is not from the side of its very essential nature. Likewise, if they said of something that it is small to such-and-such a degree, then even if it is in fact larger, that is from another side; but from the side of its essential nature, abstracted from corporeality, its measure is as they said.

Do not raise the difficulty: what has measure to do with something abstracted from corporeality? For measure is certainly relevant even to what is abstracted from corporeality. The number six has the essential nature of completeness, since by the number six a body is completed — every body having six sides. Therefore, when he said that the world is six thousand *parsah*, he meant that the world

possesses completeness in its own right, and that six thousand accordingly befits it in its own right. For this world is corporeal, and the completeness of the corporeal is six, as has been explained. Indeed, the world was created in six days (Shemos 20:11), and on the seventh, which is the holy Shabbos, it is separate from the six days. Accordingly it is fitting that the measure of the world be of the same pattern: six thousand *parsah*; and the thickness of the rakia, which is separate from the world, a thousand *parsah*. For it has already been explained that time and body are alike, related and equivalent.

It is thus clear that they did not state the measure for nothing. This is the explanation of the true sense of the Sages' words, though the matters are deeper still by far. When men see such statements in the words of the Sages, they say that the Sages meant the corporeal measure perceived by the senses, and so in their view it was far-fetched that the corporeal measure of the world should be six thousand *parsah* and the thickness of the rakia a thousand *parsah*. But this is not so. The Sages did not speak of corporeal measure; their words concern the essential nature of the world, and they said that its essential nature is this measure, as we have said.

They said that the thickness of the rakia is a thousand *parsah*, and it is said there (Pesachim 94a) that this is what reasoning yields: the beginning of the day — that is, from dawn until sunrise — corresponds and is related to the rakia, which is the beginning of the world. A man's journey from dawn to sunrise is one sixth of his journey for the whole day; and so too with the sun, its travel from dawn to sunrise is a sixth part. We have already said (see above, the passage beginning "But as for what they said") that the sun's travel is six thousand *parsah*, which is the essential nature of the world. Accordingly the rakia is to be reckoned as a sixth part of the whole day's travel, which is six thousand *parsah*. And although the sun's travel encircles the world and does not run along the world's length, nevertheless, since the essential nature of the world is six thousand — for so it is by received tradition — the rakia, which is the beginning, is to be reckoned at a thousand *parsah*.

And so it is fitting. For just as six thousand *parsah* befits the world in its own right, this pertaining to the completeness of a body — so with the rakia, which is separate from this world: such is the character of the rakia, that it is separate from the world, and it corresponds to the center, which lies within the six sides that a body has and is separate from the six, as is known. Therefore the thickness of the rakia is a thousand *parsah*. And it is fitting that it be so, because this corporeal world was likewise created in six days, and the seventh, the day of

Shabbos, corresponds to the center, which is separate from the six. Corresponding to this he said that the world is six thousand *parsah* and the thickness of the rakia a thousand *parsah*.

R. Yehudah, for his part, held that the measure of travel at the beginning of the day — from dawn until sunrise — is a tenth part of the day. He said that a man's journey is ten *parsaos*, and that from dawn until sunrise is four *mil*, as appears there (Pesachim 94a); and so the beginning of the world, which is the rakia, would be a tenth part of the day. He held that this corresponds to the ten utterances by which the whole world was created (Avos 5:1), and that the rakia, being the beginning, corresponds to the utterance *Bereishis*, "In the beginning" (Bereishis 1:1), which is the beginning. Therefore he said that the beginning, which is the rakia, is the tenth part of the world. All these matters are very deep. In any case, none of this stands in the conclusion.

Some explain that when Rava said (Pesachim 94a) that the world is "six thousand *parsah*," he meant the earth alone; and the astronomers, too, have testified that the sphere of the earth is six thousand *parsah*. But that is not the implication, for he said that "the world" is six thousand *parsah*, and did not say "the earth" or "the inhabited land," as will be explained. Moreover, what measure would he then have given for what lies between the earth and the rakia? Unless we say that, since what is primary is the settled portion of the world, namely the earth, the remainder is reckoned as annulled beside the inhabited land, which is the earth — and for that reason they said that the world is six thousand only. This too is as we said: the measure is of the essential nature of the world itself, and if the world is in fact larger, that larger size is not the essential nature of the world itself.

So too "the thickness of the rakia is a thousand *parsah*." The rakia does not belong entirely to the lower world; rather it divides between the upper powers and the lower beings. And just as the world is six thousand, corresponding to the six days of Creation, so the rakia, which is separate from the lower beings, is a thousand, corresponding to Shabbos, which is separate from the six days of Creation. Thus six thousand befits the world itself, and the rakia — which is separate from the world — a seventh part, namely a thousand *parsah*. Therefore they said that the world is six thousand *parsah* and that the rakia, which is the beginning of the world, is a thousand *parsah*, so that on this reckoning the rakia is one sixth.

He brings proof for this from the interval from dawn until the sun is revealed, and this interval is called "the beginning of the world." For we have told you very many times that night counts as privation, and that at the beginning of the day is

the beginning of existence; and until the sun is fully revealed, all of this is called "beginning." From this they inferred that the beginning of the world, which is the rakia, is likewise one sixth of the whole world, as was explained above (see above, the passage beginning "They said that"); and it is not possible to explain further.

An objection is raised against this (Pesachim 94a): that this measure does not befit the essential nature of the world. For it was taught: Mitzrayim is one sixtieth of Kush, and Kush is one sixtieth of the world, and the world is one sixtieth of the Garden, and the Garden is one sixtieth of Eden, and Eden is one sixtieth of Gehinnom. It emerges that the whole world is like a pot-lid to Gehinnom. Thus far. And in tractate Ta'anis (10a) it says that Gehinnom has no measure.

Do not err in any of this by supposing that these measures are corporeal measure. The Sages did not speak at all of corporeal measure, for they had no concern [with this]; their words are about the essential nature of the world, as we told you above. And know that what they said here concerning Kush and concerning the world belongs to the secrets of wisdom. We have already told you the difference between the sages of Israel and the other sages: the apprehension of Chazal is of essential nature, not of the corporeal at all.

As for their assigning the first level to Mitzrayim and the second to Kush — such things can be explained only to a man of great wisdom and understanding, and he knows that the power of Mitzrayim is the power of water, which is why the Egyptians worshipped the water; from this you see that they have a relation to water. The Kushites have a relation to fire, for they are black (Rashi, Bamidbar 12:1) from the power of the sun's heat, which is fire. For this reason the first level is the land of Mitzrayim, the second is Kush, which encompasses it, and after that comes the world.

He said that the world is one sixtieth of the Garden. There is no doubt that this world is corporeal, and therefore the Garden, which is not corporeal, is a higher level. Eden is more separate still than the Garden, and therefore they said (Berachos 34b) that "no eye has seen, O Elokim, besides You" (Yeshayahu 64:3) refers to Eden. It emerges that the highest level is Eden, and therefore they said, "the Garden is one sixtieth of Eden."

They also said, "Eden is one sixtieth of Gehinnom" — and this statement pertains to it [?] — because Gehinnom, as we have explained elsewhere, is deficient, which is why the men who are deficient in their deeds come there. And a deficient thing is not fit to be bounded and measured, for limit and measure belong to

completeness, so that a thing which has no limit and no measure has no completeness. Therefore they said in tractate Ta'anis (10a) that "Gehinnom has no measure." All this is because a thing entirely deficient is not fit to be bounded by a measure.

This matter has now been explained so far as it is possible to write and explain of it, for the things said here are very deep. None of the measures stated here is a corporeal measure — the Garden and Eden have no corporeal measure — but each is stated of the true essential nature of the one and the other. This is enough for those who understand, for we have already explained it above quite fully. There is no need to dwell at length on these matters; we came only to explain that they were not said by estimation and conjecture, but that all of them were said with wisdom. This is not at all the place for such matters. We have told you only this: that in all their words the Sages did not come to set out the corporeal measure of the world, but its essential nature.

A further objection is raised (Pesachim 94a): For the school of Eliyahu taught — R. Natan says: the whole inhabited land sits under a single star. [Know this,] for a man sets his eyes on a [single] star; he goes east, and it stands opposite him; he goes to the four directions of the world, and it stands opposite him. From this it follows that the inhabited land sits under a single star.

As for what they said here — "Know this: a man sets his eye on a single star; he goes east and it stands opposite him," and likewise "to the four directions it stands opposite him" — the meaning is not that the star stands opposite him in the north just as it stood opposite him in the south. That is impossible, since it is known that when a man is in the south, the southern stars appear to him standing very high above the horizon, and when he goes north that star is not visible to him at all. But the cause of this is not that he has grown distant from the star; the cause is that the earth is spherical, and this is what makes the southern star appear to him high above the horizon when he is in the south, and hidden from his eyes when he is in the north. So when he said, "a man sets his eyes on a star and the star stands opposite him; he goes in all four directions and the star stands opposite him," he means that if you remove what the earth's sphericity causes, as has been explained, he will find the star standing the same in relation to him. And were it not that the whole inhabited land is under a single star, this would not be so.

Come and hear further (Pesachim 94a): *Agalah* is in the north and *Akrav* in the south, and the whole inhabited land lies only between *Agalah* and *Akrav*; and the whole inhabited land is but one hour of the day. Know this, for at the fifth hour

the sun is in the east and at the seventh the sun is to the west, while at half of the sixth and half of the seventh the sun is over every man's head.

The meaning is not that the sun travels opposite the inhabited land for only one hour of the day. Since the earth is spherical, the sun travels opposite the inhabited land for twelve hours, according to the length of the inhabited land, and does not depart from the inhabited land. This too is known: when it is the circle of midday in an eastern country, it is not midday in a western country. If so, how could he say that the whole inhabited land is but one hour of the day? The meaning, rather, is this: although every single place has its own distinct midday, one cannot say that the inhabited land amounts to twelve hours of the day, since the midday of one country is not the midday of another. And since in each country the sun travels at the height of the heavens over men's heads for one hour only — from the middle of the sixth to the middle of the seventh — while before the middle of the sixth and after the middle of the seventh it does not count as traveling opposite the inhabited land, the sun then being in the east or in the west, at the sides: the sun counts as being opposite the inhabited land, which is the earth and lies at the center, only when it is at the height of the heavens over a man's head. For then the sun is at the center of the heavens, and then it counts as being opposite the inhabited land, which is at the center.

And should you say: if so, the sun ought to count as standing at the height for a single moment only, the moment when the sun stands at the utmost of its height — the Sages' measure is not so. For with regard to the offering of the afternoon *tamid* (the daily communal offering), the sun does not count as being in the west until the middle of the seventh hour; and likewise with regard to the *minchah* prayer, the sun does not count as being in the west until the middle of the seventh, and not as soon as the sixth hour has passed.

This accords with wisdom, for time is continuous: time is not divided but is joined together. Hence the end of the sixth is joined to the beginning of the seventh, and there is as yet no change of time here, no division in time between the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh. But the end of the sixth is not joined to the end of the seventh, for that counts as distance. Therefore after the middle of the seventh time divides, whereas the beginning of the seventh is not divided from the end of the sixth. This is the reason for the words of the Sages, who said (Berachos 26b) that the time for the *minchah* prayer is after the middle of the seventh; and the end of the sixth is not marked off as midday, because time is continuous. He said, then, that the time which ought to begin from the start of the

seventh in fact begins after the middle of the seventh, for it is then that time divides.

In exactly the same way, place is continuous. When the sun stands at the middle of the heavens, it does not count as having passed the middle of the heavens until it has passed a distance like the measure of half an hour's travel from the point of the height; for then the sun's place changes, so that one may say the sun is in the west. And one does not say that the sun is in the east except before the middle of the sixth, since there is no joining here such that the beginning of the sixth is joined to the end of the sixth. Therefore, when they said that the inhabited land is one hour, this means the hour of the sun's standing at the height, which is the center of the heavens, and this counts as being opposite the inhabited land, which is at the center. They did not mean at all that the inhabited land is so large as to be one twelfth of what the sun traverses in a day — that is not so. The intent here is only that the sun counts as entering the inhabited land for one hour of the day, because for one hour it counts as being at the center of the heavens, and of the center it is said that it is opposite the inhabited land.

R. Yochanan ben Zakkai said (Pesachim 94a): What answer did the *bas kol* give that wicked man when he said (Yeshayahu 14:14), "I will ascend above the heights of the cloud; I will be like the Most High"? A *bas kol* went forth and said to him: Wicked man, son of a wicked man, [the grandson of Nimrod the wicked], who led the world into rebellion through his kingship! How many are a man's years? Seventy years, and if with strength, eighty years, as it says (Tehillim 90:10), "The days of our years are seventy years, and if with strength, eighty years." From the earth to the rakia, how far is it? A journey of five hundred years. And the thickness of the rakia, how much is it? Five hundred years. And between one rakia and the next, how much? A journey of five hundred years. And so between each rakia and the next, five hundred years. "Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the uttermost parts of the pit" (Yeshayahu 14:15). Thus far.

Men take these *rekiim* that are mentioned to be the *galgalim* — the galgal of the sun, of the moon, of the stars and of the mazalos — and therefore they say that in Chazal's view there is empty space between one rakia and the next. But we have already told you that all of this is a mistake, for the rakia spoken of here is not a tangible body. The rakia is the beginning of the world; that is what the rakia spoken of in *Ma'aseh Bereishis* means. He means that there are seven distinctions from the lower beings to the upper powers — so far are the upper powers set apart from the lower beings. And each one of these seven distinctions is like the

distinction from the earth, which is among the lower beings, up to the rakia, which is the absolute distinction.

Therefore there is no difficulty in their saying that between each rakia and the next there is so much, for there is no tangible body here: this rakia is not corporeal, and likewise none of the distances stated here is a perceptible measure. When they say that from the earth to the rakia is five hundred years, they mean that the world has the essential nature of this measure of five hundred years, for so great was the distinction between the one and the other. The Sages did not speak at all of perceptible distance; all their words are abstracted from corporeality, as has already been explained many times. But men suppose that all this is said of corporeal distance. It is not so, and therefore they have erred greatly concerning the Sages' words.

The principle of the matter is this: all the words of the Sages are from the side of intellect, while these men think that everything the Sages say is stated in corporeal measure perceived by the senses. They erred further concerning the term "rakia" as it is used in the words of the Sages. The rakia spoken of in the words of the Sages [is] like the rakia spoken of in the Torah; the rakia is not the galgal, but the term "rakia" is applied to that which divides between the upper powers and the lower beings. This will be explained further on, for this is the primary point they failed to understand: these are the seven *rekiim* (Chagigah 12b), as we have said. And this is enough for those who understand and for those who possess knowledge, who enter the chambers of the inner wisdom.

In the first chapter of Yoma (20b): Why is a man's voice not heard by day as it is heard by night? Because of the galgal of the sun, which saws through the rakia like a carpenter sawing cedars. And that sawdust of the day is named "nothing," as it says (Daniel 4:32), "and all the inhabitants of the earth are reckoned as nothing." Thus far.

They say that the Sages' view is that the sun tears the rakia — which they take to be the galgal of the sun — and that the rakia joins together again, and the next day the sun saws through it once more. This too is like the other things they say about the Sages. Had that been the Sages' view, they would have said "the sun saws through the galgal." But we have already told you above that the name "rakia" applies only to the beginning of the world, which divides between the upper powers and the lower beings.

As for what he said here, that "the sun saws through the rakia" — know that they came thereby to make known the character of the sun and its essential nature:

that it is uniquely a ruler over the lower beings. For this reason they said that "the sun saws through the rakia," since a thing that rules over another acts upon it and annuls it, for they have no connection with one another. And we have already told you that this rakia is the beginning of the lower beings, and that this rakia is not the galgal. Because this rakia divides between the upper powers and the lower beings, it is with regard to this that he said that the sun's motion saws through the rakia; for whatever saws annuls and removes the thing in which it saws.

Therefore he said, "the sawdust of the day is named 'nothing'" — meaning that the sun saws and acts upon the rakia to such a degree that there is here some aspect in the rakia which is reduced entirely to nothing, in the place where the sun saws. This is not like other sawing, which does not saw the thing away entirely and annul it; here the sun annuls it entirely, and therefore the sawdust is called "nothing." He brings proof from what is written (Daniel 4:32), "and all the inhabitants of the earth are reckoned as nothing" — for the *kaf* of *kela* (אכל, "as nothing") indicates that there is a thing which is "nothing," and that thing is what the sun does to the rakia: it counts as "nothing," as has been explained.

And in accordance with the greatness of the action that the sun performs in the world — so that the world has no quiet and no rest, because of the power of the sun as it acts — for this reason a man's voice is not heard, because of the sun sawing through the rakia. That is to say, because of the greatness of the operation that the sun performs in the world through its motion. One who understands will understand that everything said here is clear in all these matters, beyond any doubt at all; and the statement that follows will bear this out.

The Rabbis taught (Yoma 20b): were it not for the sound of the galgal of the sun, the sound of the multitude of the fourth kingdom would be heard; and were it not for the sound of the fourth kingdom, the sound of the galgal of the sun [would be] heard. These words too seem very strange and remote.

The explanation of the matter is this. The sun has dominion and kingship in the lower world, and its motion through the rakia of the heavens is the going-forth of its power into actuality — and that is the "sound" of the sun, as has been explained before this. Not a literal sound, for it is written (Tehillim 19:4), "their sound is not heard." Rather, the "sound" spoken of here means the sun's active power, as has been explained before this. The fourth kingdom likewise has dominion and the prevailing of kingship in the world, and this too is "the sound of the fourth kingdom." He says "the sound of the multitude of the fourth

kingdom" because the multitude of their dominion is their strength and their power; this will be explained further on.

So the two of them share one thing in common: dominion in the world. Therefore he said that were there no sound of the strength of the fourth kingdom, the strength of the sun would be present in actuality entirely, more than it is present now — and this impediment is the power of the fourth kingdom. For anything that has something sharing with it — and the sun too has the power of kingship, dominion and strength in the world, and there is something that shares with it, namely the dominion of the fourth kingdom — for that reason no one power is present in actuality entirely, on account of the thing that shares with it. Both of them rule in the world, and "two kings do not make use of one crown" (Chullin 60b); therefore neither of them is present in actuality entirely, and each annuls the power of the other, so that its power is not entirely in actuality.

This is what he said: "were it not for the sound of the multitude of the fourth kingdom, the sound of the galgal of the sun would be heard." That is: if there were no active power of the fourth kingdom — that an active power was given to the fourth kingdom — then the power of the sun's dominion over the lower beings would be present in actuality. And this is what is called "the sound of the galgal of the sun," because sound is what occurs when a thing goes forth into actuality, since sound goes forth into actuality. But as things now are, there is something here that shares with it, and it impedes and annuls the power of the other so that its power does not go forth into actuality. Therefore it is the power and strength of the fourth kingdom in the world that impedes the power and strength of the sun from being present in actuality entirely. And likewise, if there were no sound of the galgal of the sun — which has a power that goes forth into actuality — the sound of the fourth kingdom would be heard, for the power and strength of the fourth kingdom would be present in actuality entirely, to the point that creatures could not receive the great power it possesses.

Do not err and say that what they said here — "were it not for the sound of the multitude of the fourth kingdom" — refers to the nation itself; for if that were so, the sound of the galgal of the sun ought to have been heard before the fourth kingdom arose. Rather, the reference is to the power of the fourth kingdom and to its preparedness, which has existed from the beginning. The power of this nation — the power of its preparedness — has existed from the day the world was created, and this diminishes the power of the galgal of the sun. And likewise the power of the galgal of the sun diminishes the power of the preparedness of the fourth kingdom. For both of them have the power of kingship; and because

both have the power of kingship and share in one power, each diminishes the other.

From this you may understand that what the Sages said about "sound" in this place is not a sound perceived by the senses. This "sound" is rather the power that goes forth into actuality — that is what "sound" means here. One who does not know these things that we have said here about the sound of the galgal of the sun and the sound of the multitude of the kingdom is left in doubt about the words we have been discussing. But one who knows where the words of the Sages come from and what their source is, and out of what place of understanding these words issued, has no doubt as to their truth.

Further there (Yoma 20b): three things — their sound travels from one end of the world to the other: the sound of the galgal of the sun, the sound of the multitude of the fourth kingdom, and the sound of the soul at the hour it departs from the body. And some say: birth as well. And some say: *ridya* as well. [Aramaic: And the Rabbanan sought mercy concerning the soul at the hour it departs from the body, and annulled it.]

It has already been explained above that a power which goes forth into actuality is called "sound," since sound goes forth into actuality. And it has already been explained before this that Hashem, may He be blessed, gave the sun an active power throughout the entire world. Therefore he said that "the sound of the sun travels from one end of the world to the other." And although above he said (Yoma 20b), "were it not for the sound of the multitude of Rome, the sound of the galgal of the sun would be heard," this is no difficulty: in any case their sound does travel; it merely does not go forth into absolute actuality, and for that reason it is not heard. So too the sound of the multitude of Rome. Dominion in the world was given to them, and therefore their sound travels from one end of the world to the other — by virtue of that dominion, which spreads through the world and goes forth into actuality.

As for the sound of the soul at the hour it departs from the body: the soul is separate and incorporeal. While the soul is in the body it bears the status of a corporeal body, and what is corporeal is limited; but when it departs from the body and becomes separate and incorporeal, which is not limited, this is reckoned as reaching from one end of the world to the other. And he said that the Rabbanan sought mercy concerning this. That is: although the soul is embedded in the body, and when it departs this is a thing that reaches from one end of the world to the other, still the intellect is separate from the body and is not

embedded in the body, and from that standpoint this is not fitting. That is the mercy they were asking for concerning it.

"And some say: birth as well." For man, inasmuch as he is a most exalted creature — so much so that he is reckoned as equivalent to the whole world, as you will find in many places — therefore birth too, when a man comes into the world and goes forth into actuality, is an act reckoned as reaching from one end of the world to the other. The same explanation applies when his soul is taken from him: since he is an exalted creature and is reckoned as equivalent to the whole world. For so they said (Sanhedrin 37a): one who sheds the blood of a single soul, it is as though he destroyed the entire world; and conversely, one who preserves a single soul, it is as though he preserved the entire world. Therefore this act too reaches from one end of the world to the other.

"And some say: *ridya* as well." For the watering of the rain goes forth into actuality so as to water the whole world; and even if it does not water the entire world, the active power nevertheless reaches from one end of the world to the other. The principle of the matter is this: a power that goes forth into actuality is called "sound," because sound goes forth into actuality. And in the cases they mentioned, the power goes forth into actuality entirely, and therefore their sound is said to be heard from one end of the world to the other. A man cannot aim at everything and set it all down in writing, nor set out the essence of these matters in their truth; still, we have opened a doorway that runs clear through.

And when you understand words of wisdom: in all of these that he mentioned, the action is by power and by might. Of the sun it is written (Shoftim 5:31), "like the going forth of the sun in its might." The power of the fourth kingdom acts by might, which is why Daniel saw (Daniel 2:40), "that it shall be strong as iron" — because it acts with power, like iron. The departure of the soul is by might. So too birth, as it says (see Bereishis 30:22), "and Elokim opened her womb." So too the rains, as it appears in the first chapter of Ta'anis (2a) regarding "one mentions the might of the rains"; and we have already explained this in the work *Gevuros Hashem* as well.

Therefore all of them are mentioned in the blessing "You are mighty forever, Hashem." "King who puts to death and brings to life" — all of that is by judgment and by might. "And releases the bound" — that is birth, for He brings him forth from his bonds, as is well known. "And brings down the rain" — that is *ridya*, which is likewise by might, for He brings the rain down from the upper powers to the lower beings, and that is by might. All of these, then, are by might. Only the

multitude of the fourth kingdom, and likewise the sun, are not mentioned, for it is not fitting to mention in a blessing the praise of these two in prayer.

