And the halakha is in accordance with the opinion of that disciple – Ḥekhalot. Some explain that Rabbi Akiva intended to say that although he knows that there is no such tradition and Rabbi Yishmael certainly did not make that statement, nevertheless, that student’s opinion seems logical (Ge’on Ya’akov).

Destroying the whole world in its entirety – kankantom: See Rashi and Tosafot, who offer various examples demonstrating that the meaning of a verse can change with the addition or omission of a single letter. The examples illustrate that minor changes can possibly destroy the entire world, e.g., when they lead to readings that involve heresy, sacrilege, or blasphemy.

The preparation of ink – Scribe – kankantom: From the Greek χάλκανθος, chalkanthos, meaning copper sulfate.

The Gemara challenges this statement: The statement of the disciple is reasonable. However, their respective opinions are not defined; which tanna accepts the view of Rav Aĥlai and which tanna rejects it cannot be determined.

It was taught in a baraita that Rabbi Akiva said: Rabbi Yishmael did not state this matter, as it is unlikely that Rabbi Yishmael would err in this manner; rather, it was that disciple who stated that matter on his own, and the halakha is in accordance with the opinion of that disciple.

With regard to that baraita the Gemara asks: This baraita itself is difficult. You stated initially that Rabbi Yishmael did not state this matter; apparently the halakha is not in accordance with the opinion of the disciple. And then you said: The halakha is in accordance with the opinion of that disciple.

Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: Rabbi Akiva said that the halakha is in accordance with that disciple only to sharpen the minds of his students with his statement. Seeking to encourage his students to suggest novel opinions, he praised that disciple before them but did not actually rule in accordance with the disciple’s opinion.

And Rav Nahman bar Yitzḥak said, in another attempt to resolve the contradiction: The statement of the disciple appears to be reasonable was stated. Although Rabbi Yishmael himself did not make that statement, the statement of the disciple is reasonable.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Anywhere that you find a statement introduced with: A certain disciple said before Rabbi Akiva in the name of Rabbi Yishmael, it is none other than Rabbi Meir, who was the student who served both Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva.

As it was taught in a baraita that Rabbi Meir said: When I was a student with Rabbi Yishmael, I used to put copper sulfate [kankantom] into the ink with which I wrote Torah scrolls, and he did not say anything to me. When I came to study with Rabbi Akiva, he prohibited me from doing so.

The Gemara challenges this statement: Is that so? Didn’t Rav Yehuda say that Shmuel said in the name of Rabbi Meir: When I studied with Rabbi Akiva as his disciple, I used to put copper sulfate into the ink, and he did not say anything to me. But when I came to study with Rabbi Yishmael, he said to me: My son, what is your vocation? I replied: I am a scribe [lavar] who writes Torah scrolls. He said to me: My son, be careful in your vocation, as your vocation is heavenly service, and care must be taken lest you omit a letter or add a single letter out of place, and you will end up destroying the whole world in its entirety. Addition or omission of a single letter can change the meaning from truth [emet] to death [met].
The Gemara clarifies elements of the conversation: What is Rabbi Yishmael saying to Rabbi Meir, and what is he answering him? Rabbi Meir's response with regard to copper sulfate does not seem to address Rabbi Yishmael's comments with regard to omissions and additions.

The Gemara explains that this is what Rabbi Meir is saying to Rabbi Yishmael: There is no need to mention defective and plane words, as I am an expert; however, even with regard to the concern that a fly might come and land on the crown of the letter dalet and blot it out and render it a reish, there by changing the meaning of the word, I am not concerned, as I have a substance called copper sulfate that I place into the ink so that it will not be erased.

Nevertheless, there is a difficulty between service and service, as one source states that Rabbi Meir initially served Rabbi Akiva, whereas the other source states that he served Rabbi Yishmael first. There is a difficulty between the words he prohibited it in the baraita, which is referring to Rabbi Akiva, and he prohibited it in the statement of Rav Yehuda, which is referring to Rabbi Yishmael.

The Gemara comments: Granted, there is no difficulty between the accounts in the two sources with regard to service and service, as it can be suggested as follows: Rabbi Meir initially came to study before Rabbi Akiva, and since he was unable to comprehend the teachings in accordance with his opinion, he came before Rabbi Yishmael and studied the tradition, and again came before Rabbi Akiva and studied logical analysis. After studying the basic principles from Rabbi Yishmael, he was able to understand the more complex teachings of Rabbi Akiva.

Having reconciled the first difficulty, the Gemara continues: However, the difficulty with regard to whether Rabbi Akiva prohibited copper sulfate or Rabbi Yishmael prohibited it remains difficult. The Gemara notes: It indeed remains difficult; no answer was found.

