



SAMUEL RAPAPORT

**TALES AND MAXIMS
FROM THE MIDRASH**

COMMENTARIES ON THE WRITTEN & ORAL TORAH

Samuel Rapaport

Tales and Maxims from the Midrash (Commentaries on the Written & Oral Torah)

Published by

MUSAICUM

Books

- Advanced Digital Solutions & High-Quality eBook
Formatting -

musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info

2021 OK Publishing

EAN 4066338116291

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Introduction

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JUST as the Written Law given by Moses emanates from God, whilst He Himself only proclaimed the first two commandments of the Decalogue, owing to the Israelites being too terrified to hear God's voice (Deut. 20. 19), and the whole of the Torah was then conveyed to Israel by Moses, so he likewise received the Oral law, which he was not allowed to commit to writing. This Oral law had to be taught by word of mouth side by side with the Written law, and thus the former became an unfolding and sequel to the latter.

This, says the Midrash,¹ is meant by the words: 'Only take heed to thyself and keep thy soul diligently lest thou forget the words--דברים meaning "words" as well as "things"--which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life' (Deut. 4. 9). 'The words which thine eyes have seen' means the Written words which can be seen, and 'lest they depart from thy heart' refers to the Oral law, words committed to memory, laid up in the heart.

From time immemorial, during the time of the prophets and even earlier, the Israelites had established schools or assemblies for the teaching of the Torah. To the places of worship schools were invariably attached in which religion was taught, the Torah was read and exegetically expounded. Whenever a portion of Holy Writ was read a דרש (Drash)--a searching inquiry--into the meaning of every sentence was made, with explanations drawn therefrom, based on the

Oral law. Not only was this the case on Sabbaths and Festivals, but on week-days too, especially so on Mondays and Thursdays, when a small portion of the Torah was read, an institution ascribed to Ezra.² Later on--probably in the time of the Maccabees--the reading of the prophets was also introduced.

The dissertations and expositions which were held were known as מדרש (Midrash), and this term was originally applied to both the הלכה (Halacha) and the אגדה (Agada).

The sermons, dissertations and expositions of whatever nature--whether exegetical, homiletical or ethical--were always given by word of mouth, but were after delivery reduced to writing. A knowledge of the Scriptures on the part of the audience was assumed, as the study of the Law was looked upon as one of the highest religious duties. There was great anxiety on the part of these teachers that nothing should be added to the Written law, which is known to us as the עשרים וארבע--the Canon of the twenty-four books.

There is this line of demarcation between הלכה (Halacha) and אגדה (Agada), which in course of time were separated from one another, though the former contains now and then a little of the latter, and vice versa.³ Halacha, derived from הלך (to go, walk), is a term denoting laws regulating man's walk in life--the performance of his religious duties. The Aramaic translation of Onkeles (Exod. 21. 9) gives הלכה as an equivalent of משפט. Halacha, when decided by a majority of the school, became incontrovertible, law that could not be gainsaid; and any one, no matter how great his reputation for piety and learning, who might attempt to

impugn it, would be excommunicated. Thus we find such lights amongst the Rabbis as Eleazer B. Hanoch, who, having questioned the Halacha on 'Purity,' was put under the ban, in which he remained all his life, and a stone was thrown on his coffin, since he had died under sentence. Akabyah b. Mahalalel was similarly excommunicated for refusing to accept the decision of the majority on four questions, and Rabbi Eliazar b. Horkynas, too, was put under the ban for declining to recognize the decision of the majority on some points. The names of the respective authorities in the Halacha were always retained.

The Agada, on the other hand, is a free interpretation of the Scriptures. As its name implies: 'It was said.' Its assertions were not incontrovertible or not to be gainsaid. There was, on the one hand, strong opposition to the Agada; but, on the other hand, it was very highly esteemed by most, and not every one was considered qualified to handle it. Even Rabbi Akiba received a mild rebuke when he tried to dive into the depths of this method of teaching.⁴ There grew up in the course of time a saying: 'If you desire to find the greatness of the Creator, study the Agada.' The names of the Agadic teachers were not always mentioned, yet certain rabbis were known to have possessed an enviable capacity for this branch of religious instruction, such as Rabbis Abahu, Ishmael, Eliazar b. Azaryah, Eliazar b. R. José the Galilean, and others, and they were known as the Rabbis of the Agada.