And because they are by might, their sound is heard from one end of the world to the other; for in the attribute of might a thing is not divided into parts, and so it reaches from one end of the world to the other — for a thing that is by judgment is not divided at all. This matter is exceedingly deep, and it belongs to the secrets of wisdom; but I have alerted you to the words of the Sages with some measure of understanding of their words, which are deeper than the sea. And because all of them are by might, and all might is by the power of judgment, therefore they are heard throughout the whole world, since it is not divided, as has been explained. This suffices.

The first chapter of Rosh Hashanah (20b): Abba the father of R. Simlai said to Shmuel, "Does the master know this matter that was taught in *Sod Halbbur*, the secret of the calendrical intercalation — 'it was born before *chatzos* (midday), or it was born after *chatzos*'?" He said to him, "No." He said to him, "Since the master does not know this, there is another matter as well that the master does not know." When R. Zeira went up, he sent word to them: This is what Abba the father of R. Simlai said — we calculate its birth. If it was born before *chatzos*, it is known that it will be seen close to sunset; if it was not born before *chatzos*, it is known that it will not be seen close to sunset. What is the practical difference? Rav Ashi said: to contradict the witnesses. R. Zeira said in the name of Rav Nachman: for twenty-four hours the moon is covered. For us — six from the old and eighteen from the new; for them — six from the new and eighteen from the old. What is the practical difference? Rav Ashi said: to contradict the witnesses. Thus far the Gemara.

Rashi, of blessed memory, explained: "This is what Abba the father of R. Simlai said" — before Shmuel, and Shmuel did not know how to explain it, what difference there is between its being born before *chatzos* and its being born after *chatzos*; I shall explain it to you. "We calculate" — the *molad*, the birth of the new moon. "If it was born before *chatzos*" — of that day — it is known that it will be seen [that day] before the sun sets, for the moon is concealed from the people of the Land of Israel, who are in the west, only for six hours after its renewal. "If it was born after *chatzos*" — it is known that it will not be seen that day, for it is small throughout those six hours and hidden from every eye. "What is the practical difference" — for one who calculates; after all, we sanctify the month on the testimony of witnesses. "To contradict the witnesses" — if it was born after *chatzos*, and they said, "We saw the new moon before sunset," so that the month

should be sanctified that day, they are false witnesses. "For twenty-four hours the moon is covered" — close to its renewal, both before it and after it, it is concealed from the eye because of its smallness: six [hours] before its renewal and [six hours] after its renewal it is hidden from every man; and thereafter, for [twelve hours], when it is in the east it is seen by the people of the east and not by the people of the west, because of its smallness, and when it is in the west it is seen by the people of the west and not by the people of the east. And it is always in the south-eastern corner before its renewal, and in the south-western corner after its renewal. Therefore, when the old moon becomes concealed in the east, the new moon is not seen by them [by the people of the east] for twenty-four hours; and when it becomes concealed from the people of the west, the new moon is not seen by them for twenty-four hours. Thus far Rashi.

And behold, the mighty men of war — those who know the science of astronomy, who sling at a hair and do not miss — hurl slingstones at this passage, saying that it contradicts the science of astronomy. For what was said here, that the moon may possibly be seen six hours after its renewal by those who dwell in the west, is not so; it has been established in the science of astronomy that the moon is not seen after its *molad* until a full day has passed, whether a little less or a little more. It follows that the moon is concealed for two days: a day before its renewal, and a day — a little less — after its renewal. So too the Rambam wrote in chapter 1 of Hilchos Kiddush HaChodesh (halachah 3): a full day is required before the moon can be seen at the beginning of the month. Thus far his words. And it follows likewise that for a full day the old moon is not seen, since one and the same rule governs the new moon and the old.

For this reason many who have made themselves wise in this science have written at length on these passages, seeking to reconcile them and bring them into one with the science of astronomy and with what the senses testify — that the moon is not seen six hours after its renewal — and they have labored very, very greatly. There is no need to answer their words, whether the truth is with them or not; but this much is clear: this is not the way. The words of Torah are one thing, and the words of their science another. Certainly, if Chazal had set the time later, saying that the moon is seen only two days after the moon's renewal, while the astronomers, whose science is built upon the sense of sight, said that it is seen in less than that, this would be a mighty objection. But since the Sages brought the time nearer and they set it further off, of this it is said (see Zevachim 103b): "I did not hear" and "I did not see" is no proof.

The reason is this. The science of astronomy is built upon the moment when a man sees the moon — when it is visible, perceived by the senses and by perception to every eye, possessing absolute light. This is what the Sages called (Rosh Hashanah 21b) being seen *ba'alil*, that is, revealed to every eye; and everything in the science of astronomy rests upon sightings of the moon *ba'alil*. There is no doubt that they never fixed a measure for the moon at the point when what is seen of it is only as much as a barleycorn. That was not within their power or within their science to know, for their science is built upon the moon's being seen as something perceived by the senses, visible to every eye. But this is not the science of the Torah, which is *Sod HaIbbur*; that is built upon what appears to those expert in seeing, who testify about the moon when what is seen of it is like a barleycorn. And if someone says that they do not know this, that is out of foolishness. Let none of the astronomers claim that they have gauged the moon at the point when a barleycorn's measure of it appears; in any case, *Sod HaIbbur* is built upon the measure of the moon when a barleycorn's measure of it appears — and this is called the moon's not being seen *ba'alil*, but seen only by one who is able to discern it, being wise in this.

Sevara and intellect require this. For if the moon is seen a little less than a full day after its renewal, and that sighting is revealed to every eye, small and great alike, how can one say that before that time there is no discernment of it whatever? And if the sightings of the moon were only when it is revealed to every eye, what is this that Moshe found difficult in the sighting of the moon? For the true tradition has come down that Moshe found the sighting of the moon difficult, until HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to him, "Like this one — see and sanctify" (Rashi, Shemos 12:2). Rather, this is certainly among the very difficult things — to discern and to know the moon — and that is why He said, "Like this one — see and sanctify."

Therefore the measure the Sages gave — that six hours after its renewal it is possible for the moon to be seen — means that it is possible in some quarter of the world, for one who has the wisdom to discern it, when there is joined to this that the air is as perfectly clear as is possible in the world; and that the country too is high and does not lie in a valley; and that it lies as far to the west as can be. For what was said here, "This is no difficulty: this is for us and that is for them," does not mean that this difference of twelve hours is the difference between the people of the Land of Israel and the people of Babylon. That cannot be said, for the distance between the Land of Israel and Babylon is only less than two hours; how then could the difference between them be twelve hours? Rather, "this is for us and that is for them" means that for the people of the east it is concealed for

eighteen hours from the new, and for the people of the west six from the new — that is, for those at the farthest end of the west it is concealed for six hours. Accordingly, when they said "six from the new for the people of the west," the meaning is that the sighting is possible and can occur in some quarter of the world. And since it is possible in some quarter, the witnesses are not to be contradicted, inasmuch as they testify to something possible. For such is the law of the Torah: witnesses are contradicted only if what they said is a falsehood impossible from the standpoint of the sighting itself, so that it could not have been seen at all. And it is not called Rosh Chodesh unless the moon is seen somewhere in the world, in whatever quarter that may be; but once the moon is seen in the world, we do not scrutinize the witnesses any further. For the month does not depend on the witnesses; the month depends on what is fit to be seen, and it is only that the mitzvah is that they sanctify it on the testimony of witnesses (Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvos, positive commandment 153). And since it is known to the *bais din* that the moon is visible in the world, and witnesses have testified that they saw the new moon, we require nothing further. One who examines the halachos in the first chapter of Rosh Hashanah will find that this is so, certainly and beyond doubt.

And this is the distinction. *Sod HaIbbur* was given to us by HaKadosh Baruch Hu through Moshe, for He transmitted to us things that are possible in themselves. He transmitted to us that in less than six hours it is impossible for the moon to be seen in any quarter, even when all the dispositions that assist a sighting are combined together: the clarity of the air; the elevation of the country, which too is of primary importance for observation, as the Rambam, of blessed memory, wrote in Hilchos Kiddush HaChodesh (17:12); the nearness of the country to the west; and the observer's being a wise man, expert in the matter of the moon's coming to be, so that he does not need the moon to be seen wholly *ba'alil* — together with all the dispositions that they knew. Then it is possible for him to discern the moon six hours after the *molad*; but in less than six hours no discernment of it can take place anywhere in the world, for so we have received it from Him who measures and knows everything. This is what deserves to be called a "science," since it is measured out with neither less nor more, and that is what befits a science. But the words of the astronomers are not like that. With them the measure goes according to the sight a man has, and they gauged that sight for air that is clear. Yet the air may be clearer still, so that the moon is seen earlier in a country that is nearer the west, and another country may be nearer yet. So too one man may be able to discern more than another discerns. Such a thing has no definition, and does not enter into science at all.

And not only this — the whole science of astronomy does not deserve to have the name "science" applied to it at all, for nothing is called a science unless one knows the thing as it is. And that you will not find in their science, for not one of them has arrived at its truth. What does it matter to me whether he is false by much or by little? In the end he does not know the truth of the thing — as *Sod Halbbur* is, where they knew its truth according to what has been received from Hashem, may He be blessed. Moreover, all the sages of the nations know only the measure of the time of the course of the sun and the stars and the circuit of the moon; they do not know the reason of the thing, in what respect it comes to be so, and why it is so, with any clarity. But this is what is called *Sod Halbbur*, in which one knows the entire matter of the course of the sun and the stars through the conception of the intellect, and their essential nature. This is a science of another order, and this is the meaning of what is said (Devarim 4:6), "for it is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations." For what has science to do with a thing that has no reason, where one does not know the essential nature of the thing but only that it is so? Such a thing does not deserve to be called a science; science belongs only to one who knows the essential nature of the thing itself.

And because no witnesses are contradicted except in a matter where there is no way at all that they are not lying, there is no contradiction here — and all the more so in the matter of sanctifying the month on the testimony of witnesses, where the *bais din* already knows the *molad* and the time at which the moon may possibly be seen. The witnesses serve only for the sake of the mitzvah of sanctifying on the testimony of witnesses, and they are not intimidated so that the month should not be sanctified. Therefore they said (Rosh Hashanah 20b) that if the witnesses said the moon appeared to them less than six hours after the *molad*, they are certainly lying; but after six [hours], since it is possible in some quarter that it be seen, we do not contradict the witnesses. Had the Sages said that the moon is not seen while the astronomers said that it is seen, there would then be an objection against the words of the Sages. But as it is there is no objection at all, for the view of the Sages is that it is possible, and can occur in some quarter, that the moon be seen six hours after the *molad*.

Therefore, when the *molad* falls before *chatzos*, Rosh Chodesh is not pushed off, since the moon may possibly be seen before sunset. And when it is possible that it was seen on that day, that day is sanctified, and the festival begins from the evening before it — even though the sighting was at the end of the day, for in the end that day is the sanctified one, since the new moon was seen on it. This is entirely obvious throughout the Talmud, and it is an explicit mishnah (Rosh

Hashanah 25b): "If the *bais din* and all Israel saw it, [and] they did not manage to say 'The month is sanctified' before it grew dark, then it is intercalated." From all this we learn that if they did manage to say "The month is sanctified," then the preceding day is the sanctified one. This is the way of truth and uprightness, and one who turns aside from it turns aside from the way of life. This suffices.

Now Scripture singles out the sages of Israel for praise, as it says (Devarim 4:6), "for it is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations," and also (Divrei Hayamim I 12:33), "and of the sons of Yissachar, men who had understanding" — yet now they turn it about, saying that the nations knew and the sages of Israel did not. And the very thing we have received concerning the course of the moon and the course of the sun is itself most welcome and most readily received among the astronomers.

The second chapter of Chagigah (12b): It was taught — R. Yosi says: Woe to creatures, who see but do not know what they stand upon. The earth — upon what does it stand? Upon the pillars, as it says (Iyov 9:6), "and its pillars tremble." And the pillars upon the waters, as it says (Tehillim 136:6), "to Him who spreads the earth upon the waters." And the waters upon the mountains, as it says (Tehillim 104:6), "upon the mountains the waters stood." And the mountains upon the wind, as it says (Amos 4:13), "He who forms mountains and creates wind." And the wind is in the storm, as it says (Tehillim 148:8), "stormy wind fulfilling His word." And the storm is suspended from the arm of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, as it says (Devarim 33:27), "and underneath are the everlasting arms." And the Sages say: upon twelve pillars [does it stand], as it says (Devarim 32:8), "He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel." And some say: upon seven pillars, as it says (Mishlei 9:1), "she has hewn out her seven pillars." R. Elazar ben Shamua says: upon one pillar it stands, and Righteous is its name, as it says (Mishlei 10:25), "and the righteous one is the foundation of the world." Thus far the passage. And they take this statement according to its plain sense — that Chazal hold the earth to have pillars, and the like — and on that reading the words are indeed far-fetched.

But there is certainly a way of explaining this statement by way of figure, and a very precious one; for thus I have found the explanation of this statement, by way of parable and figure. It comes to say that Hashem, may He be blessed, sustains the whole world so that it does not collapse, for the world has no endurance in its own right, but only through Hashem, who sustains it. And this comes about through the cleaving that the world has to Him, may He be blessed; from the standpoint of that cleaving the world has endurance, and from nothing

else. The earth, which is at the utmost bottom, would have no standing at all had it no cleaving to Him. Yet it is impossible to say that the earth by itself cleaves to Him — that cannot be, for a thing that is entirely material, like the earth, cannot cleave to Him Himself, but only through an intermediary; and through the intermediary it cleaves to Him. This is why he said, "The earth — upon what does it stand? Upon the pillars." For the earth belongs to man, as it is written (Tehillim 115:16), "and the earth He has given to the children of man," and so the earth has a connection to man in that it is for man.

And he called the children of man "pillars." This is because man stands with upright stature, like this pillar, which is upright — something you will not find among all existing things, for not one of them walks upright; they all walk bent over. This indicates man's level: that man is king among the lower beings, and all of them serve him. For this reason man alone walks with upright stature, while none of the other lower beings do. And it indicates a level in man higher still than his being a living creature endowed with speech. This is what Scripture says (Bereishis 1:27), "And Elokim created man in His image; in the image of Elokim He created him" — yet it is also written (Devarim 4:15), "for you saw no shape of any kind." Rather the explanation is this: if a man came to make some sign indicating Hashem, may He be blessed, who is King and rules over all (Divrei Hayamim I 29:12), he would make something upright for the sign — as if to say, who rules over Him? He is the God of all and has power over all — and he would not make something bent over for the sign, for He, may He be blessed, is King of the world, and it befits Him to be upright. This is what is called "the image of Elokim." For the image is nothing but a sign of some sort, indicating the description of the one for whom the image and likeness were made. If a man paints in colors and pigments, surely no pigments are to be found in the one of whom the picture was made. You are therefore compelled to say that what is called "the image of Elokim" is the uprightness that man possesses; and this is an image in that He, may He be blessed, is upright, in that He is above all and is not bent before any existing thing. It is fitting that man be in the image of Elokim, for man rules among the lower beings, as Scripture writes (Bereishis 1:26), "and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea," and so on. Therefore man is the image of Elokim: for if one were to make a description and an image of Hashem, who is a God ruling over the lower beings and the upper powers, he would make something upright, since that indicates that there is nothing above Him. It is for this reason that man is said to have been created in the image of Elokim. And this is the meaning of "the earth stands upon the pillars" — for the pillar is this image in man, and the image of man has a drawing near to Hashem, as we have said. This image includes all human beings, whether Israel or the nations: all possess

the image of Elokim, in that they walk upright. Yet even so, this is not a drawing near to Hashem entirely.

He then said that the pillars stand upon the waters (Chagigah 12b). These are those of the human species who possess the Torah. This is known: the Torah is called "water" — "Ho, everyone who thirsts, go to the water" (Yeshayahu 55:1). And they said in tractate Ta'anis (7a): why were the words of Torah likened to water, and so on. This is widely known and needs no explanation at all. He means that the whole human species is sustained on account of Israel, who possess the Torah. Certainly all the nations are connected to Israel in that they are all human beings; it is only that Israel has a higher excellence, in that they possess the Torah. These two levels the Tanna mentioned one after the other, saying (Avos 3:14), "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of Elokim" — and this includes the whole human species — and then saying, "Beloved are Israel, for they were given the precious vessel," and so on. Yet even in this there is not yet cleaving entirely.

And he said that the waters stand upon the mountains (Chagigah 12b). The mountains are the great sages, who are men marked out — like the mountain, which is very great and marked out — and they are the singular men of their generation. Just as the mountain is marked out and conspicuous in the world, so the great sages are conspicuous and marked out, like these mountains. And in the first chapter of Rosh Hashanah (11a): R. Eliezer says — from where do we know that the fathers were born in Tishrei? As it says (see Melachim I 8:2), "and they assembled to King Shlomo in the month of Eisanim [at the festival, which is the seventh month]" — the month in which the mighty ones (*eisanim*) of the world were born. [Aramaic: And from where is it implied that *eisan* (אִיתָן) is a term denoting the mighty?] As it says (Michah 6:2), "Hear, O mountains, the contention of the Lord, and you mighty ones, the foundations of the earth." And it says (Shir HaShirim 2:8), "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills" — "leaping over the mountains" by the merit of the fathers, "skipping over the hills" by the merit of the mothers. Thus far. You see, then, that the fathers of the world are called "mountains"; and therefore the great sages, who are fathers of the world as well, are likewise called "mountains." So too with (Shoftim 11:37) "and I shall go down upon the mountains." They said in the Midrash (Tanchuma, Bechukosai, *siman* 5): is there a man who goes down upon mountains? Surely one goes up upon mountains! Rather, what is "and I shall go down"? [These are] the Sanhedrin, as it says (Michah 6:2), "Hear, O mountains, the contention of the Lord." Thus far. In this midrash it is made clear to you that the great ones, who are the singular men of the generation, are called

"mountains." And this is the meaning of "and the waters stand upon the mountains": the great sages, who are the fathers of the world, are nearer to Hashem, because of their exalted wisdom and their great deeds. Therefore the waters stand upon the mountains, since the waters are what is connected and bound to them, and so on.

And he said, "and the mountains upon the wind" (Chagigah 12b) — for the level of the great sages is still not one in which they cleave to Him, may He be blessed, entirely. He said that the mountains stand upon the *ruach* (רוח, "wind"), and this is the level of *ruach hakodesh*, divine inspiration; at this level there is more cleaving to Hashem. And so, when he said (ibid.), "Woe to creatures, who see but do not know" — such is the praise of the Torah, that had they known the praise of the Torah and the mitzvos they would pursue the Torah and the mitzvos far more, since the pillars stand upon the waters and the waters upon the mountains. And he said (ibid.), "and the wind upon the storm." This is prophecy outright, for the *ruach* is a level below the level of prophecy. The level of *ruach hakodesh* is called "*ruach*" alone because *ruach hakodesh* does not come with such force; whereas prophecy would come upon the prophet with power, and therefore it says (Yechezkel 37:1), "the hand of the Lord was upon me," and (Melachim I 18:46), "and the hand of the Lord was upon Eliyahu." For this reason the prophet could not stand when prophecy came upon him. And he said that the stormy wind is suspended from the arm of HaKadosh Baruch Hu (Chagigah 12b). Since prophecy comes with power, as it is written (Melachim I 18:46), "and the hand of the Lord," he therefore said "and the stormy wind," which indicates the power of prophecy, and said that it is suspended from the arm — that is, that the prophet cleaves to the very power of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, which is called "the arm," as it is written (Devarim 26:8), "and the Lord brought us out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm"; and this is found everywhere. This is the absolute cleaving.

And because it is found everywhere that fear of Heaven is what gives a thing its endurance — a matter the Sages explained for us in tractate Shabbos (31a) on the verse (Yeshayahu 33:6), "And the faithfulness of your times shall be a store of salvations, wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is His treasure" — that even if a man has all the attributes, if the fear of the Lord is not there he counts for nothing. But the fear of the Lord is His treasure, which sustains everything, like the treasury, which is preserved; and so too the parable brought there, "a parable of a man who said to his fellow, Bring up for me a *kav* of wheat," and so on. So too Scripture says (Mishlei 10:27), "The fear of the Lord adds days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened." The reason is that one who possesses fear of Hashem, may He be blessed, makes himself an effect of Hashem, and the effect

has endurance from the standpoint of the Cause, as is known. Accordingly one may say that the storm he mentioned is the fear of Elokim: because of the fear of Hashem a man is in constant dread, and his heart storms within him. This is why he said "and the wind in the storm" — for in this there is endurance. And this is why he said "and the storm is suspended from the arm": because this excellence, fear of Heaven, cleaves to Hashem entirely. These matters are very clear.

And the Sages say: upon twelve pillars (Chagigah 12b). The explanation of this is that the earth stands upon twelve pillars, which are the twelve tribes, as the verse he brings shows (Devarim 32:8), "He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel." For "the earth He has given to the children of man" (Tehillim 115:16), and the tribes are first among all Israel, and Israel takes precedence over all the seventy nations. Therefore the world stands upon twelve pillars, which are the tribes — who have a connection to Hashem, being called "the tribes of *Kah*" (Tehillim 122:4). The tribes thus cleave to Hashem in that they are the tribes of *Kah*. And some say upon seven pillars (Chagigah 12b) — these are the fathers, for three fathers and four mothers make seven. "And the earth He has given to the children of man" — these are the fathers, who are more a beginning than the tribes. Therefore it is through the fathers that the earth has a connection to Hashem, and this is its endurance. [And] specifically the tribes or the fathers, since these are the foundations of the world: the fathers are fathers to Israel, and likewise each of the tribes is a father to his own tribe. It is fitting that they be pillars for the earth — just as they are a foundation for Israel, so they are a foundation for the world, and the earth stands upon them. But the rest of the righteous are not fit to be a foundation and a pillar for the earth, which is the whole world; only the fathers and the tribes, for in being fathers they are what is primary in the world, and therefore they are the foundation of the world. This is very clear. And R. Elazar ben Shamua says: upon one pillar (Chagigah 12b). He holds that the earth cleaves to Him, may He be blessed, through a single righteous man: since the earth was given to the children of man, and among the children of man there is one righteous man, the earth has a connection to the righteous man, and through the righteous man it has a connection to Hashem. For the righteous cleave to Hashem — that is the excellence of the righteous man. Thus the world stands upon a single righteous man. He did not wish to say what those before him said — upon twelve pillars, or upon seven pillars — because those are not in this world; they are in the World to Come. Each of the Sages, then, was raising the earth up and connecting it to Hashem, who sustains and upholds all existing things; and this is why the earth requires a connection to Hashem. Each of the Sages connects the earth, which is at the utmost bottom, to Hashem, who sustains everything, by means of intermediaries to which the earth has a connection and

which are themselves connected to Hashem, as we have said. Thus it is to be explained, and it is entirely sound.

But this statement belongs to the foundations of the science. For this sage wished to bind the earth, which is the end of existence in that it is entirely among the lower beings, and therefore he binds the earth by way of degrees that are bound one to another. He said that the earth stands upon the pillars, which are a foundation for the earth, as is known to those who understand. The pillars are bound to the waters, and thereby they endure forever. The waters stand upon the mountains — meaning that they ascend to the right, which is exalted, as in (Tehillim 36:6) "the mountains of God." And the mountains stand upon the *ruach*, which is the *ruach* of Elokim. And the *ruach* stands upon the storm, which comes from the power of might. And the storm is suspended from the arm of HaKadosh Baruch Hu like an amulet. This is clear to every man who knows the science, for this is an ascent from below up to cleaving to Him, may He be blessed, and He, may He be blessed, is the endurance of all existing things. All of this belongs to the secrets of the hidden science.