The Gemara continues the discussion of copper sulfate. It was taught in a baraita: Rabbi Yehuda says that Rabbi Meir would say: One may place copper sulfate into the ink that is to be used for all sacred writings, except for the writing of the Torah passage with regard to a sota, as it must be possible to erase that writing. Rabbi Yaakov says in his name: Except for the writing of the Torah passage with regard to a sota used in the Temple in the ordeal to determine the guilt or innocence of the wife suspected of adultery.

The Gemara asks: What is the difference between their opinions, i.e., what is their point of dispute? The Gemara answers: Rav Yirmeya said: The difference between their opinions is whether it is permissible to erase the passage of a sota from a Torah scroll. The tanna'im of the baraita disagree whether or not a section taken from a Torah scroll may be used for this purpose, or whether a special scroll must be written for use in the ordeal of the sota.

And those tanna'im disagree in the same dispute as these tanna'im, as it was taught in a baraita: A scroll that was written for one woman suspected of infidelity but was not used, her scroll is not fit to prepare the water to give to another sota to drink. However, Rabbi Akiva bar Yoshiya said: Her scroll is fit to be used to prepare the water to give another sota to drink. The legal status of a Torah scroll, which is not written for a particular sota, should be the same.
HALAKHA

Writing the sota’s scroll in her name – רָפָא הַרְּכִּיָּה. A sota’s scroll must be written in her name. If it was not written or erased in her name, it is invalid. This ruling is in accordance with the conclusion of the Gemara’s discussion in tractate Sota (Rambam, Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 3:8).

Rav Pappa said: Perhaps that is not the case, as the two circumstances are not comparable. The first ṭanna of the baraita stated his opinion that one woman’s scroll may not be used for another woman only there; since it had originally been designated in the name of another woman, e.g., Rachel, it cannot then be designated in the name of another woman, e.g., Leah. However, in the case of a Torah scroll, which is written with no particular person in mind, he too may say that we may erase it to be used for another woman, and it is not disqualified because it was not written in her name.

Furthermore, Rav Nahan bar Yitzhak said in another attempt to resolve the matter: Perhaps it is not so, as an additional distinction exists between the two cases: Rabbi Aha bar Yoshiya stated his opinion that the first woman’s scroll may be used for another woman only there because at least, in that case, it was written for a particular sota in the world. However, in the case of a Torah scroll, which was written for study, he too would agree that we do not erase it.

The Gemara asks: And does Rabbi Aha bar Yoshiya not hold in accordance with that which we learned in a mishna: If one wrote a bill of divorce to divorce his wife, but later reconsidered and did not divorce her, and a resident of his city found him and said: Your name is the same as my name, and your wife’s name is the same as my wife’s name, and we reside in the same town; give me the bill of divorce, and I will use it to divorce my wife, then this document is invalid to divorce with it? Apparently, a man may not divorce his wife with a bill of divorce written for another woman, and the same should apply to the scroll of a sota.

The Gemara rejects this argument: How can you compare the two cases? There, with regard to a bill of divorce, it is written: “And he shall write for her” (Deuteronomy 24:1), and therefore we require writing it in her name, specifically for her; whereas here, with regard to a sota, it is written: “And he shall perform with her all this ritual” (Numbers 5:30), and therefore we require performance in her name. In her case, the performance is erasure; however, writing of the scroll need not be performed specifically for her.

On the topic of Rabbi Meir and his Torah study, the Gemara cites an additional statement. Rabbi Aha bar Hanina said: It is revealed and known before the One Who spoke and the world came into being that in the generation of Rabbi Meir there was no one of the Sages who is his equal. Why then didn’t the Sages establish the halakha in accordance with his opinion? It is because his colleagues were unable to ascertain the profundity of his opinion. He was so brilliant that he could present a cogent argument for any position, even if it was not consistent with the prevalent halakha. As he would state with regard to a ritually impure item that it is pure, and display justification for that ruling, and likewise he would state with regard to a ritually pure item that it is impure, and display justification for that ruling. The Sages were unable to distinguish between the statements that were halakha and those that were not.
It was taught in a *baraita*: Rabbi Meir was not his name; rather, Rabbi Nehorai was his name. And why was he called by the name Rabbi Meir? It was because he illuminates [meir] the eyes of the Sages in matters of the *halakha*. And Rabbi Nehorai was not the name of the *tanna* known by that name; rather, Rabbi Nehemya was his name, and some say: Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh was his name. And why was he called by the name Rabbi Nehorai? It is because he enlightens [manhir] the eyes of the Sages in matters of the *halakha*.