The Agada, of which the various Midrashim contain collections, and which some of the Apocrypha have for their source, was written in the time of the Tanaim, and

consequently before the Halacha, which was only taken in hand by the school of Rav Ashé.

Whilst the Agada seeks but free scope in its own teachings and in its own interpretation of Scripture, and does not intend to invade the domain of Halacha, it yet occasionally touches some legal points. It is the oldest exegesis of the Scriptures, and contains in its elevating teachings, sermons, prayers, homilies, historical records, exhortations, admonitions and consolations, conveyed frequently in allegories, legends, parables and similes.

From the time of Ezra there were many institutions for the diffusion of this kind of teaching by the Scribes and priests. It formed the vital element in the nation's morality. When the Scribes took the place of the prophets, their interpretation and exposition of the Scriptures also took the place of prophetic utterances. In prosperity the people's favourite was the Halacha,⁵ but in adversity they preferred attending Agadic expositions, containing as they did--among much else--words of comfort and consolation, instilling faith in God and hope in His help and protection.

Rabbi Abahu and Rabbi Chanina b. Abbé were holding discourses at the same time; the former preaching on Agada and the latter on Halacha. Rabbi Chanina's audience, hearing of Rabbi Abahu's Agadic discourse, rudely left him, and went to hear the latter. This gentle sage, distinguished for his meekness and piety, felt aggrieved at the slight shown to his colleague, of which he was the innocent and unwilling cause. He went to see Rabbi Chanina and tried to assuage the grief caused him. 'It is hardly to be wondered at,' he said, 'that the people come to hear me instead of

craving for your words. For do we not find this folly in almost every walk of life? Let a man offer cheap and flimsy finery for sale, and he will find far more buyers than he who offers choice pearls and precious stones.'⁶ The Rabbis knew well how to make their Agadic discourses as attractive as possible, and to awaken their audience from their lethargic condition when occasion arose. One device was to use words of foreign languages, Latin, Greek, Persian, etc., in order to provoke questions and further interest, and so well was the Agada known for its foreign words, that if one found in the Mishna a word of doubtful meaning, recourse was had to the written Agada for its elucidation.⁷

Rabbi Akiba, once finding his audience drowsy and inattentive, used the following device: 'What,' he asked, 'induced Esther to reign over 127 provinces?' The question at once roused the attention of the whole assembly, who expected some subtle arithmetical solution, with which the Rabbi had no intention of edifying them. But finding his device successful and attention awakened, he answered the question by saying that 'it was proper for the descendant of Sarah, who lived 127 years, to reign over 127 provinces.'⁸

Rabbi Judah Hanasi, too, had recourse to enigmatical sayings: 'I know of a woman,' he said, 'who bore 600,000 children at one time.' This was enough to excite the curiosity of his congregation, who were depressed and in a dejected spirit owing to the havoc wrought by the ruthless Hadrian. Seeing that the assembly was quite puzzled at such a wonderful event, Rabbi Ishmael b. José explained that that woman was no other than Jochabad, the mother of

Moses, who was not only a host in himself, but also delivered 600,000 men from slavery.⁹

Some of the Rabbis wrote down their notes on Holy Writ as they occurred to them. Rabbi Meir, who was a skilful Scribe and wrote a scroll of the Pentateuch for his own use, is said to have written on the margin thereof short notes for his discourses. A great many Agadic and other teachings were developed in the school of Yabné, or Jamnia, granted by Vespasian to Rabbi Jochanon b. Zakkai, the last pupil of Hillel, and to his friends as well as to Gamliel's descendants. This truly great load-star of the Jewish religion established his school there, and the place became a new Jerusalem and the new seat of a highly learned assembly.¹⁰ Of the Midrashic writings of the period between the Hashmoneans and Hadrian, a period of some three hundred years, we possess but fragments, although that period may be said to have levelled the path from the Canon of the Bible to that of tradition.

What is known as the New Agada had its rise for the most part from the first to the fifteenth century.

The reopening of the schools in Palestine in the year 520 c.e., and in Babylon in the year 589, gave rise to Midrash Rabba on Genesis, followed by that on Leviticus, then Exodus and Deuteronomy, the last of the five books being Numbers. Of the Midrashim on the five Megilloth, that on Lamentations was the first, and that on Ecclesiastes was the last.