And the Sages say: upon twelve pillars (Chagigah 12b). These are the diagonal boundaries, and they are the endurance of the world. The explanation is this: these twelve parts are the divisions of body, since every body has six extensions — the upper and the lower, and four sides, namely east, west, south and north. And these six sides have twelve diagonal boundaries, namely: the east-upper boundary, the east-lower boundary, the south-upper boundary, the south-lower boundary, the west-upper boundary, the west-lower boundary, the north-upper boundary, the north-lower boundary, the east-south boundary, the south-west boundary, the west-north boundary, and the north-east boundary. These are the twelve boundaries that every body has. It is for this reason that he said the earth has twelve pillars: corresponding to the boundaries that belong to every body, since every body is divided into these twelve boundaries, no one of them like another, and each has its own endurance in its own right through having a distinct bond above. Therefore he said that the earth has twelve pillars, meaning that the earth has a binding above in all its variations, which are twelve. And this is why Scripture says (Devarim 32:8), "He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel" — meaning that He sets the boundaries of the peoples, which are the diagonal boundaries of the world, "according to the number of the children of Israel," who are twelve.

And R. Elazar ben Shamua holds that the pillars of the earth, which are the earth's endurance, are seven: corresponding to the six sides that a body has,

together with the middle, which is within the six — and these have a bond above, and that is the earth's endurance. Therefore he said that the earth stands upon seven pillars. And some say: upon one pillar (Chagigah 12b). This corresponds to the middle, since the middle is common to all the sides. The earth has a bond above from the standpoint of the middle, and that is its endurance. And therefore he said that this pillar is called "righteous," as it says (Mishlei 10:25), "and the righteous one is the foundation of the world." That is to say: this pillar, which is the earth's endurance and which is the middle, is called "righteous"; for the righteous man is like the middle, in that he does not depart from rectitude at all and does not incline to any extremity, and therefore the middle is called "righteous." This is the meaning of "upon one pillar the world stands, and Righteous is its name, as it says, 'and the righteous one is the foundation of the world.'" And for all three of these Sages, the earth's endurance comes from the standpoint of the simplicity that the earth possesses; for the earth is entirely below, and what is entirely below possesses simplicity, and this is the earth's endurance and pillar, as has been explained at length elsewhere. And the boundaries, the sides and the middle, because they are the end of the thing, possess simplicity to the greatest degree, and this is the pillar of the earth, which is its endurance. It is not possible to explain further; we have set out only a little of their exceedingly hidden words — and in particular the middle, which is the foundation of the earth's endurance. The middle is called "righteous" because the righteous man does not go out from the middle toward any extremity; rather, he does not deviate from the central point. The dispute among these Sages is very deep, and has been explained elsewhere. There is no explaining these matters further, for they are the secrets of the science, and what we have hinted at here of these matters suffices. And the first explanation is sound as well, for all the words of the Sages have a revealed aspect and a hidden one; therefore it too is sound, and this suffices.

In the chapter *Ein Dorshin* (Chagigah 12a), and in the chapter *Echad Dinei Mamonos* (Sanhedrin 38b), R. Elazar said: Adam, the first man, reached from the earth to the *rakia*, as it says (Devarim 4:32), "from the day that Elokim created man," and so forth; and when he became corrupt, He diminished him, as it says (Tehillim 139:5), "behind and before You have formed me, and You have laid Your hand upon me." Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: Adam, the first man, reached from one end of the world to the other, as it says (Devarim 4:32), "and from one end of the heavens to the other end of the heavens"; and when he became corrupt, He diminished him, as it says, "behind and before You have formed me, and You have laid Your hand upon me." [Aramaic: The verses contradict one another — this one and that one are one and the same measure.]

Now this matter strikes them as strange, for how can such things be — that from one end of the heavens, which is the east, to the other end of the heavens, which is the west, should be like the distance from the earth to the *rakia*? For if we place the earth in the middle of the heavens, as is in fact the case, it is known that from the eastern extremity to the western extremity is double the distance from the earth to the heavens, and this is clear to everyone. And how could we say that the earth is not in the middle of the heavens, contrary to what the senses testify? For half of the heavens is revealed and half is hidden, as those versed in the science of astronomy know, and this shows that the earth is in the middle of the heavens.

Now if we come to answer according to the way they understand the words of the Sages — namely, that when the Sages said "from one end of the heavens to the other end of the heavens is like from the earth to the heavens," they meant the measuring line running from the eastern end of the heavens to the western end of the heavens, which is like the measuring line running from the earth to the heavens — then we do have an answer to give them according to their own understanding, as we explained in the work *Gur Aryeh* (Devarim, ch. 4, note 20). For certainly, from the western end of the heavens is like from the earth to the heavens, and it is in this manner. Since the heavens are spherical, it is known that the line passing from one end of the heavens to the other end of the heavens, and passing over the earth, which is in the middle of the heavens, is double the line running from the center of the heavens — which is the middle, the earth — up to the heavens; and this is the longest line of all. Now every sphere is wide at its middle and grows narrower toward the top. Therefore the line that passes across the circle and divides the circle into two equal parts is the longest. A line drawn above it, which does not divide the circle into two equal parts, is shorter than the first. And the line you draw higher still is shorter yet, until the line drawn at the very top, at the end of the heavens, is a small one. If so, when you say "from the eastern end of the heavens to the western end of the heavens," which line are you speaking of? If you say it is at the wide place of the sphere of the heavens — that is, the line running from the end of the heavens and passing over the middle of the earth — one may answer you: from where do we know to say so? On the contrary, one ought to take the measure by other lines, the shorter ones, and say (Rosh Hashanah 4b), "If you have seized much, you have seized nothing; if you have seized little, you have seized" — so let us take our measure by the shorter lines.

But the explanation of the matter is this. The sphere of the heavens that is above the earth is to be divided into sides — four of them: east and west, north and south. And it must also be given an above and a below: just as we assigned it four

sides, we must assign it the above and the below, for the below is the earth, and the above is assigned to it as well. Divide these four sides into equal parts, and likewise the above [and the below], so that each one has an equal portion of the sphere of the heavens. In this way the greatest circle of the sphere of the heavens is to be divided: a third to the east, a third to the west, and a third to the side of the above; and by this the sphere of the heavens is divided as it should be. And so too for north and south, so that there are here four equal sides, with the above, the earth being below; and by this the sphere of the heavens is divided equally among the sides and the above [and the below]. Once you understand this, you will know that from the eastern end of the heavens to the western end of the heavens, when you take the measure at the shortest span, is like from the earth to the heavens. For it has already been explained to you that you must draw the line from one end of the heavens to the other at the shortest place, and that you must not draw the line at the wide place of the sphere, but only at the shortest place. And you must draw the line from the eastern side upward — that is, from the place where the above begins, for there it is shortest — and there the line is to be drawn from east to west. When you draw the line there from end to end, it is itself equal to the line running from the earth to the heavens. This is because it has already been established in the science of measurement that when you construct the side of a hexagon within a circle — that is, when you construct six equal lines within a circle — each line will be exactly equal to half the diameter of the circle; and this you can see with the sense of sight. Now when we divided the half of the sphere of the heavens that is above the earth — for the second half of the sphere is beneath the earth — and divided it into three equal parts, one part on the eastern side, one opposite it on the western side, and one part the above, then the whole sphere of the heavens, together with what lies beneath the earth, is divided into six equal parts. For the half-sphere is divided into three, and when you add to it the second half, which is beneath the earth, it is divided into six parts. It emerges that the entire sphere of the heavens is divided into six equal arcs. And the chords of these arcs are the lines laid upon the arcs by which the sphere is divided, and they are six equal lines constructed within the circle. And it has already been explained that the side of a hexagon is equal to half the diameter of the circle. It emerges, then, that the straight line drawn from the east — that is, from the place where the above begins — to the other end of the heavens, which is the west, is itself the side of a hexagon of the sphere: this line is a chord laid upon the portion of the above, which is a sixth of the sphere, and this line runs from east to west. And it is itself equal to half the diameter of the sphere, which is the line running from the middle of the earth to the utmost height. So it is set out plainly before you: when you mark off the sides and the

above as they ought to be marked off, and when you draw the line from the eastern end of the heavens to the western end of the heavens at the shortest place — as is proper, since whatever can be brought nearer ought to be brought nearer — then the line running from the eastern end of the heavens to the western end of the heavens is like the line running from the earth to the heavens, thus: heavens · the end of the heavens [west] · the end of the heavens [east] · west · east · the beginning of · the beginning of · west · earth · east. And it is evident and clear. This is the answer to be given to those who understand the words of the Sages as speaking of a measuring line perceived by the senses.

Yet you must know that here too the Sages did not set out to measure with a measuring line. Rather, what they said — "from one end of the heavens to the other end of the heavens is like from the earth to the heavens" — refers to distance in its own right. For the distance of the heavens and the earth from one another is not a matter of the line drawn from the one to the other, but of this: that the heavens are the encompassing, and the earth is the middle within the encompassing, and the encompassing and the middle are at the utmost remove from one another, as it is written (Tehillim 103:11), "For as the heavens are high above the earth" — so there is no distance like this one. It is of this that he said that from one end of the heavens to the other end of the heavens is like from the earth, which is the middle, to the heavens. For although from one end of the heavens to the other is double the span from the earth to the heavens, no distance is added here: the great distance is from the encompassing to the middle, and the return to the encompassing is no distance at all. Rather, the distance in the two of them is equal. There is no addition as between "from one end of the heavens to the other end of the heavens" and "from the earth to the heavens": the distance is from the encompassing to the middle, and the two are equal. This is the truth of the words of the Sages, and they are words of wisdom — not as they supposed, that the Sages' words fall outside inference by the intellect. There is no doubt whatever about this explanation.

In tractate Tamid (32a): Alexander asked the elders of the Negev, "Which is the greater distance — from the heavens to the earth, or from east to west?" They said to him: from east to west. You may know this, for when the sun is in the west people look at it, but when the sun is in the middle of the heavens they do not look at it. But the Sages say: the two are equal, as it says (Tehillim 103:11-12), "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His kindness toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west," and so forth. And if one of them were the greater, let Scripture write the one that is greater. Rather, what is the reason that when the sun is in the middle of the heavens not everyone looks at it?

and so on. Now do not say that when the sages of the Negev first answered that the distance to the west is greater, it was because the thickness of the earth reduces the measure from the earth to the heavens. It is not possible that they erred in this — reckoning the thickness of the earth to count for so much that on its account one could not look at the sun when it stands in the middle of the heavens, yet could look at it in the east and in the west. Moreover, the proof they brought was that when the sun stands in the middle of the heavens not everyone looks at it, whereas when it stands in the west everyone looks at it. On the contrary, the proof runs the other way: the sun is larger in the west, and if so, the distance to the west is less than the distance from the earth to the heavens, where the sun appears small.

But these matters are as we have told you: the Sages were not speaking of physical distance at all, and they have no concern with it whatever. Their question was rather about essential distance — whether the essential distance from the earth to the heavens is greater than the distance to the west, as we have explained. And they answered that the essential distance from east to west is greater than the distance from the earth to the heavens. That is to say: the sun is reckoned more distant from the earth when it is in the east and in the west than the sun is reckoned distant from the earth when it is in the middle of the heavens. For there a man cannot look at it, and therefore it is reckoned there [?] more distant from the man who is upon the earth. And certainly the reason a man can look at it in the east and in the west was not hidden from them: it is because of the vapors that rise from the earth, which interpose between the sun and the man, so that a man is able to look at the sun; whereas when it is in the middle, nothing interposes at all. Even so, the height is reckoned near, since a man cannot look at the sun there, more than the nearness he has to the east and to the west, where he can look at the sun. They were not speaking of physical distance at all; all their words concern nearness, which belongs more to the sun when it is in the middle of the heavens, since a man cannot look at it, whereas in the east and in the west he can look at it. And this is reckoned nearness to the sun not from the standpoint of measurement, but rather: in which place is the sun reckoned near to the earth — when the sun is in the east, or when it is at the height? And they held that there is greater essential distance to the east and to the west than there is from the earth to the heavens, for the reason set out there (Tamid 32a): the lines of the sun's rays fall in a straight line, without impediment, when the sun is at the height, and on that account the sun is reckoned there to be near to the man. They were not speaking of the measuring line at all. But the Sages say that it is all one measure in respect of their essential distance, as was explained above: essential distance runs from the encompassing to the middle, and nothing is

added when the line returns to the encompassing. And although in the west a man can look at the sun, we do not on that account say that it has essential distance, since there is something interposing — the vapors that lie between the sun and the man who looks at the sun. The vapors interpose, so that a man is able to gaze at it, and this is not essential distance at all. Such is the explanation of their words, and they are spoken with wisdom and insight, founded upon the bases of truth.

And should it trouble anyone: since this is said of essential distance, then when one says "from one end of the heavens to the other end of the heavens," the line is returning to the encompassing — and if so, from one end of the heavens to the other there is no distance at all, and the distance from the earth to the heavens, which runs from the middle to the encompassing, is the greater, since from one end of the heavens to the other the whole of it runs toward the encompassing. This is no difficulty at all. For certainly, inasmuch as the middle lies between the eastern extremity and the western extremity, and the line within them passes from the east over the middle to the western side, there is in any case the distance from the end of the heavens to the middle; and this measure is certainly like the distance from the earth to the *rakia*, since it runs from the middle to the encompassing — so there is here a distance from the encompassing to the middle. But the line's return to the encompassing is reckoned as nothing more than an addition, and there is no distance in its return to the encompassing. This is clear to every wise and discerning man.

Now as for their statement that the stature of Adam, the first man, reached from the earth to the heavens and from one end of the world to the other — this is a matter of great wisdom. They meant that the excellence of man, when he was in his completeness, was a separate excellence, not a physical one. And separate excellence has no measure and no limit; therefore at his creation man reached from one end of the world to the other. And when he sinned and inclined toward the material, he was then diminished, and man no longer had the separate level. This requires a very extensive explanation, for these are words of wisdom, and this is not the place for them — since we came to explain (Chagigah 12a) "this one and that one are one and the same measure," which is the primary point of astonishment and difficulty.

And know that this whole matter befell them because they understand the words of the Sages as speaking of physical measure. But it is not so. When the Sages explained here that from the earth to the heavens is one measure with from one end of the heavens to the other, what they meant is that the below and

the height are divergent in their very essence, in that this one is the unqualified below and that one is the unqualified height. The sides too are divergent in their very essence, in that this is the eastern side and that is the western side. It is of this that he said that the divergence of the sides is equal to the divergence of the earth from the heavens. The meaning of this distance is not a matter of measurement, but of the divergence itself — that there is a divergence between the unqualified height and the unqualified below, and likewise between the sides. And therefore, when Alexander asked the elders of the Negev (Tamid 32a) which is the greater distance, from the earth to the heavens or from east to west, his intent was not upon distance by measurement at all, for that is not a thing to be asked: it is known to every man. Rather, his intent was upon the divergence itself — which is the greater distance in respect of divergence: the earth, which is the utmost below, from the heavens, which are the utmost height; or the distance of east from west, which are divergent sides, just as the below and the height are. And they said that the sides diverge from one another more — that is, east and west — than the above and the below diverge. Therefore they brought as proof that when the sun is in the middle of the *rakia* a man cannot look at it; and by this reasoning the height is nearer in its own right to the below, since one can look at the sun when it is in the east or in the west. And even though in respect of distance they are entirely equal, still, from east to west is reckoned the greater distance, more than from the earth to the heavens, since when the sun is in the middle of the heavens not everyone looks at it, and this indicates greater nearness. But the Sages say: since a man's being able to look at the sun when it is in the east or in the west is only because "it does not stand in direct line" (Tamid 32a), as was explained above, this is not called distance in its own right at all; and so it is all one, from east to west and from the earth to the heavens. For the divergence of the two opposite sides and the divergence of the height and the below are one and the same thing.

To explain all of this with an absolute explanation, and to establish it, would take very long, and we have already gone on at great length. For those who do not understand the words of the Sages raised an outcry, as though — Heaven forbid — the Sages did not know things that are known to the sages of the nations. But in truth, exactly as they supposed of the Sages, so are they themselves far from the true wisdom. In this statement too the righteousness of the Sages has gone forth like brightness, for it is a statement of the deepest wisdom. We have now explained what can be explained of their profound words. Do not suppose that it is possible to explain their words to the utmost of their comprehension; that is impossible with matters such as these. But I will tell you a principle concerning the words of the Sages: all their words are of intellect — apprehensions of

existence as it truly is — and therefore we have explained to you what can be explained. To some people, certainly, our words will seem doubtful, or remote from the statement itself. But know that there is no doubt on any side in this matter: such is the explanation of their words. And even if we have not explained their words to the utmost, our words are truth and faithfulness, and none will doubt them but one who does not know the ways of the Sages. We have explained those of their sayings that appear strangest and most difficult. And if a man finds still more in their words — for there is no doubt that words of complaint have no end — let him search in their words until the way of truth is revealed to him; or let him leave it as it stands, until a spirit from on high is poured out upon him (cf. Yeshayahu 32:15), and let him not put forth a defiled thought against the sages of the world.

It would have been fitting to bring our words to a close, were it not that a certain book came into our hands, composed by one of the sons of our own people. The book was brought before me, and they said: Look, here are novel matters. When I saw it, I rejoiced over it as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride. But when I read in it, my heart was torn and my spirit was poured out within me, and I said: Woe to my eyes, that they have seen such things; woe to my ears, that they hear words like these. Cursed be the day on which these things were disclosed and brought to light. Here is a man who does not know how to understand the words of the Sages — not one of their lesser statements, still less their greater ones, and least of all their deep ones. How is he not afraid to speak about the Sages? He speaks of them as though they were men of his own generation, his own companions. Such a thing has not been in Israel until this generation. And now: "Remember the days of old, understand the years of generation after generation" (see Devarim 32:7) — each generation and its expounders, each generation and its sages (Sanhedrin 38b). Has there ever been anything like this? When you consider them closely, you will find that the Amoraim did not dispute the earlier authorities, that is, the Tannaim; and those who came after the company of the Amoraim did not dispute the Amoraim. For they knew their own standing — that the later authorities have no standing beside the earlier ones, who were near to the prophets. But now, in this generation, the lowliest of men, a fool empty of all wisdom, stands up and lets loose his tongue against holy men who lived more than a thousand years before us, and says: See my way and be wise. In several places he brings his help and support from Chaldean books and from the writers of the nations, and he treats the words of the holy and trustworthy Sages as though they were spurious words, words of wind.

And worse than this: his words were put into print, to publicize such things — things that deserve to be burned, like the books of the *minim* and the books of diviners; indeed they are worse than those — and they were set in print as though they belonged among the holy books. Our complaint, then, is not against him, for a man may at times be found with rancor in his heart, since he had been habituated to the books of the nations, as his own book testifies against him. Our complaint is rather this: that not one man was found to protest at such things being given to the press, so that this becomes a cause — Heaven forbid — for raising a hand against the Torah; and this is well known. Therefore every man who has the fear of God within him — it is fitting for him to lament for the honor of the Torah and the honor of the Sages, and to pour out his soul and his spirit over this. And so that people should not say that there is substance in what he writes — for the hearts of men who do not understand are full of folly, and those who are far from the Sages love things of this kind, because the words of the Sages are far from them — I will therefore turn my attention to his words. Although this is not really fitting, since there is no end to words of wind, still, once his words have been printed in a book, it is fitting to refute his error.

I will not take up those words of his in which he set himself up as an advocate, an interpreter and an apologist for the words of the nations and for their translation, which stands against the Torah of truth, the Torah that has been handed down to us. He himself cites, in the name of their own scholars, that they concede a place to our received tradition — that our Torah and our transmission of it are true, and that what is in their hands as the translation of the seventy-two elders who rendered the Torah into Greek is a forgery, and that their fathers inherited falsehood. Yet he made himself a *sanegor*, a counsel for the defense, to justify their translation — which is not seemly, for "what has the straw to do with the grain?" (Yirmiyahu 23:28). Now if we were to set about answering things of this kind, it would be a burden upon us. But where he expounded aggados disparagingly, corrupting their words, giving them a construction contrary to the truth, presenting them as men who knew no science at all, as though — Heaven forbid — they were devoid of knowledge, and then made excuses on their behalf, saying that no blame attaches to them if they knew no science, since they did not speak on these matters on the authority of prophecy but stated their own opinion according to what appeared to them —

Now in chapter 11 of *Imrei Binah* he cites the baraisa of tractate Tamid (32a): which is farther, from east to west, or from the earth to the heavens, and so forth. When the difficulty explained above pressed upon him, he resolved it in this way: that the earth's being spherical and set in the middle of everything, like a center

within a circle, is not accepted by our Rabbis, "and in this inquiry we have not seen one authority set against another" [?] — thus far his words. So he comes to answer for the words of the Sages by adding a further defect to the first one, for he adduced it as evidence that there is nothing surprising in their believing far-fetched things, since they themselves would not believe in the sphericity of the earth but only in the flatness of the earth — all in order to multiply the corruptions. His resolution amounts to this: that the whole view of Chazal is far from the truth. But you — the truth of the words of the Sages has already been made clear to you above, in an interpretation about which there is no doubt. This man did not stand in the council of the holy ones, and knew nothing whatever of this, for we have set out for you the clear truth, about which there is no doubt, in the explanation of the statement.

And he adduced proof that Chazal held the earth to be flat, from the second chapter of Bava Basra (25a): It was taught in a baraisa — R. Eliezer says: the world is like an *achsadra* (a portico open on one side), and the northern side is not roofed over; and when the sun reaches the northwestern corner, it bends back and rises above the *rakia*. R. Yehoshua says: [the world] is like a *kubah* (a domed tent), and the northern side is roofed over; and when the sun reaches the northwestern corner, it goes around behind the dome, as it says (Koheles 1:6), "It goes toward the south and circles toward the north" — "it goes toward the south" by day, "and circles toward the north" always by night. "Circling, circling goes the wind" (ibid.) — toward the eastern side and the western side, which it sometimes circles and sometimes traverses. Rashi, of blessed memory, explained, and these are his words: "'Like an *achsadra*' — which has no fourth wall. 'And it is not roofed over' — with a partition. 'Above the *rakia*' — it travels the northern side at the height of the *rakia*. 'Like a *kubah*' — like a tent that is enclosed all around. 'To the northwestern corner' — at night, for the sun always travels the northern side at night; and from the west it turns [to the north, for such is its course: from the east to the south], and from the south to the west, and from the west to the north. 'And it returns behind the dome' — [through a window]. 'And it goes toward the south' — the daytime circuit he calls 'going,' since it is within the space, while the nighttime circuit is called 'circling,' since it encompasses from outside. And by day it always travels in the south; even on a short day it travels no less than the southern side. 'And circles [toward the north] by night' — even on the [short] night of Tammuz, it circles by no less than the northern side," and so forth.

And he wrote, and these are his words (chapter 11 of *Imrei Binah*): "Now, for anyone who understands this halachah on its own base: although they disagree about the circling on the northern side, both of them concede that the sun's

circuit is not around the earth from above it to beneath it, like the turning of the wheel of a whetstone, by way of illustration, and that the darkness of night is not from its being then beneath the horizon. Rather it is above the surface of the earth, encompassing from side to side like a millstone, and the darkness of night comes from its being then behind the dome of the heavens. All of this follows from the earth's being flat and the heavens merely overarching it, like the *achsadra*, or like the tent that overarches the floor of a house." Thus far his words.