The Gemara relates that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said: The fact that I am more incisive than my colleagues is due to the fact that I saw Rabbi Meir from behind, i.e., I sat behind him when I was his student. Had I seen him from the front, I would be even more incisive, as it is written: “And your eyes shall see your teacher” (Isaiah 30:20). Seeing the face of one’s teacher increases one’s understanding and sharpens one’s mind.

And the Gemara stated that Rabbi Abbahu said that Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Rabbi Meir had a disciple, and his name was Sumakhus, who could state with regard to each and every matter of ritual impurity forty-eight reasons in support of the ruling of impurity, and with regard to each and every matter of ritual purity forty-eight reasons in support of the ruling of purity.

It was taught in a *baraita*: There was a distinguished disciple at Yavne who could with his incisive intellect purify the creeping animal, explicitly deemed ritually impure by the Torah, adding one hundred and fifty reasons in support of his argument.

Ravina said: I too will deliberate and purify it employing the following reasoning: And just as a snake that kills people and animals and thereby increases ritual impurity in the world, as a corpse imparts impurity through contact, through being carried, and by means of a tent, is ritually pure and transmits no impurity, a creeping animal that does not kill and does not increase impurity in the world, all the more so should it be pure.

The Gemara rejects this: And it is not so; that is not a valid *a fortiori* argument, as it can be refuted. A snake is performing a mere act of a thorn. A thorn causes injury and even death; nevertheless, it is not ritually impure. The same applies to a snake, and therefore this *a fortiori* argument is rejected.

Rabbi Abba said that Shmuel said: For three years Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagreed. These said: The *halakha* is in accordance with our opinion, and these said: The *halakha* is in accordance with our opinion. Ultimately, a Divine Voice emerged and proclaimed: Both these and those are the words of the living God. However, the *halakha* is in accordance with the opinion of Beit Hillel.

The Gemara asks: Since both these and those are the words of the living God, why were Beit Hillel privileged to have the *halakha* established in accordance with their opinion? The reason is that they were agreeable and forbearing, showing restraint when affronted, and when they taught the *halakha* they would teach both their own statements and the statements of Beit Shammai. Moreover, when they formulated their teachings and cited a dispute, they prioritized the statements of Beit Shammai to their own statements, in deference to Beit Shammai.

Purify the creeping animal – *תַּלְמִיד וָתִי הָיָה בְּיַבְנֶה שֶׁהָיָה מְטַהֵר*:

See Tosafot’s comments on this issue. The plain sense of this idea is that excessive brilliance of this type, a trait listed among the qualities required of the Sages of the Sanhedrin, is a crucial characteristic of great Sages, enabling them to arrive at innovative conclusions. However, it is precisely for this reason that outstanding scholars were regarded with a certain measure of suspicion. Others were unable to discern whether or not they were utilizing their great talents to prove ideas that they themselves did not consider correct.

Both these and those are the words of the living God – *אֵלּוּ וָאֵלּוּ הֲלָכָה כְּבֵית הִלֵּל*:

Some commentators refer to a mishnah that appears in the Jerusalem Talmud to resolve the difficulties raised by this *baraita*: When God gave the Torah to Moses, He gave it to him with forty-nine rationales for purity and forty-nine rationales for impurity, meaning that the Torah itself, from the moment it was given, could be interpreted in either direction. Although the decisions with regard to the disputes were determined by the Sages throughout the generations, all the divergent opinions have their place in the Torah as it was given, and therefore: Both these and those are the words of the living God (Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon; Ritva).

Agreeable and forbearing – *פַּעַל ויָאַבְּלֵנִי יִלְּדוּ*:

The early commentators note that the fact that the Sages of Beit Hillel were easygoing and forbearing cannot serve as a rationale to rule in accordance with their opinion. In fact, the scholars of Beit Hillel comprised the majority of the Sages; and while the members of Beit Shammai were more brilliant than their colleagues in Beit Hillel, the *halakha* was decided in accordance with the majority opinion, as dictated by the Torah. It has also been suggested that since the scholars of Beit Hillel were easygoing and forbearing, they would closely analyze the rulings of Beit Shammai, who did not do the same with the rulings of Beit Hillel. Therefore, wherever the members of Beit Hillel disagreed, it is reasonable to assume that they had solid grounds for doing so.
Whose head and most of his body were in the sukka – בַּסּוּכָּה: If one sits with his head and most of his body in the sukka, but his table is inside the house, it is as though he were not sitting in the sukka, in accordance with the opinion of Beit Shammai, with whom Beit Hillel ultimately agreed on this matter (Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 634:4).

The width of the cross beam – הִשְׁמַרְתָּה בָּרֹחַת: A cross beam must be at least a handbreadth wide to render an alleyway fit for one to carry within it on Shabbat (Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 634:7).