Midrash Tanchuma, or Yelamdenu, was most probably written in the last century of the Gaonim in Italy, about the ninth century c.e. These Gaonim were in constant

communication with Palestine. Tanchuma was followed by Midrash טוב שוחר on Psalms, Midrash on Proverbs and on Samuel.

I do not pretend to have explored for this little work (which I commenced in my sixty-ninth year, and hope to see published on or before my seventieth birthday) the Midrash in the whole of its scope.

I have not even as much as touched the Pesikta (the oldest of all Midrashim) Mechilta, Yalkut, Sifra or Sifré; but have restricted myself to about nine hundred quotations from the following Midrashim, viz. Rabba on the five books of Moses and the five Megilloth, Tanchuma on the Pentateuch, and the Midrash on Psalms, Proverbs and Samuel.

Moreover, whilst I have here and there ventured to 'dress up' the mere 'dry bones' of simple quotations with a word or two of my own, according to the (dim) light that is within me, I have chiefly confined myself to the mere quotations only.

I hope that the Eldorado which the intelligent reader will at once detect to exist in the somewhat untraversed highway of this wonderland of Rabbinical literature, may encourage an exploring thereof, and one is sure to find an inexhaustible deposit peppered with gold, to use the miner's phrase. The acquisition of a claim in this may not secure a residence in Park Lane, but it will ensure a habitation in the spheres which do not pass away. The whole realm of the moral code is represented in the Midrash; and there is not a point, whether on prudence, life's experience, or worldly wisdom, which the Midrash has left untouched.

Alexander Of Macedon

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THE great conqueror Alexander the Macedonian, the son of Philip, who, at the instigation of the Persians, was assassinated by Pisanus, when yet a boy showed great thirst for conquest. When he heard of his father's conquests he wept bitterly, complaining that by the time he assumed the crown there would be so little for him to conquer. He was barely twenty years old when he ascended the throne, but he knew well how to make his power felt. He soon conquered the Thracians, as well as the rebellious Thebans, and his heroic qualities developed so rapidly that he was appointed by the Greeks as military chief in their wars against the Persians. Uninterrupted success followed his arms, and had he not died at a comparatively early age he would probably have conquered what was then known as the whole world. His victory over the Persian General Memnon, on the river Granicus, in the North-West of Asia Minor, opened for him the road into the interior of further Asia. He was not slow to take advantage of the opportunity, and pushed rapidly through the States of Asia Minor, through Lydia and Ionia to Pamphylia. In the latter, near Issus, he gained a brilliant victory over Darius the Third, also known as Codomanus, who narrowly escaped death, leaving his mother, his wife and his children in the hands of the conqueror.

The Macedonian hero, with his troops intoxicated with victory after victory, now entered Syria, not so much in

pursuit of Darius as with a view to extending his conquests. He took Damascus and Sidon, and attacked Tyre, so as to become master of the sea also.

That city, however, being very strongly fortified, and being on one side protected by the sea, offered a stubborn resistance, and Alexander found himself compelled to embark on a long siege. In order to prevent any untoward event during the siege, Alexander was anxious to ensure immunity from the neighbouring State.

He therefore sent a message to Jerusalem, with a letter to the High Priest Jedua with the following requests: (1) To supply him with troops; (2) to allow free traffic between the Macedonian army and Jerusalem; (3) to give him every possible assistance, such as had been granted to Darius. A hint was also thrown out that the High Priest would do well to consider whose friendship and goodwill was of greater value--that of the victor, or that of the vanquished.

The letter further expressed Alexander's anticipation of having these modest requests granted, and assured the Jews that they would have no reason to regret compliance. The Jews could not but know that it would be greatly to their advantage to be on good terms with this famous hero, and that the beaten Persian could neither benefit nor injure them. Yet they did not feel justified in deserting the Persians. The High Priest therefore indited something like the following answer:--