This man has heaped up explanation, in order to interpret and expound how the view of the Sages was alien and far-fetched. Yet this man has not understood even the easy matters — how then should he arrive at the secret of the holy ones on high? Every wise and understanding man who trembles at the word of Hashem, may He be blessed, will have his heart torn over every single word of these sinful statements of his. And I am confident in the remnant of Israel, who keep faith with Hashem and with His Torah, that they will leave this book neither name nor remnant in Israel, but will judge it as it deserves. For of one who disparages the Sages they said, in the chapter *Chelek* (Sanhedrin 99a-b), that he is included among those who say the Torah is not from heaven, or among the *apikorsim*. And it is not against this man that one should complain, as we said (in the paragraph beginning "It would have been fitting"), for there are many men who have folly in their heart and a spirit of distortion within them. But that these things were given to the press — over all this my soul is sick. It is therefore fitting to answer this man's words, and we shall not be troubled about the waste of time, so that all the peoples of the earth may know, and so that there be no other like him again, Heaven forbid.

For we have already told you what the Sages are about: that they paid no regard whatever to the corporeal matter, but only to the matter of essential nature. And we have also told you that whoever supposes that the word "the rakia" stated here means the galgal has not understood the words of the Sages and knows nothing at all. For this rakia is what divides between the upper powers and the lower beings. There is no doubt that there is a boundary between the upper powers and the lower beings, by which the upper are separate from the lower, and this rakia divides between upper and lower. According to all opinions, the sun travels and circles below, beneath the earth. The dispute between R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua is this: in R. Eliezer's view there is no rakia — that which divides between upper and lower — on the northern side, for a reason we shall explain. And this rakia is not the galgal; the rakia is rather that which divides between upper and lower. According to all opinions the sun travels above the rakia — that

is, that there is a distinction, namely the rakia, between the sun and the earth. This is what is meant by saying that it travels "above the rakia," as was explained above, that such is the view of the sages of Israel. Therefore, according to all opinions, at night the sun is above the rakia. Now since for R. Eliezer there is no rakia on the northern side, while the sun does travel on the northern side, it is impossible to say that it travels behind the dome, there being no rakia on the northern side; and so he said that when it reaches the northwestern corner it bends back and rises above the rakia, the rakia interposing between the sun and the earth. [And] for R. Yehoshua the rakia is on the northern side as well, and there is no need to say that the sun bends back and rises above the rakia — only that it travels behind the rakia. Certainly it circles like a whetstone, from the earth to what is beneath it; in any case it circles by way of the northern side. For R. Eliezer, though, there is no rakia on the northern side, and since the sun travels on the northern side, he therefore said that it bends upward — meaning that its travel is not reckoned as being on the northern side, since there is no rakia on the northern side, but rather it is reckoned that the sun bends upward, above the rakia. For although the sun travels beneath the earth, the circle in which the sun revolves is reckoned as above. And as for the northern side: since there is no rakia on the northern side, the sun is reckoned to circle above, while the northern side is reckoned as below the circle in which the sun revolves — down beneath the earth, as far as the lowest point beneath the earth; that is what is reckoned as the northern side. For the circle in which the sun revolves beneath the earth is not entirely beneath the earth, at the lowest point; that is not so. The northern side, rather, is reckoned as below the circle in which the sun revolves, all the way to what is entirely beneath the earth. So when they said that the sun bends back and rises above the rakia, the intent is only this: that the circle in which the sun revolves beneath the earth is not reckoned as its traveling on the northern side; rather the northern side is reckoned as below the circle, as far as the lowest point, and the circle in which the sun revolves is reckoned as above the northern side. And this is what is meant by saying that the sun is reckoned to travel above the rakia — that is, the rakia is reckoned to be above, and there it travels. As for what they said, that it travels behind the dome, that is not said of the galgal at all, for nothing here pertains to the galgal; it is said of the rakia, which divides between what is above and what is below. This error will be explained further shortly.

As for R. Eliezer's view, that the rakia is like an *achsadra*, breached at the fourth wall — this is because of the deficiency of the effect. It is impossible for the world to be entirely complete, with no deficiency at all; rather the world was created deficient, for it is impossible that the world be entirely complete, since the effect

is not in completeness. Therefore even the rakia, which is the beginning of the world and which divides between the upper powers and the lower beings, is deficient. And this is R. Eliezer's view: that the northern side corresponds to the left, and the left is lesser and more deficient than the right. This is the deficiency of the effect — that no effect is entirely complete. He therefore held that the rakia is not in completeness, and this is the breach. Accordingly they said in the midrash (Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, chapter 3): "The northern side — snow and hail; and from it rains issue; and there is the dwelling of the harmful spirits, as it says (Yirmiyahu 1:14), 'From the north the evil shall break forth.'" Here they made it clear that the world cannot be in completeness, because of the deficiency of the effect, and that there is therefore a breach on the northern side — meaning that the completeness of the world is not there. This is what is meant by saying that the world is like an *achsadra*: that it is complete on three sides only, and on one side it is not complete; and therefore the dwelling of the harmful spirits is there, since they are deficient creatures — as the Sages hinted concerning them (Bereishis Rabbah 7:5), that the day became holy upon them and they were not finished, for one who knows the secrets of the Torah. And we have already told you the reason it is specifically the northern side: because the left is more deficient than the right, and the southern side is called the right. But the west, which is called the back — though it is not at the level of the front, which is the east — has no deficiency in it even so. The left side, however, is deficient, as it is known to be deficient, and this matter is well known. R. Yehoshua's view is that the northern side is not deficient: although there is deficiency in the world, which is the effect, it need not be said that it is deficient in this respect, to the point of reckoning the northern side of the rakia as entirely breached; the deficiency is rather in another respect, and there is no deficiency in the beginning of the world, which is the rakia.

They further said in Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer (chapter 3) that He created the northern side and did not finish it, saying: whoever is a god, let him come and finish it — thus far. These words appear far-fetched and strange, yet they are words of supernal wisdom. The explanation of the matter is this. That He did not finish it is due to the deficiency of the effect, and this indicates that He, may He be blessed, is the sole One in the world; hence it is impossible that His action — which is the effect that proceeds from Him — should be complete with absolute completeness. For were this so, that it were complete without deficiency, there would have to be two divinities here, from each of whom half of it came, and the action of each would be deficient. And so it is fitting, and it is necessitated, that the effect be deficient — unless we were to say that the world was created by two Causes, the action of each of them deficient, as is the rule of an effect, that it is

deficient, and that it is completed by another Cause, who is likewise a god. Therefore he said that He created the northern side and did not finish it, and said: whoever is a god, let him come and finish it. That is: it is certainly impossible that the world not have been created deficient, since the effect is deficient; and if it were complete, that could only be because it comes from two divinities, each of whom completes the action of the other, so that it is complete. And when the effect is deficient and is not completed, this indicates that the Agent is one. This — that the world was created deficient — proves and necessitates that He, may He be blessed, is one and there is none besides Him: in that the world, which is the effect, is deficient and is not completed, it follows that there is no further Cause to complete the world, which is the effect. This is what they said, that HaKadosh Baruch Hu created the world complete on three sides and breached on the fourth side, and let whoever is a god finish it. For because of the deficiency of the effect, which is deficient, there is deficiency in the world; and if there were another god in the world, why has the deficiency of the effect not been made complete? All their words, then, are wisdom and understanding, and these words are no more than a drop from the sea. But the foolish man supposes, of the words of the Sages, that they are saying the world is breached on one side — a breach in the galgal. This is nothing but the folly of the one who thinks it; he lays his own blemish and his own folly upon the Sages.

He further adduced material with which to cast a blemish on the words of the Sages, as though they believe every strange thing. In Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer (end of chapter 5): "The sun rides in a chariot and rises crowned like a bridegroom," and so forth. And they said the same in Bamidbar Rabbah (12:4): "'Its chariot was of purple' (Shir HaShirim 3:10) — this is the sun, which is set above, and rides in a chariot, and gives light to the world; for it was taught, 'And he is like a bridegroom,'" and so forth. This man came to resolve the passage by making this chariot the four *tekufos* of the year, wishing to join the words of the Sages to the words of the nations. [Aramaic: Take his favor and cast it upon the thorns.] It is neither becoming nor fitting for a man like him to interpret the words of the Sages, for he has no dealing with what is hidden. How can the passage bear the reading that "rides in a chariot" means the four *tekufos*? What was there in such a statement that they should wish to conceal it and speak by hint? Who does not know that the sun has four *tekufos*?

The explanation is rather this. It is a known thing that one who rides upon something is separate from what he rides upon. The Rambam, of blessed memory, treated this at length in the work *Moreh Nevuchim*, in his explanation of the Merkavah (I:70); it is a matter well known and altogether obvious. And we

have already said above, many times over, that the sun is separate from all the lower existents, for it rules in the world, and therefore rides upon them. That is precisely the force of "the sun, which is set above, and rides in a chariot": it indicates that the sun is set over all the lower beings and is separate from them. This is the essential nature of the sun — that it is separate from the lower existents — as we explained at length above.

He further brings proof (chapter 11 of *Imrei Binah*) from what they said (Ta'anis 10a), that the whole world is like a pot-lid for Gehinnom. From this, he argues, it is established that the Sages, of blessed memory, believe the earth to be flat, since the lid of a pot is flat. Is there folly to match this? The Sages did not say that the whole world is like a pot-lid. They came rather to say that Gehinnom exceeds the world on every side — on the four sides and from below alike — just as the pot exceeds its lid everywhere except at the top, where the pot does not exceed it. So too Gehinnom exceeds on every side except at its top, for Gehinnom does not rise upward: it is called "She'ol" (the netherworld), and "upper" does not apply to it. That is why the world is likened to a pot-lid for Gehinnom, and the matter is plain. In this they explained the nature of Gehinnom — and these are secrets of wisdom, though this is not the place for them.

He further took in his hand precious stones and jewels of a crown, and flung them from his hand as though they were pebbles, for he understood all these matters without wisdom or knowledge. Yonasan ben Uziel rendered (Bereishis 1:7) "And God made the rakia [and divided between the waters that were beneath the rakia and the waters that were above the rakia, and it was so]" as follows: "And He made the thickness of the rakia three *etzba'os* (fingerbreadths), between the side of the heavens and the waters of the Ocean; and He divided between the waters that were below the rakia and the waters that were above the rakia." Because he understood this rakia to be the galgal, he found the statement astonishing, and in his own judgment he turned back the words of Yonasan ben Uziel — whose wisdom was such that every bird that flew over him was burned up (Sukkah 28a). In truth his words do not deserve an answer, and of him one may say what people say: a single man can raise more questions than a hundred great sages can answer. Even so, we shall answer his words, now that he has uncovered his face and expounded aggadah so as to cast a blemish upon it.

And this is the answer. We have already said that the rakia is not the galgal, but the beginning of the world of the lower beings, and that it divides between the lower beings and the upper powers. Now anything that divides between one thing and another, standing in the middle, has three parts: it has some aspect

toward what is above; there is in it an aspect toward what is below; and it has an aspect distinct to itself, belonging neither to what is above nor to what is below. That is why Yonasan ben Uziel rendered of the rakia that it is like three *etzba'os*. He meant by this that this rakia, in dividing, stands in relation to what is above the rakia, and stands in relation likewise to what is below the rakia, and has in it something distinct to itself, as is the rule of that which divides, as has been explained. We have not come to explain to you the very secret of the upper waters and the lower waters and of the rakia that divides between them, for this is not its place. Only this: that what Yonasan ben Uziel said — that this rakia is three *etzba'os* — is a matter of wisdom belonging to *Ma'aseh Bereishis*. Indeed there is a Gemara to this effect in the chapter *Ein Dorshin* (Chagigah 15a): "I was gazing between the upper waters and the lower, and there is no more than three *etzba'os* between the upper waters and the lower." And Scripture says (Bereishis 1:6), "Let there be a rakia in the midst of the waters, and let it divide between waters and waters." It would not have been fitting to speak of this at all — only to show everyone how he derided matters that are exceedingly great.

He speaks of what Chazal said, that Yerushalayim is at the middle of the world — as they said in Yoma, in the chapter *Hotzi'u Lo* (54b), "the world was created from its middle," as it is written (Tehillim 50:2), "From Tzion, the perfection of beauty." And so it is in the Tanchuma, Parshas Kedoshim (*siman* 10): "Just as this navel is set at the middle of a man, so the Land of Israel is set at the middle of the world; and Yerushalayim is at the middle of the Land of Israel; and the Beis HaMikdash at the middle of Yerushalayim; and the Heichal (the Sanctuary) at the middle of the Beis HaMikdash; and the Aron (the Ark) at the middle of the Heichal; and the *Even Shesiyah* (the Foundation Stone) before the Aron, from which the world was founded." Thus far the midrash. Now this man went to great lengths to bring proof that the Land of Israel is not the true navel of the earth at all, and he wrote concerning it, in his own words: "The truth suffers no deficiency, and is not weakened though all the people of the earth dispute it." Then, having piled up proofs that the navel of the earth is not Yerushalayim, he healed the fracture lightly, with a dressing and a plaster that had been neither pressed out nor softened with the oil of wisdom and understanding. And such is this man's way. He heaps up proofs, difficulties and refutations — everything he has found in the writers of the nations and elsewhere — and then, after demolishing with a wall of iron, he daubs the breach over, healing the fracture lightly with insipid spittle. This, too, is the worse fault. A man who raises an objection against another leaves the resolution of the difficulty to someone else; but one who answers and resolves it with empty, insipid words is worse still, for he makes it appear that there is no answer other than this one — and this one is an empty and insipid thing.

And know that this matter — what Chazal said, that Yerushalayim is at the middle of the world — is like the other matters we have brought above: people understand such statements as measurements of physical magnitude perceived by the senses, and the matter is not so at all. What they said, that the Land of Israel is at the middle of the world, means this. Certainly this much is true, correct and established: if the name "middle" were properly applied to a thing standing at the literal middle of the world, then the middle of the world would have to be the place beneath that point in the heavens where the circle of midday (the meridian), which passes from pole to pole, cuts the circle that equalizes the day (the equinoctial), which passes from the east point to the west point, into two equal parts — for that is the middle of the world according to the position of the sphere of the heavens. But it is not fitting that this be the middle of the world. Rather, the true middle of the world is that which is the middle, because the sides are divided from one another. That is to say, the sides differ in their character: the eastern side is not like the western side in its character, and the western is not like the eastern; the southern side is not like the northern in its character, and the northern is not like the southern in its character — each one differs. So too they said in the second chapter of Bava Basra (25b) on "Out of the chamber comes the storm-wind" (Iyov 37:9): "this is the south wind," and so forth — as is explained there, each wind has its own distinct character. And there is likewise no doubt that the portion which is the middle according to the position of the sphere of [the heavens] is not the Land of Israel. But the middle of the world in the sense of an equal middle among the sides that differ, standing midway between them — that is the Land of Israel, which is the middle between the differing sides, no one of which is like another. And the difference among the sides depends on the essential nature of the world. Proof of this is what they said (Tanchuma, Kedoshim, *siman* 10): that the Land of Israel is at the middle of the world just as the navel is at the middle of a man — as they expounded on "Your navel is a round goblet" (Shir HaShirim 7:3), "this is the Beis HaMikdash," which is at the middle of the world. Yet if you measure with a line, the navel is not at the middle by physical measurement. Rather, the navel is in the middle between the part called the upper part and the part which is the lower part, and each part has its own distinct character. This follows from the essential nature of man, not from physical measurement. Therefore the Land of Israel is reckoned to be at the middle of the world, and between the sides that differ from one another. And indeed it is a land of which Scripture says, "you shall not lack *kol* (כָּל, "anything") in it" (Devarim 8:9) — so that "all" pertains to the Land of Israel. And this can hold only of something standing in the middle, which comprises both extremes, as is well known. The Land of Israel therefore has the *segulah* of the middle. For one

land is apt for one thing and another land for another, since these things are divided among them; but the Land of Israel has everything in it, and that belongs to the *segulah* of the middle. Nor should one object: why should the middle not be the middle according to the position of the sphere of the heavens? This is no difficulty, for being the middle by physical measure counts for nothing and is no excellence at all. But the thing that stands in the middle between the two differing sides is the balanced thing, which does not go out to any extreme but remains in the middle — and that carries the weight of an exalted excellence. For this reason the Land of Israel is called "the land of the living," since this land is in the middle between the extremes. Everything that is an extreme moves toward the extreme, and privation cleaves to the extreme; whereas the Land of Israel, which does not incline toward the extreme, is the land of the living. All of this is because the Land of Israel lies between the two differing sides; there is no need to say that it is the middle by the measuring line. And for this reason everyone who goes to the Land of Israel is said to "go up." This is because the Land of Israel is in the middle and does not incline toward the extreme in which privation lies — for movement toward that extreme is called "going down," just as perdition is called *She'ol*, and descent belongs to *She'ol*. But of the Land of Israel, which is the land of the living, only ascent is spoken.

And further, it is entirely fitting that the Land of Israel be the middle. Since the earth is spherical, the middle of a sphere has no particular place at all: the name "middle" falls upon any place on the sphere whatever, precisely because it has no particular place. One must therefore posit as the middle something that is balanced and does not incline toward the extreme — and that is the Land of Israel. Hence the Land of Israel is entirely the middle of the world. And so they said (Kiddushin 69a) of the Land of Israel that it is higher than all other lands, for this same reason: that the Land of Israel is called the middle. For you can set the high point of a sphere at nothing but what is the middle of the sphere, and at no other place. The high point of a sphere is the middle among all four sides, which are lower than it. And we have already established that the middle place is the Land of Israel and no other place; so it is fitting to posit that the Land of Israel is the high point as well, and therefore it is necessary that the Land of Israel be the high point of the sphere. Even though the earth is spherical, and with anything spherical you can make the middle be at [whatever] place you wish, still, once we have said that in view of the difference among the sides, which are divided, nothing is the middle except the Land of Israel — which is the middle in itself, a land that possesses the mean and does not depart from the balance — it is fitting on that account to posit the Land of Israel at the middle of the world. This was not said with reference to the measuring line at all. Nothing entered their minds

except that the Holy Land, according to its excellence, possesses the mean and inclines to no extreme. And therefore the middle place of the world must be posited as the Land of Israel specifically. For the earth is like a perfectly uniform sphere; and since the holy Land of Israel is the middle between the two differing sides, and is the middle in itself, it too must be set as the middle of the sphere. Even though on a sphere any place at all can be called the middle, still, because the Land of Israel is the middle in itself, as we have said, it is fitting that it be the middle of the sphere as well. For this reason "going up" applies to it also: once the Land of Israel has been posited as the middle of the sphere, and the middle of the sphere is higher than everything else, ascent applies to it too, for the reason that has been explained. Thus you find (Bereishis 46:4), "I will go down with you to Mitzrayim, and I will also surely bring you up" — and Mitzrayim lies to the south of the Land of Israel (Rashi, Bereishis 13:1). And it is written (Yirmiyahu 23:7), "As Hashem, may He be blessed, lives, who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north" — so that from every side alike, "going up" is said of the Land of Israel. These matters are exceedingly clear: according to the essential nature of the world the Land of Israel is at the middle, for the reason we have given, and one must posit on that account that the high point of the sphere is the Land of Israel. And every man of understanding in knowledge knows that these matters are exceedingly clear.

Now the man we spoke of searched through the books of the gentiles and the nations, and it is on that account that he came to dispute the words of Chazal. In chapter 12 he wrote that a contradiction appears in their words, where they undertake to tell us who cut down the Jews of Alexandria; and the end of his talk is wild folly. He wrote, in his own words: "Even if we are willing to concede that certain matters reached the ears of the Sages in some garbled form [?], and that this is how they related them to us, not a [thing] is diminished from their honor." Thus far his words. The whole of what he says comes from what is stated in tractate Sukkah, in the chapter *HeChalil* (51b), where it says: "One who has not seen the glory of Alexandria has never seen the glory of Israel," and so forth — [Aramaic: and Alexander of Macedon killed them all]. In the Yerushalmi (Sukkah 5:1) this incident is stated explicitly, and it says there that Archinus killed them; and so too in Midrash Eichah Rabbasi and in the other midrashim. It was on that account that he wrote what he wrote. In this he is provoking the *yetzer hara* (the evil inclination) against himself. What business has he to invent out of his own heart the charge that certain of Chazal's words came down garbled? Surely the garbling is his own. And if his soul so longed after his difficulty — that the reading troubles him, namely that we read (Sukkah 51b) "Alexander of Macedon" — surely our Rabbis of blessed memory, the Baalei Tosafos (the Tosafists), and the

other commentators, whenever a contradiction appeared in a reading, would say *hachi garsinan*, "this is how we read it." For this much is clear: what one man reads may have come down to him with an error in his reading, and for that reason they would strike a reading out — all the more so where one name has been exchanged for another, which is an exceedingly common thing. That is what he should have said, rather than playing the fool who spreads slander (cf. Mishlei 10:18), as he has done throughout. There is no doubt that on account of his falsified words all the luminaries of heaven were eclipsed, for what he wants is to darken with his errors every luminary that Hashem, may He be blessed, has set in the world. We have already said that his words deserve no attention, since there is nothing in all of them but a multitude of words, like any man who multiplies words. You will find in him no interpretation fit for a wise man possessed of intellect and knowledge — only foolishness and a multitude of words. As we have already said, this is the way of fools: one of them asks more than a thousand wise men can answer. And so with his dragging in the books of the nations, and the like. This alone is to be said of it: as for the day on which his errors came out into the light — let that day be dark, let no brightness shine upon it, the day his words came out in print. But certainly, quite apart from the fact that he could have said "we read thus and so," he deliberately raises difficulties for himself and provokes the *yetzer hara* against himself. And so the greater part of his Torah is reckoned as something alien, for most of his edifice rests upon the writers of the nations, and it is to them that he gives place and renown.

And certainly we can say that the reading is sound (Sukkah 51b): that Alexander of Macedon destroyed them, and that this was their punishment. As for what is said in the fifth chapter of Gittin (57b) on "The voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands are the hands of Esav" (Bereishis 27:22) — "this is Hadrian Caesar, who killed in Alexandria twice as many as those who came out of Mitzrayim" — Tosafos there (s.v. *Zeh*) have already explained it: perhaps they were destroyed twice, once in the days of Alexander of Macedon and once in the days of Hadrian Caesar. And as for the fact that the Yerushalmi does not likewise reckon both destructions, this is because Alexander is the one who began to annul their honor and their greatness, and they never returned to their former honor, until Hadrian, who killed them off altogether. In tractate Sukkah, there, only Alexander is mentioned, because he is the one who began to annul their great honor. And as for the Yerushalmi's saying that Trachinus killed them, while the fifth chapter of Gittin (57b) says "this is Hadrian Caesar, who killed," and so forth — one may say that Hadrian is the king who sent Trachinus out to war against them, and so the whole of it is reckoned to him. The Yerushalmi (Sukkah 5:1) mentions only the man who did the deed, namely Trachinus, who did the killing

among them, and it says there that it was Trachinus who killed in Alexandria. And so it is found in a number of midrashim besides this one, that the killing at Alexandria was carried out by Trachinus.