The sturdiness of the cross beam – הִשְׁמַרְתָּה בָּרֹחַת: In the Jerusalem Talmud, the criterion is that it be sturdy enough to support bricks lined up along its entire length, up to three handbreadths away from the two sides of the alleyway (Magen Avraham; based on Beit Yosef, Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 634:7).

A small brick and a large brick – אֲרִיחַ וּלְבֵנָה: A large brick is usually a square of three by three handbreadths. Large brick and small brick

The Sages taught the following baraita: For two and a half years, Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagreed. These say: It would have been preferable had man not been created than to have been created. And those said: It is preferable for man to have been created than had he not been created. Ultimately, they were counted and concluded: It would have been preferable had man not been created than to have been created. However, now that he has been created, he should examine his actions that he has performed and seek to correct them. And some say: He should scrutinize his planned actions and evaluate whether or not and in what manner those actions should be performed, so that he will not sin.

The cross beam, which the Sages stated may be used to render an alleyway fit for one to carry within it, must be wide enough to receive and hold a small brick. And this small brick is half a large brick, which measures three handbreadths, i.e., a handbreadth and a half. It is sufficient that the cross beam will be a handbreadth in width, not a handbreadth and a half, enough to hold a small brick across its width.

And the cross beam must be wide enough to hold a small brick and also sturdy enough to hold a small brick and not collapse. Rabbi Yehuda says: If it is wide enough to hold the brick, even though it is not sturdy enough to actually support it, it is sufficient. Therefore, even if the cross beam is made of straw or reeds, one considers it as though it were made of metal.

If the cross beam is curved, so that a small brick cannot rest on it, one considers it as though it were straight; if it is round, one considers it as though it were square. The following principle was stated with regard to a round cross beam: Any beam with a circumference of three handbreadths is a handbreadth in width, i.e., in diameter.

As in the mishna that we learned: In the case of one whose head and most of his body were in the sukka, but his table was in the house, Beit Shammai deem this sukka invalid; and Beit Hillel deem it valid. Beit Hillel said to Beit Shammai: Wasn’t there an incident in which the Elders of Beit Shammai and the Elders of Beit Hillel went to visit Rabbi Yohanan ben HaHoranit, and they found him sitting with his head and most of his body in the sukka, but his table was in the house? Beit Shammai said to them: From there do you seek to adduce a proof? Those visitors, too, said to him: If that was the manner in which you were accustomed to perform the mitzva, you have never fulfilled the mitzva of sukka in all your days. It is apparent from the phrasing of the mishna that when the Sages of Beit Hillel related that the Elders of Beit Shammai and the Elders of Beit Hillel visited Rabbi Yohanan ben HaHoranit, they mentioned the Elders of Beit Shammai before their own Elders.

This is to teach you that anyone who humbles himself, the Holy One, Blessed be He, exalts him, and anyone who exalts himself, the Holy One, Blessed be He, humbles him. Anyone who seeks greatness, greatness flees from him; and, conversely, anyone who flees from greatness, greatness seeks him. And anyone who attempts to force the moment and expects great effort to achieve an objective precisely when he desires to do so, the moment forces him too, and he is unsuccessful. And conversely, anyone who is patient and yields to the moment, the moment stands by his side, and he will ultimately be successful.

They were counted and concluded – כִּי יָדַעְתָּם: Some commentators explain that the question was whether or not the potential positive actions of a person are greater than his opportunities for failure. Ultimately, they counted the mitzva and concluded that there are more negative precepts than positive precepts, which means that the danger of transgressing negative commandments is greater than the possibility of fulfilling positive ones. Due to this danger, it would have been preferable had a person not been created (Maharsha).

Examine and scrutinize – הִשְׁמַרְתָּה בָּרֹחַת: Some explain that a person should examine the actions that he has already performed and scrutinize the actions that he plans to undertake (Ritva). Others suggest that one should examine the totality of one’s actions and scrutinize each individual action (Me’iri V’Yosef).

Enough to receive a small brick – בַּסּוּכָּה וְשֻׁלְחָנוֹ בְּתוֹךְ הַבַּיִת: In the Jerusalem Talmud, it is explained that the cross beam must be sturdy enough to bear a complete row of bricks along its entire length, with the bricks laid out lengthwise or widthwise. The rationale is that otherwise the cross beam would look as though it were a small wooden plank not placed permanently in that spot.

Curved...as though it were straight – קָרֵב אֵלֶּה אֵלֶּה: It is said in the Jerusalem Talmud that the entire latter section of the mishna is stated in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda. According to most commentators, that is not the understanding in the Babylonian Talmud, although some commentators, including Rabbeinu Yehonatan, dispute this.