'Recognition and high esteem are undoubtedly due to so glorious a hero, yet for the present the Jews of Jerusalem cannot comply with his wishes, for these reasons: We Jews have promised our loyalty, on our oath, to Darius. So long as

that Prince lives the oath has its force, and the Jews could commit no sin so grievous as wilful perjury, seeing that one of their commandments, with which God has entrusted them, is this: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." The High Priest moreover mentioned instances--such as Zedekiah, the last King of Judah, who became disloyal to the Babylonian ruler, his former allegiance notwithstanding, and brought calamity upon himself and upon Judea. He further pointed out that Moses' teaching tends to show that the God of Israel is a God of Truth, that treachery and untruth bring misfortune on those who practise them, and that it is incumbent on every true adherent of the teaching of Moses to avoid all falsehood and duplicity. Alexander would perhaps have been satisfied with the explanation offered by the High Priest Jedua, had it not been for the Samaritans, who, whilst practising all sorts of idolatry, were at the same time anxious to unite with the Jews, and to be considered as a portion of that body. When the Jews repudiated them, they sought to set up a temple of their own on the model of the Jerusalem Temple. Menasseh, a brother of Jedua, formerly a priest, having married a Samaritan woman, the daughter of a Samaritan governor, was deprived of his office of priest in the temple, and was naturally all the more anxious to set up an opposition temple, in which he could exercise his priestly function. The Samaritans therefore strained every nerve to excite Alexander's illwill against the Jews, and to obtain his sanction for the erection of a temple on Mount Gerizim.

Sanblat, the Governor of Samaria, and father-in-law of Menasseh, the expelled priest, sought audience of Alexander, and took the opportunity to give his version of the motives of Jedua, the High Priest, in refusing Alexander's requests. He maintained that loyalty to Darius was not the motive of the refusal, as the Jews, he said, knew nothing of loyalty, but, on the contrary, would overthrow every throne not occupied by one of their own people if they had the power. He said that they were priest-ridden, and that if there were any who would join his (Alexander's) army, they dared not venture it, as that would exclude them from participating in the Temple service, which to them meant moral death. If he (the Macedonian) would only secure an alternative to the Jerusalem Temple by sanctioning the opposition Temple which the Samaritans were anxious to set up, this would bring large numbers from Jerusalem to the new Temple; and the newcomers, no longer fearing exclusion from the Jerusalem service, would gladly join with the Samaritans the banner of the great conqueror Alexander. It is perhaps not surprising that the Macedonian conqueror was much impressed with this plausible version, especially when the Samaritans, as an earnest of their acceptance of and adhesion to the new state of affairs, deserted en masse the ranks of the crushed Darius, and went over to Alexander's army.

The desired permission for the building of the Gerizim Temple was granted, and the work was taken in hand. Soon afterwards, however, the governor, who was a man of advanced age, died. Tyre could no longer resist the severe siege, and, as predicted by the prophet (Is. 27), it

capitulated. Indescribable slaughter and ravage took place within its walls; the town was laid in ruins, and its heroes were either slaughtered or taken as slaves.

Alexander now turned his attention to the punishment of the Jews, and started with his ever-victorious army for Jerusalem. When the news of the approach of Alexander and his formidable army reached Jerusalem, there was consternation, and despair ruled supreme amongst the inhabitants, one and all. The Jews took refuge, as ever, in their religion; prayer, fasting, sackcloth and ashes were the order of the day. Confession of sin and repentance were practised daily by almost every person. When Alexander was but about one day's distance from Jerusalem, the High Priest and Elders of the Temple had the streets of the city beautifully decorated, the public buildings as well as the private residences were magnificently adorned, and they ordered the inhabitants to form two lines in the streets--one opposite the other--the people to appear in their holiday attire. The gates of the city were bedecked with garlands of the finest flowers, and triumphal arches were erected. The priests, the Levites and the Elders, at their head the venerable High Priest Jediah in full priestly robes, mitre, ephod and breastplate, made their way, towards evening, to the entrance of the city, carrying torches and candles in their hands, and a light was thrown on the brilliant assembly such as eclipsed the noonday brightness of a magnificent summer's day.

Soon after their arrival at the gate, Alexander, at the head of his army, made his appearance. He was quite astonished at the sight that met his view, and seemed to be

overwhelmed on beholding the grand and imposing assembly that came to meet him. When he saw the High Priest, who looked even as an angel in his garments, Alexander dismounted, as though impelled by an instinct, bowed himself reverently, and proclaimed aloud: 'Blessed be the God whose servant you are.' His army, however, having anticipated plunder rather than the sight before them, could ill conceal their bewilderment at the strange turn of affairs. They could hardly believe, on the evidence of their own senses, that their proud monarch should bend his head so humbly and so reverently before the High Priest. One of Alexander's confidential and favourite officers, Parmenion by name, ventured at last to ask the King why he, the proud conqueror, showed such marked honour and deference to the Jewish priest.