He raised a further difficulty: the Gemara (Gittin 57b) says "this is Vespasian Caesar, who killed in the city of Beitar," and so forth, whereas the Yerushalmi (Ta'anis 4:5) and the other midrashim prove that it was Hadrian Caesar who killed at Beitar, and not Vespasian Caesar. Here too the same resolution applies: the Yerushalmi mentions the man who did the deed, and that was Hadrian Caesar. There is therefore no difficulty, since it is not always the Caesar himself who goes out to war — as we say (Gittin 56a), "he sent Nero Caesar against them," "he sent Vespasian Caesar," and (Gittin 56b) "he sent Titus against them." Reason supports this, since it says "this is Hadrian Caesar who killed" — that he is nothing more than the man who did the deed, the one who killed. And do not be astonished that it calls him "Hadrian Caesar" when he is not Caesar. This is no difficulty, for he is *palga d'kaisar*, a half-Caesar, as it is stated in the chapter *Chelek* (Sanhedrin 98b) concerning "and My servant David shall be *nasi* (a prince) to them" (Yechezkel 37:25), where it says: like a Caesar and a half-Caesar. And so one must say of what it says (Gittin 56a), "he sent Nero Caesar against them," and so forth: it is impossible to say that he reigned at all, since Nero converted. Nor is it possible to say that he was Caesar from the outset. For it says "he sent Nero Caesar against them," and likewise (ibid.) "he sent Vespasian Caesar against them," which implies that at the moment of the sending he was Caesar — and that is not so, for it was only afterwards that they appointed him Caesar over them, and in that case it should not have said "he sent Vespasian Caesar against them." Rather, none of these was an absolute Caesar, but only a half-Caesar, and that is why he is called by the name "Caesar." And now there is no difficulty at all.

However, even though it seems clear that there is no difficulty whatever, I say this: the words of the Sages are not a book of chronicles, in which scribes set down the events that took place. Had they come to state who it was that killed at Beitar, and what befell [Hadrian], the difficulty would stand. But the Sages did not come to relate any of that — only what befell Israel and the Holy Land, that kings destroyed it; and they expounded this verse (Bereishis 27:22), "The voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands are the hands of Esav." And the Sages' view is not content with there having been two destructions, for the destruction was decreed upon them once, not twice. As for Beitar, although their kingdom continued for some years after the destruction, it is nonetheless one destruction, and the two are not separate things. Certainly, had Yerushalayim not been destroyed, Beitar would not have been destroyed; the whole of it followed upon the destruction of

Yerushalayim. This is plain, for you will find in the chapter *HaNizakin* (Gittin 55b) that it recounts the destruction of Tur Malka and of Beitar together with the destruction of Yerushalayim, as though the whole were a single event. It is not fitting to say that there were two, and for that reason it attaches the destruction of Beitar to Vespasian. And this is great wisdom — to make the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash and the destruction of Beitar literally one destruction. The principle of the matter is this: this man imagined, God forbid, that he could exchange the truth for falsehood; but every man of religion and understanding will know that these words are trustworthy.

In chapter 15 (of *Imrei Binah*) he set out to expound the aggados as a thing of blemish, taking his start from what is found from Chazal in the Yerushalmi (Shabbos 16:1): [Aramaic: "This aggadah — one who writes it has no share, one who expounds it is scorched, and one who hears it receives no reward. R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: In all my days I never looked into aggadah, but on one occasion I found it written: 175 sections in the Torah — corresponding to the years of Avraham; 147 psalms [that are written in Tehillim] — corresponding to the years of Yaakov, 'and You are enthroned upon the praises of Israel' (Tehillim 22:4); 123 times they answer *Halleluyah* — corresponding to the years of Aharon, the holy one of Hashem," and so on.] Over against this he sets the chapter *HaParah* (Bava Kamma 55a): R. Tanchum was regularly to be found with R. Yehoshua ben Levi for aggadah. And in the Midrash Rabbah: Rav Shimi was regularly found before R. Shimon ben Pazi for *shema'ta* (the halachic give-and-take), and before R. Yehoshua ben Levi for aggadah. And in Midrash Tehillim (psalm 28), on "for they do not understand the works of Hashem" (Tehillim 28:5), R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: he merits sons who are masters of wisdom, masters of aggadah. So, he says, the contradiction is plain. And at the end he wrote: "Truly, the one who will bring us out of the siege will be the genuine Gaon, Rav Sherira, of blessed memory, and his son as well, who walks in his ways. For Rav Sherira Gaon wrote of the aggados in *Megillas Setarim*, and these are his words: 'Those matters that emerge from a verse (*hani milei d'nafka mi-pesuka*), and are called "midrash" and "aggadah," are *umdena* — an assessment of the mind.' Thus far." And this — what is found in the name of Rav Sherira, "Those matters that emerge from verses," and so forth — he made into a crown for his head. Upon every last one of his own statements, which it is forbidden even to look at, all the more so to carry upon one's lips, he brought the words of that Gaon, so as to hang himself on a great tree with cords of falsehood and cart-ropes of sin. He wrote, and these are his words: "Accordingly it appears that among the aggados there are some that resemble, in a certain respect, the angels created out of the river of *Dinur*, of whom Chazal spoke in a number of places — that once they have said their song

they pass away and return no more. For some of the aggados, once the expositor has reached through them the end he desired, as stated, are neither remembered nor recalled, so as to bring [proof] from them concerning events that actually occurred; and the truth of these statements is far from the intellect." Thus far his words. And further on, after this, it is written, in his words: "And likewise, in keeping with what we have said regarding the words of Rav Sherira, that the aggados are *umdena*, and in keeping with the words of the Rambam, of blessed memory, who always ascribed parable to them, you may go on to judge concerning some of them that they are sheer invention," and so forth. See how this man, in his folly, has made the words of the Sages into so many imaginings meant to entice the masses — as you will see when he says that they are an invention and a stratagem to entice the multitude. All of this is nothing but words of scorn, and the judgment such a man deserves is known.

Now go and learn from the chapter *HaSefinah* (Bava Basra 75a). R. Yochanan sat and expounded: the Holy One, blessed is He, will in time to come bring precious stones and pearls thirty by thirty, and hollow out in them ten by twenty in height, and set them up in the gates of Yerushalayim. A certain student mocked him: "Now we cannot find stones even the size of an egg — are we to find any as great as this!" In time his ship put out to sea, and he saw the ministering angels sawing precious stones and pearls thirty by thirty, hollowed out ten by twenty in height. He said, "For whom are these?" They said, "The Holy One, blessed is He, will in time to come set them up in the gates of Yerushalayim." He came before R. Yochanan and said to him, "Expound, master, for it is fitting for you to expound: just as you said, so I saw." He said to him, "Empty one! Had you not seen, you would not have believed. You are one who mocks the words of the Sages." He set his eyes upon him, and he was made a heap of bones. Thus far. And how many heaps, and heaps upon heaps, would have been made of this man's bones — one for every single thing he does not believe! As anyone may see from what he writes: any matter that strikes him as the least bit strange, he pronounces an invention, or something of the kind.

As for his wish to hang himself on the great and holy tree — that is, on what is found in the name of Rav Sherira Gaon — he has not understood the Gaon's words at all. For if Rav Sherira's intent were as he understood it, namely that the words of aggadah are not certain but are merely a matter of what someone thought, why would he have had to say "those matters that emerge from within a verse"? Are there no aggados except those that emerge from Scripture? And why did he not take in every aggadah and say that it is *umdena*? He therefore did not understand his words. For the Gaon, of blessed memory, came to say this: let no

one object that when they expounded something from Scripture, the exposition is in truth remote from the language of Scripture. It is to this that he said they are *umdena* — meaning that the *sevara* itself requires the matter, and they merely rested it upon the verse. Had knowledge and *sevara* not required these things, they would not have expounded them from Scripture at all. That is what "they are *umdena*" means, and it is plain. And in any case Mar the son of Ravina never set his seal to this matter, that this man should make it the head and the whole purpose of his argument, hanging himself on a great tree with cords of falsehood.

So too the proof he brought from what is said (Yerushalmi, Shabbos 16:1), "one who writes it has no share" — Heaven forbid that such a thing should be said of the aggados, in which all the secrets of the Torah and of wisdom are stored away for whoever knows how to understand. The matter is rather this: they were accustomed to write aggados down, because all the halachos were familiar and current with them by heart, whereas with aggados they were not fluent by heart and needed to write them. And so you find the Gemara in a number of places. Concerning R. Yochanan (Berachos 23a): when he would go in to the privy, he would take a book of aggadah and hand it over. And again (Bava Metzia 116a): he would bring out a book of aggadah, in the case of "things that are made to be lent and hired." And again (Gittin 60a): R. Yochanan would study a book of aggadah on Shabbos. But you will not find "a book of halachos," and this is because they were fluent in halachah by heart and had no need to write it; aggadah, however, they did write, because they were not expert in it by heart. It is of this that they said there (Yerushalmi, Shabbos 16:1) "one who writes it has no share" — because it is forbidden to make a book apart from the twenty-four books, and therefore "he has no share," meaning that he has no share in the World to Come, since it is as though he were adding to the Torah. So it was in their days. Now, however, on account of "It is a time to act for Hashem; they have voided Your Torah" (Tehillim 119:126), the Oral Torah is written down (Gittin 60a). So too "one who expounds it is scorched" — that is, one who expounds it out of the book. And so too "the one who hears receives no reward" — because the derashah came about by means of something it is forbidden to do, and therefore he receives no reward. The matter is explicit in the Yerushalmi, in the chapter *Kol Kisvei* (Shabbos 16:1), which brings this statement in connection with the rule that the Oral Torah is not written down. And here a man who does not know how to understand a *sugya* of the Gemara or the plain sense of a statement raises objections against the words of the Sages — to the point that he wrote at the end of his remarks, in his own words: "And the one who will bring us out of this strait will be the Gaon Rav Sherira, who wrote as follows: 'Those matters that emerge from a verse,'" and so forth. He thereby made it appear that this is why R. Yehoshua ben Levi held that

the aggados are not to be studied — because there is nothing in them but *umdena*. But he understood neither the words of the Yerushalmi nor the words of Rav Sherira, if indeed Rav Sherira Gaon wrote these words at all.

As for what Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon wrote at the end of Berachos concerning the episode of the *ova tamya* (the necromancer) (Berachos 59a) — "This matter is aggadah, and in every case like it the Rabbanan said that one does not rely on the words of aggadah," thus far — it is not as this man understood it. He wrote, and these are his words: "Each one of them was said according to the need of the moment, to draw the heart of the people to this reason or to that, and the one who said it did not himself lay it down as fixed; but in the words of the Yerushalmi cited above, 'he is scorched.'" Thus far his words. Any man of religion who hears these things — which this man has raised against the religion of the Torah of Moshe and against the Sages, as though the words of aggadah were nothing but contrivance, drawing men's hearts with ropes of falsehood — will rend his heart over it; and words such as these are set in print! As for the words of Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon, Heaven forbid that his intent should be anything of the kind. He means only that one may not rely on the words of aggadah so as to explain the aggadah according to its plain sense and say that such and such is so before the Holy One, blessed is He, as in the episode of the *ova tamya* — for there is a matter of wisdom here. We have already explained these things above quite clearly, as you will see if you examine them. It is for this reason that one may not rely on the plain sense of the words of aggadah. And this is precisely what they meant when they said that one does not raise refutations in aggadah: it is possible that the one who said it said it in a concealed way, and therefore one neither refutes nor raises difficulties against an aggadah taken according to its plain sense. So it appears from the words of some of the commentators — that this is the reason one does not rely on the words of aggadah, and does not raise difficulties or refutations in aggadah. For when a man refutes or raises a difficulty against the aggadah, he is overturning that aggadah; yet it may be that there is no difficulty at all, and that one who understands could resolve it — so that we should not [overturn] the aggadah and annul it. In a matter of halachah and law it is understandable: a law may not be ruled unless no contradiction stands against it, and if a contradiction does stand against it, it is not right to act upon it, and therefore one must raise difficulties. But in a matter like this, from which no ruling issues, neither a prohibition nor a permission, one should not raise a difficulty and overturn the statement — for perhaps he will find no resolution, and will overturn the statement until it is void, whereas in all likelihood there is no difficulty at all, since the author of the statement did not err.

For this reason they also said (Yerushalmi, Chagigah 1:8) that one does not learn halachah out of aggadah: because it has not been clarified through difficulties and answers, which is what would make it fit to learn halachah out of aggadah; but since it has not been clarified with full clarity, one does not learn halachah out of aggadah. This is the meaning of what they said in the matter of the *Akeidah* (Bereishis Rabbah 56:6), "From where do we learn slaughtering?" and so forth; and it says there: "If he told you from formal teaching, he cannot retract it; but if he told you from aggadah, he can retract in this." That is: if he told you to learn the law of slaughtering from a verse, then this law has certainly been clarified through difficulties and resolutions, and it is refined sevenfold, and therefore he does not retract it. But if he said mere words of aggadah, then, since the matter has not been clarified and refined through difficulties and resolutions, he sometimes does retract. And because in a matter of halachah it must be clarified through difficulties and resolutions, therefore one does not learn halachah out of aggadah. For this same reason they said that one does not learn halachah from a mishnah: the reason being that in the Mishnah it has not been clarified through difficulties and resolutions, as the halachah in the Gemara has been clarified — for the Gemara is the clarification of the Mishnah.

However, what they said — that one does not learn halachah out of the words of aggadah, and that one does not raise refutations in aggadah — carries a further point of wisdom. For halachah is halachah for practice, and a thing that is halachah for practice does not deviate from the absolute truth. Not so a thing that is not halachah for practice, such as the words of aggadah: such a thing is not entirely so, but only in a certain respect. And though the Torah has many faces, still, a thing that is halachah for practice has only one face. That is why he said that one does not raise difficulties or questions on the words of aggadah, and does not learn halachah from the words of aggadah. This is the true interpretation, and there is no doubt of it. But to say that the aggados are not words of Torah, like the rest of the Torah that was spoken from Sinai — whoever says this has no share in the World to Come. And this is proved from the very thing he himself brought as evidence, that through the aggados a man comes to know his Creator: they are words of divine science for one who understands what they say — not for one who has no wisdom or knowledge whatever, and apprehends nothing but the physical things in front of him. The words of the Sages are an apprehension of exceeding, exceeding depth.

Do not be astonished and ask: if the aggados are so deep an apprehension, why did they say (Chagigah 14a) "What have you to do with aggados?" and so forth — why do we not give their study precedence over the words of halachah? This is no

difficulty, for halachah is in every case the most excellent of all, since halachah is the completeness of action, as we have said. Not so aggadah, which does not bring one to action — and the purpose of the Torah is action. That is why they said in the Yerushalmi (Horayos 3:5): "and God did not give him power" (Koheles 6:2) — this is the master of aggadah, who neither forbids nor permits, and so forth. That is to say, there is no action in aggadah, and action is the purpose of the Torah. Yet all the words of aggadah are the science of the Torah, and it is of this that they said (Sifrei, Devarim 11:22): "If you wish to know the Former of all, occupy yourself with aggadah." Thus far. For they surely open the gate of heaven, and open every treasury that is sealed and shut. But for a man who has no key, the treasury of glory stands before his eyes to see, and of it he does not eat. And this is owing to his folly, in that he does not know how to discriminate; and everything he has said is nothing but prattle and scorn. Yet in this my spirit is calmed and quieted and my mind set at ease: that no man who holds to the religion of the Torah of Moshe will drink these evil waters, these waters of the curse, that this man has given men to drink. For anyone who can grasp truth apart from falsehood will see that he has erred in most of what he says, and that all his words are nothing but folly — errors that no man ought to make, which shows his deficiency and his folly in wisdom.

Once more a spirit of confusion came over him, in chapter 17 (in *Imrei Binah*), and these are his words: "Among the statements you will observe to be neither from an ancient tradition nor necessitated by Scripture, etc." — down to: "in the chapter *Ben Sorer uMoreh* (Sanhedrin 69b), 'the earlier generations used to father children at eight years old.' Surely their intent was to say that the strength of the earlier generations was great, and their nature stronger than ours. Yet this very case refutes it, and the treacherous bow is turned back — for from the Torah's own narratives it has already been shown that whoever is quick to father children is quick to die." And he goes on at length there.

These, precisely, are his words; and turn them over as you will, they are all poison-weed and wormwood, thorns and barbs, against the religion of the Torah of Moshe and against the words of the Sages. He would feed others the poison-weed and the wormwood by the sweetness of his tongue, and the thorns and the barbs mixed in among other matters, until they come into the reader's hand and pierce his palm (Yeshayahu 36:6), and enter his innards to make the belly swell and the thigh fall away (Bamidbar 5:22), until he can no longer rise (Eichah 1:14).

Now the whole of what makes this man unwilling to believe that the earlier generations fathered children at eight is his claim that in the Torah we find their

lives to have been long, and that they did not begin to father children until a long time had passed. But surely the answer to this is plain. When the world was created, and Adam, the first man, was the handiwork of Hashem, may He be blessed, it was certainly fitting that his life should be exceedingly long — and so too the lives of all the generations near to him, down to the Flood. And in proportion to the length of their lives, so was their procreation. For offspring exist in order to maintain the world, as it is written (Koheles 1:4), "One generation goes and another generation comes." That is why they did not raise up offspring in their youth: offspring were not yet needed for the endurance of the world, and so they raised them up in proportion to their lifespan, down to the Flood. There was no order or fixed allotment whatever in this matter — that is, in the length of their days. For after the Flood the generations no longer belonged to Adam, the first man, who was His handiwork, and therefore there was no fixed allotment here at all. Just so, there was no fixed allotment for procreation either: sometimes they were early, sometimes they were not. This lasted until man's allotment became seventy years, and then there was a fixed allotment for procreation as well, namely from twelve years old — for then everything ran by measure and by order, as Hashem laid it down.

As for the difficulty Rabbeinu Yeshayah raised against the Gemara, on what we say (Sanhedrin 69b) — that a girl of seven would give birth at seven [?], and Betzalel at eight — he wrote as follows: "It is difficult for me, from what we say further on: [Aramaic: 'But when Betzalel made the Mishkan he was thirteen years old, as it is written (Shemos 36:4), "each man from his work."'] This shows that even in the earlier generations one is not called 'a man' at less than thirteen years. And it seems to me that although they fathered children at eight, one is not called 'a man' at less than thirteen, because that was a miraculous occurrence, and one does not derive a rule from a miraculous occurrence. It is for this reason that he said we do not derive from the earlier generations — because the case in which we find that they fathered children at eight was a miraculous occurrence." Thus far his words.

Now this man understood the words of the Rav, R. Yeshayah, of blessed memory, to mean that it was entirely by way of miracle, and on that basis he brought a proof that in the course of nature no one fathers a child before twelve. But he did not understand the Rav's words — as is his way, to understand nothing. For how can the Rav's words be explained in that way? R. Yeshayah came to explain the Gemara, and the Gemara says (Sanhedrin 69b), "the earlier generations used to father children at eight" — which proves that the matter depends upon their being the earlier generations, and not upon a miracle. And if it did depend on a

miracle, Hashem performs miracles for the later generations just as for the earlier. Rather, when the Rav said "it was by way of miracle," he means that this does not belong to the way of the world that stands established forever, as it does with the later generations, whose nature is the nature of the world, by order and by measure. Even in the earlier generations it was an extraordinary thing, something that departs from the order — for it came about through their power, which went beyond the order of the world then in force, and that is why it is called a "miracle." And one brings no proof from it to the later generations, whose governance follows the way of the world.

Therefore one of thirteen years is called "a man," and there is no "man" at less than thirteen; and this belongs to the governance of the order of the world, which operates always. One is called "a man" only when he is a man according to what befits the order that operates always. But as to fathering offspring, the earlier generations did father before thirteen. Even so, it is an extraordinary thing even in the earlier generations — for were it not extraordinary, he would be called "a man" as well, even at less than thirteen. Rather, in any case it is extraordinary even in the earlier generations, since he is not called "a man."

The words of Rabbeinu Yeshayah, of blessed memory — that it was a miraculous occurrence, and that one does not derive from a miraculous occurrence — may also be explained to mean that the earlier generations were blessed by Hashem to a greater degree, and that this is what is called "a miraculous occurrence." In any case, the earlier generations did father children at eight, as the Gemara says; and not, as this man understood, that it was entirely a miraculous occurrence.

In the chapter *Yotzei Dofen* (Niddah 45a) there is an incident involving Yustini the daughter of Asverus, who came before Rabbi and said to him, "At what age does a woman conceive?" He said to her, "At twelve years and one day." She said to him, "I was married at six and gave birth at seven." The Gemara there raises the difficulty, "But does a minor conceive?" and answers by citing (Yechezkel 23:20), "whose flesh is the flesh of donkeys." Their meaning is this: although Hashem set an order for the world in which there is no procreation before one is a man, that holds for those included in the order of humankind; but for such as these, "whose flesh is the flesh of donkeys," the thing is not an absolute order such that they never depart from it. If so, all the more is there no need to say that this came about by way of miracle, since we find [so] at the very least among the nations "whose flesh is the flesh of donkeys." And therefore you find this even in Israel in the earlier generations, whose natures were not altogether like the natures of these generations of ours, and whose power to generate seed was greater. And

although one is not called "a man" at less than thirteen, he does father children earlier — and that is the extraordinary thing.

Because this man has spoken words that are like coals of fire, we were obliged to set all this out, so that no one be scorched by this man's coal; for their words are clear to anyone who understands. And this is enough.

He further gathered statements (chapter 16 of *Imrei Binah*) to show how the Sages spoke strange things, things that are like an invention. The statement in question is the one in the chapter *HaNizakin* (Gittin 56b), concerning Titus: that a gnat entered [his nostril and bored into] his brain and bored inside it for seven years, and that after his death they split his brain open. R. Eliezer bar Yosi said, "I was among the great men of Rome, and when he died they split his brain open and found in it something like a sparrow, weighing two *sela'im*." [Aramaic: In a baraisa it was taught,] "like a year-old fledgling, weighing two *litrin*." Abaye said, "We have it by tradition that its mouth was of copper and its claws of iron." Thus far the passage.

Against this he raised an objection: how is one to imagine so much empty space between the brain and the skull as to contain a two-year-old fledgling, and without its weighing on the brain and diminishing it? And in the third chapter of Chullin (58a) it says that any creature which has no bone does not survive twelve months. And what is "its mouth of copper and its claws of iron" — how could copper and iron be generated in such a place? Thus far his objection. And at the close of his words he writes as follows: "So too with the affair of Titus, I can say, and am permitted to say, that the account of it is nothing but an invention; and this mode of instruction is the practice of those perfect in knowledge, to deliver a teaching into the heart of the multitude," etc. — down to: "and with great wisdom they framed the invention so that it should match what is prepared for the wicked man [?] — that is Titus, who dealt with us as he did. Surely in a case like this it appears that one is permitted to depart from the truth for the sake of peace (Yevamos 65b) — the peace that is to be set between us and our Father in heaven." Thus far the substance of this man's words: a man who has given over his mouth and his tongue to sin, in making the words of the Sages falsehood.

Had these words come from a man who does not stand with us in our faith, it would be fitting to keep silent, for a difference of faiths hides the truth and makes the straight look crooked. But that one who has entered with us into the faith of the Torah of Moshe should bring forth such words against the supernal holy ones — that is a thing to astonish and amaze. We have told you very many times that the words of their wisdom were spoken in wisdom and in intellect, and are not

corporeal matters; and that is why they are called "the words of the wise" (Koheles 12:11), for they are matters of intellect and nothing else. The words of the Sages were only about the essential nature of the matter, and they have no business with material things that lie open to view. As for the objection this man raised from nature, his words settle nothing at all, for one brings no proof from nature regarding a miraculous occurrence — and this was a miraculous act.

But the truth is this. When it says here that the gnat entered his nostril, the matter is that every living creature has an essential nature distinctly its own, by which it is what it is. And this — the essential nature of the gnat — is what entered his nostril, and it was acting within him. For the gnat is an acting power, and what entered his nostril was an acting power, and that is the essential nature of the gnat. And what it says (Gittin 56b), that when he heard the sound of the hammer from the blacksmith [Aramaic:] it fell silent — this is well known: a change such as the one in his brain acts only until it is a change no longer, and once it has become habitual it acts no more. That is the meaning of [Aramaic:] "once he has trodden it, he has trodden it." And it says that once he died they split his brain open, in order to recognize the change that had been wrought in it; and then they assessed that the power which had been acting was an acting power like a sparrow weighing two *sela'im*, or like a year-old fledgling weighing two *litra*. Although at the outset, when it began to act, it was a small power, it afterward became a great power. As for its saying that it was the weight of two *sela'im*, or the weight of two *litra*, this will be explained shortly. And Abaye's saying that its mouth was copper and its claws iron — all of this refers to the distinct essential nature that it had.

The explanation is this. The gnat acts upon another in respect of two things. The first is that it strikes and bores, and this action comes by way of a blow, in that it bores into him; and the harder and stronger a thing is, the more it acts. The second action is in respect of sharpness: it cuts and so acts upon another, and this action comes by way of the claws, which are sharp, and with them it cuts and scratches; and the sharper a thing is, the more it acts. In Titus's case an acting power entered, both in respect of hardness and in respect of sharpness. Therefore it says that a power entered him strong enough to act to the utmost, so that the essential nature of this hard power was the essential nature of the hardness of copper — for you have nothing harder than copper. That is why it says "its mouth was copper," since the action of hardness is referred to the mouth of a bird, which is hard. And further, it had sharpness to the utmost, so that the essential nature of its sharpness was the essential nature of the sharpness of iron. That is "and its claws were of iron" — meaning that the essential nature of its

sharpness was the essential nature of the sharpness of iron, and this acted upon him to the utmost.

And do not say that this interpretation departs from the plain sense of the words of the Sages — that the plain sense concerns an absolute, material gnat, and that everything is to be taken at face value. That notion is a product of the imagination. But for one who has knowledge and wisdom, who knows that all these things concern the essential nature — for all existing things share in matter, and only the essential nature is the thing itself — and we have already told you that the words of the Sages are only about the essential nature and not about the corporeal: when you take these things as non-corporeal, then all of it is entirely according to its plain sense, without any interpretation at all; they are simply words of wisdom.

And so that you may know the interpretation of this statement still further — so that you may know that the whole of it is sacred praise, and that this statement was not spoken by way of invention but is great and deep wisdom, every single expression in it a secret of wisdom — know this. Titus is the one who laid waste the House of our God, and burned and destroyed it, and there has been no man in the world so opposed to Hashem, may He be blessed, as this wicked man was. For although the wicked Nevuchadnetzar laid waste the House of our God, he is not comparable to this one: he laid it waste because they had rebelled against him (Melachim II 24:1), and his primary intent was not to lay waste the House of our God. There was no man like Titus, whose intent was directed against none but Hashem, may He be blessed and exalted. The Sages testified to this about him when they said (Gittin 56b) of the verse "Where is their god, the rock in whom they trusted" (Devarim 32:37): "This is the wicked Titus, who reviled and blasphemed toward Heaven" — as is recounted of him. In this he stood outside the class of all the kings who rebelled against Him, may He be blessed: this wicked man was set apart in opposing Hashem Himself.

Perhaps someone will answer that in *Sefer Yosifon* it is found that, on the contrary, Titus protested to them that the Temple should not be burned. Even if we grant the words of *Yosifon*, the sages of truth know by the truth of the Torah, and they knew that these things were not so — that his purpose was only to keep the Beis HaMikdash standing, so that it should be in his hand to work his will in it, and his reviling and his blaspheming. And He, may He be blessed, who knew his heart, gave the Beis HaMikdash over to be burned with fire, so that the wicked man should not work his wantonness in it with reviling and blaspheming as he had been doing — for his intent was nothing but to oppose Hashem. Were it not

so, this deed, the burning of the House of our God, would not have been carried out through him; and such a thing is carried out only through one who is prepared for it. Therefore all his words that tend to show he wished the House of our God not to be burned — everything he did was to desecrate the honor of the Mikdash with his abominations. And so it was fitting that there come upon him a punishment answering to the particular way in which he opposed Hashem.

Drowning in water was not fitting for him, as it says there (Gittin 56b); for this wicked man said that since man's dominion has no power over water — man having been created to be in the inhabited land, which is where man's power lies — therefore His power, may He be blessed, extends over man only in the water. That is why he said that He should come up onto dry land, since man's power is in the inhabited land; he supposed that in the inhabited land, where man's power lies, Hashem could not prevail against him. Now when one wishes to overcome someone who opposes him — as the wicked Titus opposed Hashem, to whom might belongs — then the one to whom power belongs entirely overcomes him thus. For if a lowly man rebels against a king, the king does not come against him with his whole army; were he to do so, then even if he did overcome his opponent, it would be said that the rebel too was mighty, and that the king defeated him only because he was mightier in his army. He therefore sends against him one of his servants, who overcomes him — and this might, by which he prevails over him, is might in the utmost degree, since one of his least servants overcame him. And because the wicked Titus reviled and blasphemed, it was fitting that nothing but a small thing should overcome him; and so the gnat is the thing fit to overcome this opponent.

And it says that it was like a sparrow weighing two *sela'im*, and according to the baraisa weighing two *litra* (Gittin 56b). This was not for nothing: on every view there was a two in it — either the weight of two *sela'im* or the weight of two *litraos*. And on both views there was completeness in it as well — either like a complete sparrow, or like a young dove that is complete in its year. The meaning is that this war came from Hashem, and that is why this gnat was prepared for war, having a complete power; for that which is like a sparrow or like a year-old fledgling is a complete power, since a sparrow is a complete thing, and likewise a year-old fledgling is complete in its year. And when it says the weight of two *sela'im* or the weight of two *litraos*, the meaning is that killing lay in its power, for all killing is a division. That is why it says the weight of two *sela'im*, or the weight of two *litra* — for all duality is division and separation. Those who have entered into the inner part of wisdom know this matter, and know from what level this creature comes, which has a power of division and separation. For the gnat is a

small thing, and every small thing divides and separates all the more. Therefore it says that it was specifically a gnat, and that it had the weight of two *sela'im* or of two *litra*, meaning that it had the power of division and separation.

All this is because Titus destroyed the House of our God: he was the chief of destroyers, and so absolute destruction and separation came upon him. We have explained this in the work *Netzach (Netzach Yisrael)*; see there. And all of it is said with reference to the essential nature, as was explained above, for so it befits the Sages to speak of the quality and the essential nature of a thing, and not to speak of the corporeal, but only of the essential nature abstracted from the corporeal. These matters are intelligible to those who know wisdom.

The principle of the matter is this, and this is what they meant to say. Titus destroyed the House of our God — the House through which Israel had connection to their Father in heaven, and through which the whole world had connection to Hashem, so that the world was one — and he was destroying and cutting off that connection, so that there was here separation and severance. Therefore the blow that came upon him was a power that cuts off and separates, for such an agent surely cuts off. That is why it says that this power was present to the greatest degree, saying that its claws were of iron and its mouth of copper, as explained above. And it says "like a year-old fledgling weighing two *litraos*" — that is, a complete power set apart for cutting off. And because this wicked man was prepared for severance, therefore when he died he commanded that his ashes be gathered and scattered [Aramaic:] over the seven seas, as we have explained in its place. The meaning is that in accordance with the wicked man's deeds during his life, so does he decree upon himself what shall be done to him after his death; and this is called his having commanded that it be done to him after his death, even though he did not command it explicitly. That is why, [Aramaic:] when they raised him up by necromancy, he told his judgment and sentence to be exactly as he had himself decreed upon his own soul, as we have explained in its place; see there, and there is no need to expand here.

We have set these things out for you only to show that they are ordered with the utmost wisdom — that the punishment fitting for Titus came upon him from Hashem. He destroyed the House of our God, and therefore there came upon him what is fitting for a wicked man such as he. As for the proof he brought from the chroniclers of the nations, there is nothing to answer here; for if there were, one would have to answer everything the chroniclers of the nations have said. When a man looks closely into these matters, he will find that everything spoken from the mouths of the Sages belongs to the secrets of the Torah and of wisdom. And

even if the matter were as some of the chroniclers of the nations have testified — although one of them says one thing and another says another — surely, according to the interpretation we gave above, there is no difficulty at all, even on their own account: for all these things were said as words of wisdom and nothing else, and therefore even if it is said that the wicked man died of whatever illness he died of, this presents no difficulty whatever. Had this man had wisdom in him, he would have grasped something of their words; but he understood nothing at all of them. And there is no need to expand further on this.

Further, in the book *Yemos Olam*, he set out to place himself outside the general body and to dispute our entire received tradition — matters received by every one of the sages of Israel in the Babylonian Gemara and in the Yerushalmi and in all the rest of the midrashim, so firmly that the thing is as though it were something perceived by the senses: that the First Temple stood 410 years and the Second Temple 420 years. He took himself to the other side on the strength of the chroniclers of the nations, and of a few proofs and demonstrations from Scripture read according to the confusion of his own understanding, holding that the First Temple stood more than 410 years and likewise that the Second Temple stood more than 420. He then went further and said that the years of the count from Creation as we reckon them — a reckoning known to all Israel wherever they are upon the face of the earth — that this reckoning is not certain, since it is possible to add to it. He further disputed R. Yosi, in the baraisa in the first chapter of Avodah Zarah (9a), over the reckoning of the kingdoms of Persia and Greece. Had he wished to press his case from the chroniclers of the nations, as is his way and his custom, that would have been enough for him. But he wanted to bring proof for his position from Scripture as well, as though R. Yosi and all the sages of Israel had not seen how faulty his proof is. Go out and see whether there has ever been the like of him. As to the first matters — where he supposed of the sages of truth that they did not know human wisdom, that is, the science of astronomy — for that he has some excuse, in that he can say that this science is not found set out explicitly in their words. But now he comes to dispute them in their very interpretation of Scripture: the Torah that was handed over to them, the Torah that is called by their name. And this man comes to dispute them in this. By this the character of this man is recognized, for it never entered the mind of any of the sages of the nations to do such a thing, to dispute over the interpretation of the verses. I have therefore not undertaken to reply to his words; and any man who knows and understands anything at all can recognize his error for himself. Although some commentators too went in his ways, they were interpreting the plain meaning according to their own understanding — whereas this man comes to push away words of truth and uprightness, and interprets whatever he pleases

out of his own mind. Is our complete Torah not to be worth as much as his idle talk? Everything he brought from the talk and the tales of the chroniclers is mere talk, and the power of the Sages is not diminished by it. And if the chroniclers are many, it is evident that for the most part one says one thing and another says another, and they do not run in one direction. So too with the number of the years of the Second Temple: he goes storming on, deliberately arousing difficulties in himself, hunting out cavils from Scripture in order to reckon a different count. He brings a whole array of commentators — this one interpreted thus, and the number of the years comes out so; that one interpreted otherwise, and the number of the years comes out more, or less — each of them interpreting the verses as it seems to him. Had they all agreed on one thing, he would have had an excuse, and could say that one is compelled to interpret so. But he himself brings any number of conflicting interpretations. Is the wisdom of the Sages, together with their faithful and true received tradition, to have no power to interpret Scripture as well, just as the later commentators did? Why did he turn aside from the truth and from the received tradition without any need? This is nothing but a man inciting the *yetzer hara* in himself. And it is known that the number of the years of the Temple cannot be known except from the received tradition. Anyone who counts the years of the Temple according to the number of years found in Scripture is in error, and it cannot be otherwise, since in most cases there are partial years here. For we hold, in the first chapter of Rosh Hashanah (2b), that when a king came to the throne on the twenty-ninth of Adar, one counts a year to the new king and also a year to the king who died; and likewise when a king died on the first of Nisan, one counts a year to the king who died and also a year to the king who came to the throne. It emerges that a single year is counted as two years by the reckoning of the kings. So it appears on this matter in the first chapter of Megillah (11b), where the seventy years of the exile of Babylon are reckoned by the years of the king and come out in excess; and the Gemara answers that they were partial years. If so, it is an error to reckon by the years of the kings. What is primary is the received tradition: so we have received, that the Temple stood such and such a time, and this was a matter of common knowledge. All his words are therefore empty and insipid and do not deserve a reply, for all the words of the Sages rest upon the true received tradition, refined and purified.

And if a discrepancy is sometimes found between the Babylonian Talmud and the Talmud Yerushalmi — take this matter. In the Gemara, in the first chapter of Yoma (9a), R. Yochanan said: What is the meaning of the verse (Mishlei 10:27), "The fear of Hashem adds days, but the years of the wicked are shortened"? "The fear of Hashem adds days" — this is the First Temple, which stood four hundred

and ten years, and only eighteen Kohanim Gedolim served in it. "But the years of the wicked are shortened" — this is the Second Temple, which stood four hundred and twenty years, and more than three hundred Kohanim Gedolim served in it. Deduct forty years that Shimon HaTzaddik served, and eighty that Yochanan Kohen Gadol served, and ten that Yishmael ben Pavi served — and some say eleven, that R. Elazar ben Charsum served — go out and reckon, and not one of them completed his year. Thus far the passage. But in the Yerushalmi and in the Sifrei it says that eighty Kohanim Gedolim served in the Second Temple. Now the Tosafos resolved this difficulty: in the Yerushalmi and in the Sifrei only the Kohanim who served from Pinchas onward were counted. Thus far their words. But what seemed clear to me is this: our Gemara counts every one of the Kohanim Gedolim who served in it. For sometimes a disqualification befell a Kohen and another served in his place, or he was ill and could not perform the service — and our Gemara counts all who served in the Second Temple. In the First Temple, where their merit was great, disqualification did not befall them so often, and therefore there were only eighteen Kohanim Gedolim. But in the Second Temple there is no doubt that it happened many times that a disqualification befell a Kohen so that he could not serve. So it appears in the first chapter of Yoma (12b): "There was an incident with Yosef ben Ilim of Tzippori: a disqualification befell the Kohen Gadol, and they appointed him in his place. And the Sages said: the first returns to his service," and so forth. And in the chapter *Hotzi'u Lo* (Yoma 47a) they said of R. Yishmael ben Kimchis: "Once he spoke with an Arab in the marketplace, and a spray of spittle flew from his mouth onto his garments; his brother Yeshevav entered and served in his place, and their mother saw two of her sons as Kohanim Gedolim in a single day." And again they said (ibid.) of R. Yishmael ben Kimchis: "Once he went out and spoke with a *hegmon*, a Roman officer, in the marketplace, and a spray of spittle flew from his mouth onto his garments; his brother Yosef entered and served in his place, and their mother saw two of her sons as Kohanim Gedolim in a single day." Surely this happened many times over. The Gemara did not bring this because it was an extraordinary thing, but only for the sake of what is said upon it (Yoma 12b), that the Sages said the first returns to his service; and in the second incident (Yoma 47a), that their mother saw two of her sons as Kohanim Gedolim in one day — and the Gemara there explains by what merit all her sons became Kohanim Gedolim, as it appears there. As for what it says (Yoma 9a), "and not one of them completed his year," the meaning is this: when you divide the years of the Second Temple by the number of Kohanim who served in it, a full year does not come out for each one. Even though there were several who served more than a year, still,

when you divide the years by the number of the Kohanim, not one of them completed his year.

And you should know that as for the eighty Kohanim Gedolim counted in the Yerushalmi and in the Sifrei, it was fitting that eighty Kohanim Gedolim should serve there. For the Kohen Gadol serves in eight garments, as is known (Yoma 71b), and from this you may know that the excellence of the Kohanim Gedolim is this number. Eighty and eight are all one; it is only that each and every level up to the eighth includes ten, and so they are eighty. And in our Gemara, which said that three hundred Kohanim Gedolim served in it — this too is the great level of the high priesthood. This matter is known to the discerning, and we have explained it elsewhere; this is not its place. That is why they were three hundred. The way of the Yerushalmi and the way of the Bavli are all one way, and both are true. For the Yerushalmi counts those who were appointed Kohanim, because they would buy the office with money, and that applies only to those who were appointed; whereas our Gemara said "the years of the wicked are shortened" only of those who served in it, and it counts all those who were serving in it. This is fitting, and each of the two has a cause of deep wisdom behind it. Yet when this man reached this passage, he struck the blow and healed it with tasteless spittle, saying that the Sages spoke by way of exaggeration. This is no exaggeration; it is words of great wisdom.

And as for the rest of the matters in general, there is no need to reply further, for if we were to reply to each and every thing the account would be drawn out to no purpose. This man has let words out of his mouth against exalted holy ones, and he did not understand the plain sense of their words, as he has done in a number of his chapters. This book therefore falls within the class of the outside books, the *sefarim chitzonim*, which it is forbidden to read. Let every man who holds to the religion of the Torah of Moshe, and who believes in the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, treat this book as one that "shall not be seen and shall not be found"; let him neither look at it nor gaze into it, neither with the sight of the intellect nor with the sight of the senses. At first I said in my heart that I would keep the words of Shlomo, peace be upon him, and not answer him (Mishlei 26:4). But since I saw that his words had gone out in print to the many, I said: a man may well think that, because they were given to the press, there is substance in his words. So I came out against him, to fulfill the second verse (Mishlei 26:5), "Answer," and so forth — as the Gemara establishes the two verses in the chapter *Bameh Madlikin* (Shabbos 30b). He, may He be blessed, knows that we did not write these words to disgrace or to revile; it is zeal for Hashem and zeal for His Torah that did this, when I saw the words of the living God, hewing

out flames, and this man making sport of them as though they were empty words with nothing of use in them. It is fitting to wonder greatly at a man who has entered into the covenant of Avraham Avinu, and who is designated within the general body of "Israel," that he should speak words such as these. For even if you find men who are not of the children of Israel speaking, in certain matters, words against the exalted holy ones on high — surely it is zeal for their religion that does this. But that a man who has entered the religion of Israel should let words like these out of his mouth: such a thing has never been at all, and it never entered the heart that one like this should be found among the children of Israel, the seed of Avraham, who believe in the Torah of Moshe, in the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. May He, may He be blessed, save the seed of the remnant of Israel, that there be found among us no further breach, no one who gives honor and glory to strangers. Amen, selah.

The Seventh Well — pure waters: clear, refined and limpid; set apart from every admixture and kept guarded; cleared of all dross and refuse; standing for generation upon generation; unclouded and not turbid; lovely to the heart and giving light to the eyes.

The Seventh Complaint — what they complain of in the words of the Sages: that the Sages perverted the statute and the justice due to those who are not sages, as though this were done in order to magnify themselves and to take revenge on them. And likewise what the Sages said about those who are not within the general body of the religion of Israel — that they perverted the justice due to them, with statements that depart from religion and from intellect. Such a thing, the critics say, is not fitting, since all human beings are His creatures, the work of His hands. On this they complained at great length, for iniquity and falsehood deserve to be hated and kept far off. Yet here too the righteousness of the Sages' judgment comes forth like a shining light, for there is no iniquity in their mouths and no deceit on their tongues. **In the chapter *Eilu Ovrin*** (Pesachim 49b): R. Elazar said, an *am ha'aretz* — one ignorant of Torah — may be stabbed to death on Yom Kippur that falls on Shabbos. His students said to him: Rabbi, say rather that he may be slaughtered. He said to them: slaughtering requires a blessing, and stabbing does not require a blessing. And R. Elazar said: an *am ha'aretz* is forbidden to eat meat. And R. Elazar said: it is forbidden to travel in the company of an *am ha'aretz*, as it says (Devarim 30:20), "for it is your life and the length of your days" — if he has no concern for his own life, how much less for the life of his fellow. Rav Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of R. Yonasan: an *am ha'aretz* may be torn open like a fish. R. Yitzchak said: and from his back. R. Akiva said: when I was an *am ha'aretz* I used to say, "Who will give me a talmid

chacham, that I may bite him like a donkey!" His students said to him: say rather, "like a dog." [He said to them:] the one bites and breaks the bone, and the other bites and does not break the bone. Thus far the Gemara. Here too they charged that the Sages withheld the justice due to other people, those who do not become wise, and that such a thing is not to be done. **You must know** that the words of the Sages are in truth and in righteousness. The great master who stands above all the great authorities of the later generations, Rav Alfasi — the Rif, R. Yitzchak Alfasi, of blessed memory — has already given a reason for these statements, as is set out in its place; see there. Nevertheless you must know that this matter is understood in its truth once you know that these statements are said only of those people who are separate from the Torah altogether, who have no partnership and no connection with the Torah. They are of those *amei ha'aretz* of whom R. Akiva spoke, who say, "Who will give me a talmid chacham, that I may bite him like a donkey" — those who are entirely separate from the Torah, and who are reckoned like the beasts that perish. But those who have a connection and an affinity to a talmid chacham are judged by the rule that governs a talmid chacham, for whatever is joined to a thing is like it. This is so because a human being is called by the name *adam* on account of the speaking soul within him, as it is written (Bereishis 2:7), "and the man became a living soul," which Onkelos renders (ibid.) [Aramaic: "and the man became a speaking spirit"]. And certainly the name *adam* applies to his body as well, because all the limbs are joined to the speaking soul, so that the name *adam* is applied to them all together. So too, when a man has a connection to the intellect — that is, to the talmid chacham — then by having a connection to him he enters within his definition along with him. That is why they said (Kesubos 111b): "'to love Hashem, may He be blessed, your God and to cleave to Him' (Devarim 30:20) — but is it possible to cleave to the Shechinah? Is He not a consuming fire (Devarim 4:24)? Rather, whoever cleaves to talmidei chachamim, it is as though he cleaved to the Shechinah." This is so because the talmid chacham has a cleaving to the Shechinah, since there is in the talmid chacham a divine intellect; and therefore one who cleaves to a talmid chacham, who himself has a cleaving to the Shechinah, has a cleaving to the Shechinah as well, even though he is not a talmid chacham at all. This will be explained shortly. The passage (Pesachim 49b) speaks only of one who hates talmidei chachamim and keeps himself far from them; of such a one it speaks, and of no other case. That is why it brings here R. Akiva's statement, "When I was an am ha'aretz I used to say, 'Who will give me a talmid chacham,'" and so on — for a man like that is certainly not within the general body of created beings at all. All living creatures were created for man's need, and in this they have a connection to man, who is the completeness of creation. But a man such as this

has no affinity and no connection to that which is primary in creation, and for this reason he is lower than they are. That is also why every living creature requires a blessing when it is slaughtered for man's need: since the living creature was created for man's need, it is fitting to make a blessing over this. But an am ha'aretz who hates a talmid chacham has no connection to the talmid chacham, who is creation in its completeness — and it is to this creation that everything ought to be joined. **You must further know** the truth of this interpretation of what they said, that an am ha'aretz may be stabbed to death on Yom Kippur that falls on Shabbos. This holds in respect of his having no Torah in him, and therefore he may be stabbed. But in respect of the fact that every man, even if he is not a master of Torah, stands in potentiality for Torah to be in him — since at any hour it is possible that he will receive the Torah — and because he is in potentiality for this, he is like any other man who has Torah in him. Just so with an infant: even though he knows nothing, still, in respect of the potentiality by which he is prepared for Torah, or prepared to join himself to the sages, he departs from the status of an am ha'aretz. And since he is in potentiality to be a talmid chacham, one may not say that it is permitted to stab him. Yet the ruling in its truth — that he may be stabbed — holds in respect of his being an am ha'aretz. It comes to teach you the ignominy and disgrace of the am ha'aretz: that in respect of his being an am ha'aretz, he could be stabbed to death on Yom Kippur that falls on Shabbos. This is the clear interpretation of the matter. He means to say how great the ignominy and disgrace of the am ha'aretz is, for in respect of his being an am ha'aretz it would have been permitted to stab him. It is only in respect of the fact that every man is in potentiality to become a talmid chacham — for they said (Megillah 6b), "'I have toiled and not found' — do not believe him" — and therefore every man is in potentiality for this. And in respect of his being in potentiality for this, he is like a talmid chacham in this regard, that one may not do him harm, since he is in potentiality for this. Nevertheless, from this one may know the magnitude of his baseness: that his completeness is only in potentiality, and he has nothing in actuality. And if he dies and his intellect has not emerged into actuality, it turns out retroactively that it was permitted to stab him to death on Yom Kippur — and this is ignominy and disgrace. His status was not that of any other man; it was so only because he was in potentiality to become a talmid chacham.