'Listen, then,' replied Alexander, 'and I will tell you of a wonderful experience of mine. While I was still in Macedonia I often lay awake at night, when all else was at rest, thinking of a plan by which to gain mastery of Asia. One evening, when my thoughts were more than usually occupied with this fond scheme of mine, I fell, exhausted by this mental strain, into a deep slumber, and saw in a vision an awe-inspiring man standing before me. The very sight of him seemed to instil into me courage and hope, and, as though reading my very thoughts, he advised me to cross the borders of Greece without further hesitation, and assured me of the success of my projected undertaking. That vision of mine was no myth, no nightmare, not the mere phantasy of a heated brain; for not only have I, since that vision, never met with anything but victory, but in the hoar-headed

and venerable servant of the Jewish God, in his attire and in his bearing, I see no other than the man of my vision. Shall I not then revere the man who was the messenger of his God to lead me to victory? I am equally convinced that my destiny is to overthrow Darius, and for that purpose I was called to undertake this venture, and the appearance of this holy man foretells complete success.' After this explanation, Alexander entered Jerusalem, accompanied by the Jewish dignitaries who came to meet him. He was welcomed and cheered throughout by the population of the city. His first request was to be taken to the Temple, where he anxiously inquired concerning the ceremonies and sacrifices and the manner of the services.

His curiosity was gladly satisfied, and the High Priest directed his attention also to the passage in Daniel 8. 5, where it is foretold that a Greek ruler (which term the High Priest applied to Alexander) would overthrow the Persian kingdom, and Alexander was exceedingly pleased with all he saw and heard. The following day the Macedonian hero summoned all the priests and elders, and asked them to tell him, without restraint and hesitation, what they wished of him as a token of his great satisfaction at the reception given him, and as a mark of his high estimation of their services and organization. The High Priest, who was the spokesman, asked his Majesty to grant them the free and unhindered exercise of their religious rites, and to waive the payment of taxes in the Sabbatical year, when, according to the law of Moses, no agricultural pursuits were allowed, and consequently there was no revenue from their lands. This was at once granted; but Alexander observed from Jedua's

demeanour that there was some further favour he wished to obtain, but that the good man was reluctant to name it. He therefore requested the High Priest to lay all his wishes before him. The High Priest then ventured to ask that the great monarch might extend his permission regarding the exercise of the religious rites by his Jewish subjects to all other parts of his wide dominions, such as Babylon and Media, and this was also cheerfully granted by the great Alexander. At the express wish of the Macedonian warrior, a large number of the most valiant of the Jewish community joined his army, and he gave them permission to follow their religious observances in the camp. As a further favour, Alexander requested that his likeness might be framed and placed in the Temple. It was pointed out to him that the Jews were strictly forbidden to have pictures and likenesses of anything whatever in their places of worship, and, in lieu of this, it was suggested (1) that all male children born in that year throughout Jerusalem should be named Alexander, and (2) that the Jews should adopt a new era called the Alexander Era. That era was to commence with October 1 of the year 312 before the Christian era. This suggestion met with Alexander's approval, and up to the eleventh century of the Christian era this method of reckoning the years was actually in force, and was known as the Era of Documents.¹¹

With Alexander's entry into Jerusalem began a very considerable improvement in the condition of the Jews.¹² The Samaritans used every subterfuge in order to be recognized as Jews by the Macedonian hero, so that they might enjoy the privileges and advantages bestowed on the latter, but they failed to convince Alexander, who

remembered their efforts to prejudice him against the Jews, that they were of the same people. 'If you are indeed Jews,' he asked, 'how is it that you are not known by that name?' 'We are,' they insisted, 'descendants of the Patriarch Jacob, and Israel's God is our God; but the Sidonites call us Samaritans, and we are also known to them by the name of Shechemites, after our capital Shechem.'

Alexander was not satisfied with their answer, and told them that he could not recognize them as Jews, and to the Jews alone he had granted the privileges which the Samaritans sought to obtain. He asked them to leave the matter in abeyance till his return from the long journey he was about to undertake, and on his return he would thoroughly investigate their claim, and then see that justice was done to them. The Samaritans were dissatisfied with Alexander's treatment of them, and they rebelled and burned the Governor Andromachus in his own palace. Alexander's anger at this was very great; he returned, put to death the leaders, exiled a number of Samaritans to Egypt, where they formed a colony in Thebais, and handed a large number of them over to the Jews as slaves, as a reward for their tried loyalty.

Alexander of Macedonia, be it remembered, was by no means a mere uncouth warrior whose knowledge did not extend beyond the narrow compass of the battlefield, for the vast dominion of art and science was an open book to him. From his thirteenth to his eighteenth year he was a pupil of Aristotle, who guided him through all branches of wisdom and knowledge, and inspired in him a love for Homer's works, which in fact he always carried with him. As

a consequence, he naturally had a longing for intercourse with the educated and learned men of every place which he visited. Arrived in the South, his first step was to have the men distinguished for their wisdom brought before him. To them he put the following ten questions: (1) Which is the longer distance--from the earth to the skies, or from the east of the world to the west? Answer: The last-mentioned is the longer, because if the sun stands in the East or in the West, then he is perceived in the half of each sphere; but if he is in the centre of the sky, then he is not visible everywhere. Consequently he must be higher in the former case than in the latter. (2) Which was created first--the heavens or the earth? Answer: The Almighty clearly commenced His work with the heavens, for is it not said, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'? (3) Who is truly wise? Answer: He who can foresee the result of his acts is truly a wise man. (4) Who is truly strong? Answer: Strength is in the possession of him who can overcome his passions. (5) Who can be considered truly rich? Answer: Truly rich is he who possesses contentment. (6) How can man acquire true life? Answer: True life can be obtained by deadening one's passions. (7) What hastens man's death? Answer: Indulgence in earthly pleasures. (8) How can man obtain the love of his fellow-men? Answer: By not seeking supremacy over them. Alexander felt himself hit by this answer, and said, 'I am not of your opinion in this respect. My idea is that, in order to obtain the love of one's fellow-man, one must acquire might and power, and use them with discretion.' (9) Which is the more agreeable abode--on land or water? Answer: Surely on land, because seafaring men

are not happy and contented till they reach land. (10) Who amongst you is considered the wisest? Answer: In this respect we are unable to give any one the preference, as you may have observed that our answers were unanimous and simultaneous.

Alexander proceeded in argument with the wise men. 'Why,' he asked, 'are you so averse to heathenism, seeing that the heathens greatly outnumber you?' To which he received the reply that it is just the multitude, the masses, who are apt to lose sight of truth, and it is only given to a comparative few to perceive and understand pure truth. 'But,' he continued, 'it is in my power to destroy the whole of you.' 'No doubt,' was the answer, 'you possess the power to do so, but we are not apprehensive on that point, having once received the promise of your protection.' He then consulted them concerning his projected journey to Africa. The wise men answered, 'That you cannot reach, as it lies beyond the dark mountains, which no human foot can traverse.' The king seemed to be piqued by this, and said, 'I do not ask you whether I shall or can traverse those mountains. My mind is made up, and there is no resistance to my will. What I want to know is the best means known to man for undertaking this formidable expedition.' The wise men advised him to the best of their knowledge. Part of their advice was to procure certain draught animals from Libya, which possess the faculty of seeing their way in darkness. The king, having adopted all the necessary measures, started for Africa. He arrived at a place called the land of Amazon, whose inhabitants consisted only of women, to whom he sent a declaration of war. The women

sent a message to him that a war with them could only be an inglorious one, inasmuch as if he were victorious a victory over women could not bring him either fame or honour; whereas if they should be victorious, that would surely bring disgrace upon him.

The king saw the wisdom of their argument, and gave up the idea of war, but bade them supply him with bread. The women brought him lumps of gold in the shape of loaves of bread. The king said in amazement 'Do you use this metal as bread?' They answered 'You surely have not come all this distance merely for bread; is there no bread in your own country?'

Alexander took his departure thence, but, before starting, he wrote on the gate of the city: 'I, Alexander of Macedonia, was a simpleton until I arrived at this gate, where I learnt wisdom from women.' He next arrived at Katzia, where also he was met with presents of gold. 'I want no gold of yours,' said Alexander to the chief. 'And to what other purpose have you come all this great distance?' was the answer, given in the shape of a question. 'I have come,' said Alexander, 'to become acquainted with your manners and customs, especially with your administration of justice.'