And R. Elazar said that an am ha'aretz is forbidden to eat meat (Pesachim 49b). You will know the reason for this from the fact that meat was forbidden to Adam, the first man, until Noach came, when meat was permitted to him. For *adam* is so called after the *adamah* (אדמה, "the ground"), and he in particular was created from the ground. So too all ten generations down to Noach stood in relation to the

ground. Then Noach came and was called (Bereishis 9:20) "a man of the ground" — meaning that he prevailed over the ground, and that he had a separate level. And this is well known: what is material has no existence whatever in relation to the separate level, and is reckoned as though it were not, since the one is material and the other is separate from the material. That is why meat was not permitted to Adam. Eating indicates that the existence of the thing eaten counts for nothing in relation to the eater, and that is why he eats it. And even though Adam was full of wisdom, since his body inclined toward the ground he was not permitted to eat meat. Then Noach came, who was "a man of the ground" and did not incline toward the ground in respect of his body, and the flesh of a living creature, which is material, was permitted to him. For we have already said that what is material has no existence at all in relation to what is separate, and he eats it inasmuch as it has no existence. Therefore an am ha'aretz, who is material, is forbidden to eat meat — inasmuch as only one who is separate from the material may fittingly eat meat, and things that possess matter have no existence in relation to something that is separate. This is a clear and true thing, and there is no doubt about this interpretation. And we have already said that this applies to the am ha'aretz we spoke of above: one who hates talmidei chachamim and has no affinity at all to talmidei chachamim. **As for his saying that it is forbidden** to travel in his company (Pesachim 49b) — the explanation is that the am ha'aretz does not cleave to life. For death does not come from one who cleaves to life; had he had a disposition toward life, he would have come within the general body of the Torah, which is life. And since he is not prepared for his own life, all the more is he not prepared to have concern for the lives of others; therefore it is forbidden to travel in his company. **As for what** Rav Shmuel bar Nachmani said, that an am ha'aretz may be torn open like a fish, and from his back (Pesachim 49b) — the explanation of this is that the am ha'aretz has no law of life at all, and does not have even the status of a beast. For a beast stands ready for slaughter; and although it is permitted to destroy a beast in whatever manner one wishes, the status of death nevertheless applies to it only in respect of one aspect, namely in respect of the *simanim*, the windpipe and the gullet, which are close to death — and that is why its slaughter is performed at its *simanim*. This shows that its slaughter is certainly by way of one particular aspect, and that this brings about death and destruction to the whole. But the am ha'aretz may be torn open from his back, for the back is the primary foundation and the strength of him; and even in respect of the back destruction is fitting for him, so that there is in him no aspect whatever by which to live. All this is to teach us that the essence of the am ha'aretz counts for nothing. For had his own self counted for anything, it would not have been fitting to tear him open from his back, so as to annul his very self.

Even if it were permitted to slaughter him, and death were due to him in some respect, still the annulment would not be in the thing itself. But since it is permitted to tear him open like a fish, and from his back, this can only be because there lies the annulment and destruction of his very self — for the back is the primary foundation of a living creature, upon which everything rests, and in this respect annulment applies to him. Thus the essence of the am ha'aretz counts for nothing at all. **And R. Akiva** said: when I was an am ha'aretz I used to say, "Who will give me a talmid chacham, that I may bite him like a donkey," and so on (Pesachim 49b). The explanation of this is that what is material is opposed to the talmid chacham, to the point that in respect of the material, that which is not material has no existence at all. That is why he would say, "Who will give me a talmid chacham, that I may bite him like a donkey" — so as to break the bone, which is an absolute annulment of the thing in its very self, so that nothing remains. For what is material destroys and annuls what is separate with an absolute annulment and destruction, and not merely with an opposition in some measure. These words are true, and trustworthy beyond doubt. We have made clear to you that all their words are in true justice: they did not pervert the justice due to existing beings, but gave to each and every one his statute and the justice proper to him, and showed favor to no creature. It is only that man's intellect falls short of grasping their words, and so he lays the deficiency on their words — and it is not so at all. It is impossible to explain everything; we have explained only a portion for you, as a means of testing and as a testimony concerning all their words.

In the last chapter of Kesubos (111b): R. Elazar said, the amei ha'aretz will not live, as it says (Yeshayahu 26:14), "The dead will not live, the *refa'im* (רפאים) will not rise." For it was taught in a baraisa: "The dead will not live" — might this apply to everyone? The verse therefore says, "the *refa'im* will not rise": Scripture is speaking of one who lets himself go slack (*merapeh*, מרפה) from words of Torah. Thus far. To some people this is a thorn that gives pain — that there should be no resurrection except for talmidei chachamim, and that all the rest of mankind should count for nothing. In this too, the critics say, the Sages overstepped the statute that belongs to the level of man: not only in the case of those who are not of the seed of Yaakov, but in the case of everyone who is not a master of Torah, from whom they took away his final success, so that he is likened to the beasts and comparable to them. But there is no cause to be astonished at this, or troubled by it, for the author of the statement himself explains his own words. It says there (Kesubos 111b): [Aramaic: He saw R. Yochanan, who was distressed.] He said to him: "Rabbi, I have found them a remedy from another place, as it says (Devarim 4:4), 'And you who cleave to

Hashem your God are all alive today.' But is it possible to cleave to the Shechinah? Is it not written (Devarim 4:24), 'For Hashem your God is a consuming fire'? Rather, that he should cleave to talmidei chachamim — and Scripture accounts it for him as though he had cleaved to the Shechinah. Of him it is said, 'And you who cleave to Hashem your God are all alive today.'" So they do have a rectification, and one that is very easy. For certainly Hashem, may He be blessed, who gave the Torah to Israel, gave it to Israel primarily so that this should be their final success. Therefore a man who is not a master of Torah, and who lacks it, cannot arrive at the final success except by being subordinate to those who are masters of Torah. And this is a great kindness to them from Hashem. **And now there will be made clear** to you the words of the Sages, which any man whose soul does not incline toward winning an argument, and who concedes to words of truth, will concede. Know that man is made up of many limbs — hands and feet and the rest of the limbs, up to 248 limbs. None of them has life of itself; life is in one organ alone, the one that "sits first in the kingdom" (based on Esther 1:14), which receives life first because it is prepared for this. And when life is annulled in this first organ, which is the heart, then all the limbs are annulled and have no more life. Now, all human beings together are reckoned as one particular man. There are men who stand in the relation of the principal organ to the man, and so with the rest of the limbs: each one stands in the relation that befits him, according to the level and the excellence of each. For the nasi or the king, who are set over the people, are called "head", since they are like the head of a man. And the sages among them, who lead the people by their wisdom and their Torah — the Sanhedrin and the judges — are called "the eyes of the people", as it is written (Bamidbar 15:24), "if it was done in error, away from the eyes of the congregation." Chazal expounded (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:15): "the eyes of the congregation" — these are the Sanhedrin, who are the eyes of the congregation. For they are like the eyes, which lead the man, and a man goes after his eyes; and so too the Sanhedrin lead the people, and the people go after them (ibid.). For this same reason the sages who teach the people wisdom are also called "the heart of the people", just as those who lead the people are called "the eyes of the congregation". The sages have agreed upon this — that human beings as a whole are like one particular man — and they have spoken of it much and at length. It is truly the view of Chazal in their midrashim, but this is not the place for it. In any case, we learn from it that the levels of men correspond to the limbs. And now the words of the Sages, and what they intended by this, will be clear to you. Just as the limbs have no life except through the heart, which receives life first, no other organ receiving it, so too the amei ha'aretz, whose souls incline toward thick and coarse matter and who are at the level of the rest of the limbs:

for this reason they do not receive that life, which is the resurrection. Only the sages are first for this, inasmuch as they are far from matter, and are therefore fit to receive life — like the heart, which in particular is of itself fit to receive life. And when R. Elazar saw R. Yochanan his master distressed over this, that none would be fit to receive life except the sages, who possess the upper intellect, which is the Torah, he said to him: "Rabbi, I have found them a remedy from another place" — that they should cleave to talmidei chachamim. **The explanation of this matter** is as we have said: human beings are reckoned as one particular man. Just as in a particular man the foot has no life of itself, but life spreads to it and it receives it from the heart, so too the whole of mankind is reckoned as one particular man, and those men who are at the level of the rest of the limbs receive life by way of the heart — it is through the heart that they receive life. Therefore all the limbs must cleave to the heart: that is, men must have a connection to one who is at the level of the heart, and then they will receive life through that particular man who is like a heart, since it is the heart that brings life to the rest of the limbs. And when [the pathway] that brings life to a limb is closed off, that limb is dead and annulled, because it has been cut off and severed from what brings it life. So too the man who is reckoned at the level of the rest of the limbs: if he is severed and separated from those who are first to receive life, he has no life. His endurance therefore lies in joining himself to one who stands to him at the level of the heart — and then they receive life. These matters are objects of intellect, and there is no doubt about them. **And when you search** their words, you will not find anything of the kind — that they take the world away from those who are *amei ha'aretz*. On the contrary: even to one who is not of the children of Israel they gave a share in the World to Come. R. Yehoshua, whose view is the halachah as against R. Eliezer, holds that the pious of the nations of the world have a share in the World to Come, as it appears in the chapter *Chelek* (Sanhedrin 105a). And more than this: it is known that the seed of Esav are opposed to Israel, and yet in the first chapter of Avodah Zarah (10b), Antoninus asked Rabbi, "Will I come to the World to Come?" He said to him, "Yes." He said to him, "But is it not written (Ovadia 1:18), 'There shall be no survivor of the house of Esav'?" [He answered:] "That is said of one who does the deeds of Esav." It was likewise taught in a baraisa: "'There shall be no survivor of the house of Esav' — might this apply to all of them? The verse therefore says, 'of the house of Esav': one who does the deeds of Esav." Thus far. So they do not lack the level of man at all; rather, everything follows the deed. And this matter is clear.

And further they said that they overstepped the statute and altered the justice due to human beings who are not of the children of Israel — as they said (Bava Kamma 37b) that "the ox of his fellow" (Shemos 21:35) means his fellow's ox and

not the ox of a gentile. This seems to them violence, robbery, and the perverting of justice. Here too it will be established that they overstepped neither statute nor justice for any creature in the world; everything is by justice and by righteousness. Know that human beings, according to the law of the Torah of Moshe as it was received in the hands of the Sages, are divided into three divisions. The first is the people whom Hashem, may He be blessed, chose — in the patriarchs and in their seed after them — and to whom He gave Torah and statute and law through Moshe His servant. **The second division** is the rest of mankind, who are not included in Israel, the ones to whom the Torah of Moshe pertains; and yet they do not depart so far from what is fitting as to turn everything upside down and serve any but Hashem, may He be blessed, who is everything. They serve none but the First Cause, to whom all is directed. For when the Sages say everywhere "a gentile who worships *avodah zarah*", their intent is that he worships something other than Him, may He be blessed. By the very expression they chose, *avodah zarah*, they included everything that is other than Him: all of it is called *avodah zarah*, since everything is *zar* (זר, "strange") in relation to Hashem. This is why one should not say "a gentile who worships idols" — that implies specifically one who worships graven images, which are idols, whereas one who worships the sun and the *mazalos*, which are not idols, would not be included. Therefore they said "one who worships *avodah zarah*", meaning anything whatever in the world, even the sun and the moon and the angels: all of it is *zar* in relation to Hashem. And when a man has accepted upon himself to serve the First Cause, he is called a *ger toshav* (a resident alien). This is mentioned in several places in the Torah: that even [though] he does not keep the Torah of Moshe, so long as he does not serve another, the Torah calls him a *ger toshav*. It is written, "If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter beside you, you shall uphold him — a *ger* or a *toshev* — that he may live with you" (Vayikra 25:35), and Rashi explains (ibid.): "Even if he is a *ger* or a *toshev*. And who is a *ger toshav*? Anyone who has accepted upon himself not to worship *avodah zarah*, though he eats *neveilos* (carrion not ritually slaughtered)." Thus far. Further, in the Gemara in the chapter *Kol HaBasar* (Chullin 114b): "'You shall not eat any *neveilah*; to the *ger* who is within your gates you shall give it, that he may eat it, or sell it to a gentile' (Devarim 14:21) — both the gentile and the *ger* alike, whether by gift or by sale. R. Yehudah says: the *ger* by gift, the gentile by sale. [Aramaic: What is R. Yehudah's reason? If it should enter your mind to say as R. Meir says, let the verse write, 'to the *ger* who is within your gates you shall give it, that he may eat it, [and] sell it to a gentile.' And R. Meir? That wording serves to give precedence to giving to the *ger* over selling to the gentile. And R. Yehudah? For that no verse is needed; it is a matter of reason: this one you are commanded

to sustain in life, and that one you are not commanded to sustain in life.]" Thus far. And in the chapter *Eizehu Neshech* in [Bava] Metziah (71a): "a *ger* and *toshav* is one who has accepted upon himself not to worship *avodah zarah*, though he eats *neveilos*." Thus far. And in the chapter *HaMekabel* (Bava Metziah 111a): "With a *ger toshav* there is the obligation of 'On that day you shall give him his wage' (Devarim 24:15), but there is not the prohibition of 'The wages of a hired man shall not remain with you overnight until morning' (Vayikra 19:13)." Rashi explains there (Bava Metziah, *ibid.*): "A *ger toshav* — one who has accepted upon himself not to worship *avodah zarah*, though he eats *neveilos* and *tereifos*." Thus far. So all of these constitute a division of their own: whoever has accepted upon himself to serve none but Hashem. For even if they do not keep the mitzvos that Hashem gave to Israel, so long as a man does not serve another than Him, he falls within the category of *ger toshav*. He is simply not called a *ger tzedek* (Kiddushin 20a), who keeps all the mitzvos of the Torah of Moshe; but he is called a *ger toshav*, as we explained above. This division has a distinct rule attached to it — that one is commanded to sustain him in life — as is set out in the chapter *Kol HaBasar* (Chullin 114b), where it says that it is a matter of reason that giving to the *ger* takes precedence over selling to the gentile, since they are commanded to sustain him in life. **The third division** of mankind consists of those who worship *avodah zarah* — that is, they serve something other than the First Cause. This division is called by the plain name *goy*, "gentile". Scripture is full of this: that all the gentiles worshipped other gods, that they did not hold themselves apart from the service of foreign gods, and that they served another than Him. It is on this account that *Aleinu leshabe'ach* was instituted — "who has not made us like the nations of the lands," and so on — and the commentators explain that Yehoshua instituted it. Therefore it says, "Therefore we hope to You... to remove the abominations from the earth, and the idols shall be utterly cut off, to set the world in order," and so on: he was praying that *avodah zarah* be annulled from the world, since at that time all the nations were worshippers of idols. It emerges, then, that human beings are divided into three divisions. The first desires the service of the First Cause, to keep all the mitzvos that Hashem gave. The second division does not perform the mitzvos, yet does not exchange good for evil so as to serve a god other than Him who created everything. The third division are those who do make the exchange, giving honor to graven images and to alien things. There is, however, a fourth sect — the *minim* and the *apikorsim* — and there is no mention of these men within the category of created beings at all, as will be explained. **And when these three sects have been made clear** to you, you will know that wherever the Sages mentioned the law that applies to the gentile and his conduct, it is as though they had said explicitly: the division that

does not serve the First Cause, but who have taken it upon themselves to serve whatever they please, thinking that this is their success. Accordingly, as to what they said among the laws governing gentiles in the [fourth chapter] of Bava Kamma (37b) — "an ox belonging to an Israelite that gored an ox belonging to a gentile, whether *tam* (not yet forewarned) or *mu'ad* (already forewarned), is exempt" — the *nochri* spoken of there is the third division. Now those who serve Hashem have partnership and connection with one another, in that they are held to One, the First Cause, who binds them together and unites them. But those who serve another than Him are creatures separate from all the created beings who were created for His service. On this account it is fitting to exempt, and not to hold a man liable for damage done by his animal to their animal. For it is not in itself fitting that a man be liable for the safekeeping of his animal: that he must guard his animal so that it does no damage to another is an extraordinary thing in the Torah, since by knowledge and by reason it falls upon the one damaged to guard himself against the damage. And if it is impossible for a man to keep his own animal from going out to the field to graze, how should the one who causes damage keep his animal from going out to graze either? Even now, no one who judges by conventional law holds that when one man's ox gores another's ox he is liable to pay. The Torah imposed the liability to pay toward one with whom a man has connection and fellowship. Since he has fellowship with him, it is not fitting that damage should come from the one to the other, even by way of his property, for that is the opposite of fellowship and connection. This is why the Torah said, "And if one man's ox strikes his fellow's ox" (Shemos 21:35) — for the word *re'us* (רֵעוּת, "fellowship") belongs to the language of joining together, as in "a man of companions, to keep company" (Mishlei 18:24), and much else of the kind. Because they have connection with one another, damage should not come from the one to the other, and therefore he pays for the damage his property did to him. But one who has taken himself off to another side, who does not serve the One who created everything but serves another — the one designated by the term *nochri* — has no fellowship with him at all, and the Torah did not enjoin payment. For this law is itself a measure of keeping damage at a distance, that a man should guard his property so that it does not damage another's property; whereas by right it is upon the one damaged to keep himself at a distance. **And they explicitly gave** this reason there (Bava Kamma 38a): because they do not keep the seven mitzvos of the *bnei Noach* with which they were charged. For the *bnei Noach* were commanded (Sanhedrin 56a) concerning *avodah zarah*, concerning blasphemy, concerning murder, concerning forbidden unions, not to rob, to judge between a man and his fellow, and concerning a limb taken from a living animal — that one may not cut a limb from it and eat it, which is very great

cruelty — and they did not keep them. Therefore, in this matter, when our property damages theirs, there is no liability to pay. Tosafos too explained this explicitly (Bava Kamma 38a, s.v. *Amad*), and these are their words: "He permitted their property' implies specifically in this matter, where our ox gored their ox." You see, then, that it is because they did not keep the seven mitzvos — for we find in Scripture that they served another than Him, may He be blessed, and all the more so that they did not keep the rest of the mitzvos — that for this reason the Sages said He permitted their property in this matter, when our ox gored their ox. It follows from this that had they kept the seven mitzvos, this would not have applied to them. It is only because they do not serve Hashem that their law is such. In any case it is forbidden to rob them, as Tosafos explained (ibid.), [that] it is specifically that one is not enjoined concerning damage to property. **And likewise what they said** in tractate Bava Metzia, that *ona'ah* (overreaching in a sale) against a gentile is permitted, since it is written, "And a man shall not wrong his fellow" (Vayikra 25:17). This speaks of a case where a man sells something to his fellow and it turns out that the buyer was overreached by a sixth: he must return it to him. Even though the seller himself did not know at the time he sold, he must nevertheless return the *ona'ah* to him once it becomes known that the buyer was overreached, as is set out and explained in the words of the Sages. This is an exceptional measure of keeping at a distance and a great stringency, one not found in the law of the nations; for by the law of human beings, once the buyer has acquired the item, even though he was overreached, nothing need be returned to him. But the Torah was stringent, as is found explicitly — and specifically where the other is his fellow in Torah and in mitzvah, and is his companion. That is why it enjoined this.

In the chapter *Ein Ma'amidin* (Avodah Zarah 26a): "Gentiles — one does not raise them up and does not lower them. But the *minim*, the informers, and the *meshumadim* (apostates) — one lowers them into a pit at the outset." Thus far. The explanation is this. The gentiles, who abandon the eternal God and serve foreign gods — one neither raises them up nor lowers them. One does not raise him up, since he does not serve the living God, whom it is fitting to serve, but serves foreign gods; for if he does not worship *avodah zarah* he falls within the category of *toshav*, which is the name given to one who has accepted upon himself not to worship *avodah zarah*. But wherever it says "the gentiles", it means those who worship idols. Therefore one is not to grant him life by raising him up if he is in a pit, since by that the man would go on living for *avodah zarah*. Yet one does not lower him into a pit with one's own hands either, because the act of bloodshed is abominable and disgraceful in itself, and a man is not to do a thing that is disgraceful in itself — even where he would be doing it to one who serves

foreign gods and idols. He must therefore keep far from such an act; and this will be explained further shortly. But the *minim*, the *meshumadim*, and the *kofrim* — these three one lowers into a pit. For the *meshumad* is one who abandons his own God and serves foreign gods, and the term *meshumad* applies to one who at first served Hashem, may He be blessed, and afterward apostatized. That is the force of the term *meshumad* (משומד, from *shemad*, destruction): he was at first built up, and afterward destroyed himself into the worship of idols. Utter destruction is therefore fitting for him as well. The gentile, however, even though he worships *avodah zarah*, does not fall under this rule, for he has not turned aside from following Hashem as one does who served Hashem and afterward went off to the worship of idols — for such a one, utter destruction is fitting. And all the *minim* are utterly attached to *avodah zarah*. The *min* is not like the gentile, who is not utterly attached to *avodah zarah*. They are those for whom it is not enough that they serve another than Him, may He be blessed; rather they are forever pursuing delusions, to entice others to abandon the living God and to worship idols. These are the ones called *minim*. And because they cleave utterly to *avodah zarah*, their law is like that of the *meshumad*: to lower him into a pit. **And as for what is found** in the words of the Sages (Rashi, Shemos 14:7), "the worthiest of the gentiles — kill him; the best of snakes — crush its brain": even were we to concede the point, namely that because it says "the best of the gentiles — kill him", this means even one who does not worship idols, since that is the one who is "best of the gentiles" — and in truth this is no proof at all, since the meaning of "best" is that even a gentile who is in the habit of doing him good is nevertheless to be killed, because he worships idols — but even if we do say that the expression "the best of the gentiles" implies one who does not worship *avodah zarah*, they derived it from what is written, "And he took six hundred choice chariots and all the chariots of Mitzrayim" (Shemos 14:7): "Whose were the horses? If you say they were Israel's — but it is written, 'Our livestock too shall go with us; not a hoof shall remain' (Shemos 10:26). If you say they were Mitzrayim's — but it is written, 'And all the livestock of Mitzrayim died' (Shemos 9:6). Whose, then, were they? They belonged to the one who feared the word of Hashem, as it says, 'He who feared the word of Hashem brought his livestock to safety' (see Shemos 9:20). From here R. Shimon ben Yochai said: the best of the gentiles — kill him." And the meaning of "the best of the gentiles — kill him" is: in war, as was the case in Mitzrayim, where the Egyptians oppressed Israel and killed them. There is no war greater than that. Even the best of the gentiles is not fit to be shown mercy in war, since if a man himself were to fall into that gentile's hand, the gentile would show him no mercy. Let him therefore show him none, so that harm should not come to him from that very gentile, since it is a time of war. So it

was in Mitzrayim: the gentile who was good when the plagues came nevertheless in the end lent his horses to pursue Israel. From this you see that no gentile is good in war, and it is of this that they said, "the best of the gentiles — kill him." This has already been set out explicitly in the *Mordechai* (the halachic compendium of R. Mordechai ben Hillel), in the chapter *Ein Ma'amidin* (Avodah Zarah, *siman* 814), and these are his words: "Gentiles — one does not lower them (Avodah Zarah 26b); yet in war, of that we say in Kiddushin, 'the best of the gentiles — kill him.'" Thus far. You see that he, of blessed memory, explains it of the gentiles who are separate from Israel and who come against Israel in war: even though he is good, do not trust him in war — kill him in war. These matters are thus clear; for how could their words be contradictory, when they said (Avodah Zarah 26b) that one does not lower them into a pit? But because their words require explanation and understanding, a man who takes their words at their first understanding does not grasp what they say, and remains far from them.