A remarkable case of litigation happened to be in progress in the place at this time. A man who had bought a house of another found in its precincts a treasure-trove, which he took back to the seller, saying: 'This is yours; I bought the house only, and not what may be found in it.' The other, in refusing to accept the proffered treasure, argued that he sold the house, and the buyer was the rightful owner of all that might be found in it. The judge

gave his decision that the son of the purchaser of the house should marry the daughter of the seller, and the young couple should receive the treasure as a dowry. As Alexander expressed his wonder at and approval of the wise verdict, he was asked by the judge how a similar suit would be decided in his own country. 'In my country,' replied Alexander, 'the treasure would be taken by the Crown, and both parties would be deterred by the threat of death from laying any claim to it.' 'How,' said the judge, 'have you also rain and sunshine in your country?' 'Surely,' replied Alexander. 'And you possess also animals and fowls?' 'Why not?' asked the Macedonian. 'Then,' remarked the judge, 'I must suppose that the purpose of the rain and sunshine in your land is to sustain those harmless creatures; for you, the human inhabitants, judging by your perverseness and injustice, are unworthy of such blessed gifts of nature.'

One day they arrived at a river, and as his servants were washing off the salt of the fish, which they carried with them for their august master, in the water of the river, they saw that life was returning to the fishes. When the marvellous event was reported to Alexander, he determined to find the source of that river. He pursued his way, and at last found a gate, where he demanded admittance. The answer he received to his demand was: 'This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter therein,' and he concluded that it must be the gate of Paradise. As all his pleadings did not gain him admittance, he asked for some article from the place as a token of his having arrived there. A lump of gold in the shape of a human eye was handed out to him, and on putting it in the scales to ascertain its remarkable weight,

he found that whatever weight he might put on the opposite scale, it would not turn the scale on which the golden eye was put. As soon as he met with the Rabbis again, he asked them to unriddle this remarkable thing. The Rabbis told him to put a little earth over the eye, and its weight would vanish. They explained that the eye was a perfect type of the human eye, which, as the wise king tells us (Prov. 27.), is never satisfied, until a little earth is put over it (in death), and its everlasting hunger ceases.¹³

Alexander returned home from his great adventures through the wilderness and went to Egypt, where he built the city of Alexandria. He was anxious for the Jews, whom he held in high esteem for their bravery and loyalty, to be among the settlers of the great city. Once, some African tribe and some descendants of Ishmael laid complaints before him against the Jews. The Africans claimed the possession of Palestine, basing their claim on Numbers 34. 2 and on their being descendants of Canaan; they maintained that they had an undisputed right to the country of their ancestor. The sons of Ishmael, too, put in a claim to the possession of at least a portion of Palestine, as the land was promised to their grandfather Abraham (Gen. 25. 13). And so the Egyptians bethought themselves of their claim against the Jews, and referred also to a Scriptural passage (Exod. 12. 36).

Alexander had the elders of the Jews summoned to him, and mentioned the claims of the respective parties against them. The Jews selected one named Gebaha, son of Psisa, as their defender. He faced the plaintiffs, and said: 'You have each based your claims on Scripture; I, too, will plead

against you out of the books of Moses, our lawgiver. Regarding the Canaanites, we have it in Genesis 9. 25 that Canaan was cursed and was made a slave to his brothers. A slave can possess no property of his own. As to the demand of the Ishmaelites, we have it also on the same authority (Gen. 25. 5) that Abraham presented Isaac with all his possessions, and to the children of his concubines he made presents and sent them away from his son Isaac.

'Against the claims of the Egyptians, we have a huge counterclaim. The second book of Moses mentions the time of the Jewish compulsory servitude in Egypt as 430 years. We are fully prepared to restore the value of what we carried away from Egypt, if the Egyptians will pay us the wages of 600,000 men, whom they compelled to work for them for the period mentioned.'

Alexander demanded a reply on the part of the three claimants against the Jewish arguments, within three days, if they did not wish to be punished for making fictitious claims.

Nothing more was heard of the claims.¹⁴ The Jews rose in Alexander's esteem daily, and he gave them the most beautiful part of the city, on the banks of the river, as their quarter, and granted them the full rights of citizenship. The Jewish community increased greatly in wealth and numbers. A year later, at the battle of Arbela, a town in Chaldea, Alexander entirely annihilated the Persian empire. After more wars and conquests, he died suddenly at the age of thirty-three. His death was brought about as much by revelry as by his many cares and bodily exhaustion. Some of his generals contended for his throne; he was left unburied

for some time, and eventually no royal burial was his portion. The Macedonian monarchy was divided amongst four of his generals.--Midr. Rabba Gen. 33; Lev. 27. and Tanchuma Emmor, etc.

Demons

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THE spirits of demons were created on the eve of the sixth day, but before their bodies were formed the Sabbath set in, when rest was proclaimed, and their formation was not consummated.--Gen. Rabba 7.

After Cain had killed Abel, Adam separated from his wife for the space of 130 years, during which time Adam emitted male demons and Eve female demons.--Gen. Rabba 20.

Eve, 'as the mother of all living,' was also the mother of demons.--Gen. Rabba 20.

Four things were altered from their former condition in the time of Enos, son of Seth: the mountains became as hard as flint, dead bodies of man commenced to putrefy, which was not the case before; man began to resemble the ape, and demons commenced having power or dominion over man, of which they were deprived before the image of God in man was impaired.--Gen. Rabba 23.

From Adam to Enos man had God's image, then man formed the image of demons.--Gen. Rabba 24.

Noah took demons into the ark and thus preserved their species.--Gen. Rabba 31.

A demon named Shamdon went with Noah to plant the vineyard and made a condition with him (Noah) not to interfere in any way with his work, or he would injure him.--Gen. Rabba 36.

Demons are also known as the 'Hairy ones,' as the prophet describes them (Is. 13.).--Gen. Rabba 65.

The flaming revolving swords were placed at the entrance of the Garden of Eden through the agency of demons. The word להט means demoniac agency as well as 'flames.' And when we are told that Pharaoh's magicians imitated Moses' performance of miracles בלטיהם, it means that they did this through the agency of demons.--Exod. Rabba 9.

As Pharaoh's magicians worked their imitation of Moses' miracles through demons, they were unable to imitate the third plague, since demons cannot bring forth anything smaller than a barleycorn.--Exod. Rabba 10.

With the crow of the cock announcing the approaching dawn of day, the power of demons diminishes, their power being for the most part confined to night only.--Levit. Rabba 5.

Religious men may gain power over demons and subdue them in various ways, as did King Solomon before his fall, before he was led astray by strange women. After his fall, though partly restored to his greatness, he not only had lost his power over demons, but was in terror of them, hence he had need of the sixty mighty men to surround his bed (Songs 3. 7).--Numb. Rabba 11.

The ninety-first psalm was composed by Moses as a sort of talisman or protection against demons whom he feared, when about to ascend Mount Sinai, as putting a stumbling block in his way. Agras, daughter of Machlas, is the name of a female demon who commands a large number of associates or assistants, and there is one great demon whose name is כטף (Kative), in Hebrew 'Arrow.' The Psalmist alludes to this when he says, 'The arrow that flieth by day'

(Ps. 91.). This terrible demon has exceptional power between the first six and the last nine hours of the twenty-four. His power is greatest neither in the shade, nor in the sun, but in the condition betwixt sun and shade. His physiognomy is described as follows: head similar to that of a calf, one horn rising out of his forehead in the shape of a cruse or a pitcher. No one beholding him, man or beast, can live, but drops down dead at once, and several instances are given of men who on seeing him fell down dead immediately. There was one, however, Judah son of Samuel, who was proof against falling down at the sight of this demon, but he died shortly afterwards. There is a certain period of the year when this demon has special sway, and that is during the three weeks between the 17th day of Tamuz and the 9th day of Ab. So great indeed is his power for evil during the above-mentioned period, that the Rabbis prohibited the schoolmasters chastising naughty scholars during those days, lest 'Arrow' should avail himself of his propitious season and add mischief of his own to the beaten pupils, and the result should prove fatal. It is comforting to know that during the existence of the מִשְׁכָּן (Mishkan) Tabernacle, demons were removed from this globe because the Shechinah took up its abode in the Mishkan, which was erected by special command and design of the Lord.--Numb. Rabba 12; Midr. on Psalms, Lamentations, and Song of Songs.

There is not so small a space as a yard of ground upon which there are not thousands of demons ready to injure man, but a sort of mask or thick veil is put before their faces, which tends to dim their sight, so that they cannot