However, as for what they further said — that the Sages of Israel instituted improper things in their prayers, to the point that they even spoke against the kingdom — if the matter were as they supposed, this would contradict the Sages' own words. For this blessing, which is the curse of the *minim*, was instituted by Shmuel HaKatan at Yavneh in the presence of the Sages, as it stands in the chapter *Tefillas HaShachar* (Berachos 28b). And an explicit mishnah is [taught] in tractate Avos (3:2): "Pray for the welfare of the kingdom, for were it not for the fear of it, a man would swallow his fellow alive."

It is well known that when they said "Pray for the welfare of the kingdom," the intent was not that one should pray for the kingdom of Israel. Had that been the intent, there would have been no need to supply the reason "for were it not for the fear of it, a man would swallow his fellow alive" — since one ought to pray for the kingdom of Israel in any case, because the welfare of that kingdom is the endurance of Israel, drawing down their peace, their greatness, their exaltedness and their success. Therefore, when they said "Pray for the welfare of the kingdom," they meant a kingdom other than Israel's. That being so, how could the Sages have instituted the very opposite?

And not only that: it would run against Scripture, since we were warned through the prophets that we are to pray for the welfare of the kingdom to which we have been exiled. For so it is written through the prophet Yirmiyahu (Yirmiyahu 29:4-7): "Thus said Hashem *Tzevakos*, the God of Israel, to all the exile that I have exiled from Yerushalayim to Babylon: Build houses and dwell in them; plant

gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there and do not diminish. And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you, and pray on its behalf to Hashem, for in its welfare you shall have welfare." So He commanded us to pray to Hashem on behalf of the place to which we have been exiled. How, then, could they have instituted the opposite of this, God forbid, and transgressed the words of the prophet?

On the contrary, the Sages warned us to accept upon ourselves the kingship and dominion of the nations. Since Hashem, may He be blessed, decreed that we be under their authority, it is fitting that we accept their dominion and not annul the decree. In the last chapter of Kesubos (111a) we read: "I adjure you, O daughters of Yerushalayim" (Shir HaShirim 2:7) — why these three oaths? That is to say: the verse "I adjure you, O daughters of Yerushalayim" is written three times. R. Yosi bar Chanina said: One, that Israel should not go up to the Land as a wall — meaning, by force. One, that HaKadosh Baruch Hu made Israel swear not to rebel against the nations. And one, that HaKadosh Baruch Hu made the nations of the world swear not to subjugate Israel excessively. "By the gazelles or by the hinds of the field" (ibid.) — R. Eliezer said: HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to them, "If you keep the oath, well and good; and if not, I will declare your flesh permitted, like the gazelles and the hinds of the field." Thus far the Gemara.

See how severe the warning is against rebelling against the kingship of the nations of the world — so severe that, God forbid, their flesh would be ownerless, like the gazelles and the hinds of the field. There is no doubt that the reason is this: since it was the decree of Hashem that Israel be under the nations, they must not annul Hashem's decree by force, for that would be against the decree. Rather, let them pray that the kingdom of Israel be restored, as the Sages instituted in the blessing *Es Tzemach David* ("May the offshoot of David...") and the blessing *V'liYerushalayim Ircha* ("And to Yerushalayim, Your city...").

But the character of this blessing is self-evident. Wherever this blessing is mentioned in the words of the Sages it is called "the curse of the *minim*," because it was instituted against those who abolish religion and those who oppose it — as they said there (Berachos 28b), that it was on account of the *minim* that this blessing was instituted. Know, then, that religion is abolished by four classes of men.

The first: when religion is burdensome to a man, and for that reason he leaves it, because he wishes to follow the stubbornness of his heart and to go after his

yetzer hara. So Scripture says (Devarim 29:17-18): "Lest there be among you a man or a woman, or a family or a tribe, whose heart turns away this day from Hashem our God to go and serve the gods of those nations; lest there be among you a root bearing gall and wormwood. And it will be, when he hears the words of this oath, that he will bless himself in his heart, saying: I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart." Accordingly he throws off the yoke of religion in order to serve foreign gods. The cause here is not that he errs in his thinking, but only that he wants to follow the evil stubbornness of his heart. And this weakens religion, because others are drawn after him: once a breach has been made, it is easy for it to be breached still further. That is the first.

The second: when there are men who err in their thinking and say of the commandments of the Torah that the way of the Torah does not bring success. The whole matter of the Torah is to remove from human hearts the serving of any other than Him, and that is the foundation of the Torah. These men err and say that the service of foreign gods brings a man success — more than distancing oneself from foreign gods brings a man to success. For this reason those who err entice the adherents of religion to walk in their way. This class is not like the first, who throws off religion for the pleasure of his inclination and has no wish to entice others to it: since his whole intent is only to follow the stubbornness of his heart and to be free of the yoke of Heaven, why should he entice others? But one who holds in his own mind that this is better for a man entices others as well, because he considers that enticing others is his success.

The third is jealousy over religion: religion draws a division between the nations, so that on this account jealousy and hatred arise toward that nation as a whole because of the difference of religion. For every nation is set apart by its own religion, and it is by its religion that it is that nation. Therefore, when the prayer says "and all the enemies of Your people," it is as though it said "and all the enemies of the religion of Israel" — for they are the people of Israel by virtue of the religion, and without the religion they are not Israel. So the third opposition is on account of jealousy over religion.

The fourth class likewise opposes religion, but not out of the jealousy over religion that draws a division among men. Rather, it is that every religion in the world, insofar as it is the acceptance of the decree of the supreme King of kings, is by that very fact opposed to a king of flesh and blood. For if a king of flesh and blood decrees something contrary to religion, men do not heed his decree but the decree of the supreme King of kings — and that amounts to the annulling of the decrees of his kingship. And there is the man of power, who wills and desires the

force of his own kingship, to the point of wanting men to be wholly under his authority and obedient to him, and to annul the decree of the supreme King of kings. This is what is called "a wanton kingdom," because in the wantonness of his heart he wishes to rule over the people and to display an excessive dominion — that they must accept his decree even in what is against the decree of Hashem, may He be blessed. There is no greater wantonness of heart than this. Many kings have done just this, decreeing decrees against Israel contrary to their religion in order to display their dominion over them: so Nevuchadnetzar did to Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah; so did the wicked Antiochus, who decreed against Israel that they should not keep the Torah; and so did many kings who decreed to make them transgress their religion. There is no doubt that they did so because the keeping of religion, which is the decree of the King on high, takes men out of the authority of a king of flesh and blood, as has been explained — and they wanted to display a great dominion, such that one must obey their decree and annul the decree of the King of the universe.

So you have four things that oppose religion, and you will find no more than these. Corresponding to the first they instituted "and for the *meshumadim* let there be no hope": these are the ones who left the religion in order to follow the stubbornness of their hearts, and who therefore threw off the yoke of religion — and this weakens religion. Corresponding to the second: "and may all the *minim* perish in an instant" — those who think there is success in serving other gods and who entice men after their view; this is the abolition of religion. For this they instituted "and may all the *minim* perish in an instant," for the *minim* mentioned here are those who think that the service of foreign gods is success for them, and such a man is called a *min*. So the Sages said explicitly in the last chapter of Horayos (11a), and this requires no proof.

Corresponding to the third they instituted "and may all the enemies of Your people be swiftly cut off": those who hate the people of Israel on account of the religion — such a man is therefore a hater of religion. Had they said "and may all our enemies be swiftly cut off," one might have thought that the prayer concerns those who are our enemies and do us harm, and who seek, God forbid, to cut off the name of Israel from the world. But this is not so at all. The prayer concerns whoever is an enemy of the nation because he hates the religion — for it is by the religion that they are the people of Israel, and by nothing else: if they do not have their religion, they are not Israel. There is no division between one nation and another except by religion; and when a man hates the religion, there is no doubt that his whole thought is to abolish the religion of Israel. This much is clear: had they wished to pray against their own enemies, the prayer would have read "and

all our enemies," those who are enemies to us. But "the enemies of Your people" — the prayer concerns one who is an enemy of the name of Israel, that is, of the nation as a whole, and who hates Israel because they have a religion. For He, may He be blessed, has decreed upon His people, just as a king decrees his decrees upon his people. This is clear.

Corresponding to the fourth they instituted "and the wanton kingdom." For when there is a wanton kingdom, it does not want them to keep the religion, because of the wantonness of its pride, since it does not submit to Hashem. Were that not so, their keeping the religion would not be opposed to it. Indeed, upright kings love the keeping of religion; but a wanton king's intent is to rule over men even against religion. So too they said in the *Al HaNissim* prayer (on Chanukah): "when the wicked Greek kingdom rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and to force them from the statutes of Your will." And Hashem delivered these wanton men into the hand of those who occupy themselves with Torah, as it says there. This is beyond any doubt the meaning of the prayer.

Perhaps a man will say that in our time there is no one who desires and seeks to make anyone transgress his religion. This is no difficulty: the prayer is framed for the case that such a one is found, and many prayers are like this — the prayer is a fixed text of that kind, to apply if such a thing occurs. And this is clear from everything the Sages say: that this blessing was instituted only against those who oppose the Torah.

Therefore this blessing has twenty-nine letters: corresponding to the twenty-seven letters of the Torah, and corresponding to the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. And when you examine these matters — how they composed this blessing against whoever comes against religion, and with what wondrous wisdom — as I have found in the books, that this blessing was instituted against the opponents of religion: they are four levels, one after another, each coming against religion with greater force. For the first, who comes against religion, departs from the community through the stubbornness of his heart; he throws off the yoke of Torah and the yoke of Heaven, and causes others to be drawn after him and to walk in his footsteps — for with every breach, the breach goes on widening. Yet this does not abolish religion by force, as the *min* does who entices another. For one who entices another does abolish religion somewhat by force, since he entices and misleads another until that man listens to him; he is close to one who abolishes it by force altogether. The third abolishes it by force altogether, for those who oppose one another on account of religion abolish religion by force, out of hatred of religion, until they abolish it with absolute force. Yet their

abolition does not reach so far, since the ability and the dominion are not theirs — unlike a kingdom, a wanton kingdom, such as the kingdom of the Greeks and the other kingdoms, which abolished religion by force in proportion to the greatness of the king's dominion. So there are four who abolish, each abolishing with greater force and vehemence.

You will find this set out plainly in the wording of the blessing itself. For the first they instituted "let there be no hope," which is nothing more than the negation of good from him. For the second they instituted "let them perish" — for their perishing is more than what was said before it, "let them have no hope." This is not merely the negation of good; rather, destruction comes upon them in themselves, in that they perish. For the third, who abolishes by force, they instituted "let them be cut off," and this is more than "let them perish," which happens of itself. For the word *yovdu* (יִאבְדוּ, "let them perish") is a verb in the *kal*, the simple conjugation, and it does not denote an agent, since there is no one here who performs the perishing; rather they perish of themselves, by an inherent force. But the word *yikoresu* (יִכְרְתוּ, "let them be cut off") does have an agent, for the one who cuts off is an agent performing his act. And for the last, who abolishes with force and vehemence — in proportion to the vehemence and strength with which he abolishes — it says "may it be uprooted, broken and cast down." All this is because he comes against religion by force, to the point that he wishes to abolish religion by force and vehemence. And each is repaid according to what he has done: since he comes against religion by force, to the point that he wishes to abolish religion by force and strength, so shall his own abolition be. Thus anyone who has wisdom and knowledge will know that their words are framed with great wisdom and justice. So we have received the explanation of this blessing from scribes and from books; the truth makes its own way, and it is plainer than the sun at noon. This is enough for whoever can tell truth from falsehood.

When a man takes their words without examination, as though they were merely relating matters between one man and his fellow, he will impute wrongdoing to them. But when he contemplates their words he will find that it is not so; the failure lies in his own understanding. And when a man brings their words together, he will find that they answer to one another and testify to one another, for their whole intent was for the truth. It is therefore not right to lay blame upon them, but rather to vindicate their words.

Indeed, whoever hears these things will grieve in his soul over the words these men speak in derision of the Sages. For it is not enough that what they said of

them is not spoken with justice or uprightness at all — their claim that the Sages instituted improper things in the prayer, when we have already explained that the matter is not as they said. They turn the matter completely on its head: it was the Sages who taught us and warned us that our prayer should not be of this kind at all. And this even though we have explained their words so that nothing whatever remains that departs from uprightness and truth — the prayer being directed against the *kofrim*, who deny the true God and His unity, may He be blessed, and against those who wish to rule and to abolish the religion of Hashem — so that anyone would say of this that it is true and right and well founded.

Even so, our Sages of blessed memory kept far from this, as it stands in the first chapter of Berachos (10a): [Aramaic: There were certain *biryonei* (lawless ruffians) in R. Meir's neighborhood, and they caused him great distress.] R. Meir prayed for mercy concerning them, that they should die. Beruriah, R. Meir's wife, said to him: "What is your reasoning? Because it is written (Tehillim 104:35), 'Let sins cease from the earth'? Is *chot'im* (חוטאים, 'sinners') written? *Chata'im* (חטאים, 'sins') is written. And further, go down to the end of the verse: 'and the wicked will be no more' (ibid.). Once 'sins cease,' then 'the wicked will be no more.' Rather, pray for mercy on their behalf, that they repent." Thus far the Gemara.

You see, then, that R. Meir thought to pray for mercy that the wicked should die, and his wife told him that it is not right to pray for this: even though a man is wicked, one should not pray that he die, since it is possible that he will turn back from his sin. If so, why should one pray that he be destroyed, seeing that man is the work of Hashem's hands? Therefore this is not fitting. That is why it is written "let sins cease from the earth" and not "sinners" — for *chot'im* is the descriptive term for a man who is wicked, and it would have implied that the man who sins should die and cease. Moreover, this follows from what is said afterward, "and the wicked will be no more"; otherwise it should have said, "let the wicked cease from the earth and let the wicked come to an end from the world." But "let sins cease from the earth" means that sin should not be found — that is, that Hashem should turn the mind of the sinner so that he does no more evil. In this way "sins cease," in that he commits no further transgressions, and then "the wicked are no more," meaning that wicked men are no longer to be found. That is how a prayer ought to be.

So the Sages taught us the character of prayer, and warned that our prayers should not ask even of the wicked that they die, but only that sins no longer be found, because the sinners will return to Hashem. How, then, is it possible to say that they transgressed the very warning they themselves gave? Rather, the prayer

means this. "And for the *meshumadim* let there be no hope" — that there be no hope for them that *meshumadim* should continue to exist, but that they pass from the world. They meant that there should no longer be such men in the world, but that they turn back from their deeds. "And may all the *minim* perish in an instant" — that the outlook of *minus* (sectarian heresy) should not exist in the world, and then the *minim* will have perished from the world. Had the prayer read "and may all the *minim* die in an instant," it would have implied that one prays for their downfall; but it says only "and may all the *minim* perish in an instant," which means that the outlook of *minus* should no longer exist in the world. "And may all the enemies of Your people be swiftly cut off" — this expression too means that the enemies of Your people be removed; that is what "cut off" means, that enemies of Your people no longer be found. And that there be no wanton kingdom in the world. But for the downfall of a kingdom — even of a wanton kingdom — there is no prayer at all. This is why it says "and the wanton kingdom ... and humble them speedily in our days": a kingdom that acts with wantonness and wishes to abolish the decree and commandments of Hashem, as has been explained — that kingdom is to be uprooted, so that there no longer be a wanton kingdom in the world; and this wanton kingdom will be turned about so that it no longer has a wanton heart, and He will bring it to submission. Then there will be no wanton kingdom to make men transgress their religion and refuse to accept the decree and commandments of Hashem. In none of the things mentioned is there any talk of their downfall — only that Hashem should remove this evil thing from their hearts and that they return in repentance.

So you see that in all that they said against the Sages, they have spoken what is perverse. In the very matter in which the Sages came to warn a man not to act, these critics have thought ill of them, as though it were they who had done it. Over this a man's heart ought rightly to grieve. And this is enough.

However, as for what they said — that things are found in the words of the Sages touching upon their religion, and that this is not to their liking — the truth is that we have not found these things in the words of the Sages at all. Only this: when something is found in their words that it is possible to interpret as bearing on the matter they have in mind, no favorable judgment whatever is extended to them, that they never intended it so; instead the complaint is multiplied over it. And wherever something is found to which a complaint might attach, it is found in the early commentaries — such as the Tosafos — that they explained the Sages' words to mean that it is not so.

Nor have we heard that the earlier generations who came before us had this complaint against the words of the Sages, concerning matters that stand in books which are famous and open to all. And this is so for one of two causes: either because, even though on a first view it appears to be as they say, one who examines closely will not find it so; or because it is not fitting that any complaint be made about this at all, since it is not fitting that a man reject another's words — as we have expounded at length above, at the beginning of the fifth complaint. Even the sages of the nations, who are the philosophers, have agreed to this.

The philosopher wrote in the book *Shamayim ve'Olam* (De Caelo et Mundo), and these are his words: "Then we shall begin and set out the views of the ancients who differ with us in this, and we shall set out their arguments; and this for two considerations. The first, that their arguments are doubts raised against the demonstrations we ourselves are to bring, and among the things that complete a demonstration is the resolving of the doubts that come against it. The second consideration, that our statement will be more acceptable and more readily received by one who loves truth — all the more so when we first arrange the arguments of those who differ and only afterward annul them. We shall then not be culpable in this action, nor shall we be suspected of wanting only to establish our own view, of paying no regard to another's view, and of holding such men in contempt — all the more so where the party who disputes with us is absent from the disputation. Therefore, if we bring our own view and our own arguments without the arguments of those who differ with us, the reception of our words among lovers of truth will be weaker, their attention to them smaller, and the suspicion of us greater. And one who wishes to judge by the judgment of truth ought not to be one who angers the party to his dispute, or who hates him; rather he ought to acknowledge him, to have compassion on him, and to speak with him gently. And the definition of acknowledgment is that he concede in the statements, carrying over to them what he would concede for himself [?]." Thus far his words — as we have written and expounded at length above.

And the things that he wrote concern the matter of religion as well. Even so, he wrote that it is not fitting for a man to hate his opponent's words; rather he should draw them near to the utmost. And he wrote there that if he does not do this — if he does not receive with love the words of those who differ with him, but pushes them away — that is certainly a weakness in his own words, for men say of him that this is precisely why he rejects their words: the weak has no endurance in the presence of one who opposes him. Therefore it is not fitting to keep at a distance anything that opposes one's own view, out of love for inquiry and for knowledge.

This applies especially to one who did not intend to provoke, but only to state the faith that is his. Even if his words go against the hearer's faith and religion, one must not say to him, "Do not speak; stop up the words of your mouth" — for if so, there will be no clarifying of religion. On the contrary: in a case like this one says, "Speak as much as you please, and everything you want and wish to say," so that you will not say, "Had it been possible for me to speak, I would have said more." For if a man does this, stopping his mouth so that he not say it, it points to the weakness of the religion, as we have said.

This, then, is the opposite of what some people think. They think that when a man is not permitted to speak about religion, that is the fortifying of religion and its strength. But it is not so: the suppression of the words of one who opposes in matters of religion is nothing but the annulment and the weakness of the religion, when men say, "Shut your mouth from speaking."

And therefore the earlier generations — even when something was found in books that ran against their religion, those who opposed it did not reject the thing. For the intellect necessitates that there be no impediment in this at all, and no shutting of a man's mouth in a matter that touches upon religion; rather, the copy of the religion is given out to all.

This applies above all to what is written, for one who writes in a book has no intent other than study, and there is nothing here that men intend in order to anger or to provoke. Therefore this must not be stopped up or annulled. And we have never found that they prevented or protested about such a thing at all; there was none here who "opened a mouth or chirped" (cf. Yeshayahu 10:14) about it.

Why, then, is this complaint not made against the books of the philosophers? They followed their own inquiry, and they betrayed and denied and said that the world is pre-eternal and had no creation at all — and even so, men take up those books and have not rejected them. Rather, this is how it ought to be, in order to arrive at the truth: to hear the arguments they made according to the view that is theirs, since they did not intend to provoke. Therefore it is not fitting to reject the words of another who opposes one; it is fitting rather to draw them near and to examine his words, as has been explained at length.

A thing written in a book was not written as though someone were speaking against religion; it was written to teach a man. Such a thing must not be shut up at all, whatever it may be. And if it is shut up, the one who stands against him will say that had he been given leave to speak as fully as was needed, he would have refuted everything. It is not the man who is speaking, but the book that speaks —

and is it for a man who has wisdom in him to pour out his fury upon paper and parchment? All the more so against one who set the words down in a book, whose intent was not upon speech but upon study, which one ought to hear from anyone; and one must not reject another's words, as has been explained above from the words of the philosophers. It is by this that a man comes to the inner content of the truth of things and arrives at the absolute truth, and there is no shutting up of things such as these.

For any mighty man who wishes to contend against another in order to display his might greatly desires that the one who comes against him should prevail with all the strength he can muster; for then, if he defeats that mighty man who came to prevail against him, the victor is seen to be the mightier. But what might does he display when the one who comes against him is not permitted to stand up for himself and fight against him? Certainly a master who overpowers his servant displays no might at all, since the servant neither can nor is permitted to fight against his master. Therefore one must not stop the mouth of a man who comes to speak against religion, saying to him, "Do not speak so." On the contrary: if he does this, that itself is his weakness.

And the moralists have said: Beware of the one who hates in his heart, when he thinks iniquitous thoughts about you — unlike one who brings it out with his mouth, for a man can answer and remove from himself what is only a matter of lips. So too it is written in the Torah (Vayikra 19:17): "You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall surely rebuke... and you shall not bear sin because of him." That is to say: you must not hate your brother in your heart, for then your brother cannot remove what you are thinking about him. Rather, if your thought about him is that he has done something evil — "you shall surely rebuke" him, and then he is able to remove from himself what you are thinking about him. "And you shall not bear sin upon him" — a sin he cannot remove from himself, which is what happens when you hate him in your heart and do not bring it out into the open.

If so, when they have done just this and brought out into the open what was in the heart — is that a bad thing? On the contrary: he is then able to answer. But if a man does not bring out what is in his mind, and it stays in his heart, what answer can be made? For is it not known with certainty that when men do not believe in the religion and stand far from it, they are not of one mind and one heart with that religion? For this reason this complaint is not found among the earlier generations.

The principle of the matter is that it is very, very far from right to bolt the door of books, so that they should not speak of things such as these. Therefore we do not find that the earlier generations prevented it, for the thing is not fitting.

Moreover, one who examines the Sages' words closely will find no proof here at all that they were speaking in their books about another religion. For the Torah of Moshe, peace be upon him, is longer than the earth in measure, and it is enough for them to speak of the Torah of Moshe, of which one can never speak enough. Only if a man examines them in a merely cursory way does he think such a thing of them.

And so there has been removed from them every complaint, from the greatest to the least; for they were sages of truth, and "truth springs up from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven" (Tehillim 85:12). Their righteousness has gone forth like the light, and their justice like the shining light. And may He, may He be blessed, grant that our portion be with them. Amen, and may it be His will. Amen, selah.