

וְהַמְלוּחָה סָלַע לְעַנִּי בְשַׁעַת דְּחָקוֹ – עָלְיוֹ
הַכְּתוּב אוֹמֵר “אִזְ תִּקְרָא וְהָ יַעֲנֶה
תְּשׁוּעָה וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי.”

סִימָן אִשָּׁה וְקָרָע עֵזֶר וְאִתְּ שִׁתִּי
הַבְּרוּכֹת תִּגְרִי פְחִתִּי. אָמַר רַבִּי
אֶלְעָזָר: כָּל אָדָם שֶׁאֵין לוֹ אִשָּׁה – אֵינוֹ
אָדָם. שְׁנַאֲמַר “זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בְּרָאָם וַיִּקְרָא
אֶת שְׁמֵם אָדָם.” וְאָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר:
כָּל אָדָם שֶׁאֵין לוֹ קָרָע – אֵינוֹ אָדָם.
שְׁנַאֲמַר “הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמַיִם לַהּ וְהָאָרֶץ
נָתַן לְבָנֵי אָדָם.”

וְאָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר: מַאי דְכָתִיב “אֶעֱשֶׂה
לוֹ עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ,” זָכָה – עוֹזְרָתוֹ, לֹא זָכָה –
כְּנֶגְדּוֹ. וְאִיכָא דְאָמְרִי: רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר רְמִי,
כְּתִיב “כְּנֶגְדּוֹ” וְקָרִינָן “כְּנֶגְדּוֹ,” זָכָה –
כְּנֶגְדּוֹ, לֹא זָכָה – מְנַגְדָּתוֹ.

אִשְׁכַּחֲיָה רַבִּי יוֹסֵי לְאֵלִיָּהוּ, אָמַר לִיה: אִשָּׁה
בְּמָה אֶעֱשֶׂה לוֹ עֵזֶר, בְּמָה אִשָּׁה
עוֹזְרָתוֹ לְאָדָם? אָמַר לִיה: אָדָם מִבֵּיא
חִטִּין – חִטִּין כּוֹסֵם? פְּשָׁתָן – פְּשָׁתָן
לֹבֵשׁ? לֹא נִמְצְאָת מְאִירָה עֵינָיו
וּמַעֲמִידָתוֹ עַל רַגְלָיו?!

and who lends a *selā* to a pauper^N at his time of need, about him the verse states:^N “Then shall you call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say: Here I am” (Isaiah 58:9).

§ The Gemara provides a mnemonic device^B for a series of statements cited in the name of Rabbi Elazar: **Woman; and land; helper; this; two; the blessings; merchants; lowly.** The Gemara presents these statements: **Rabbi Elazar said: Any man who does not have a wife is not a man,^H as it is stated: “Male and female He created them... and called their name Adam” (Genesis 5:2). And Rabbi Elazar said: Any man who does not have his own land is not a man,^N as it is stated: “The heavens are the heavens of the Lord; but the earth He has given to the children of men” (Psalms 115:16).**

And Rabbi Elazar said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “I will make him a helpmate for him [*kenegdo*]” (Genesis 2:18)? If one is worthy his wife helps him; if he is not worthy she is against him.^N And some say a slightly different version: Rabbi Elazar raised a contradiction: It is written in the Torah with a spelling that allows it to be read: **Striking him [*kenagdo*], and we read it as though it said: For him [*kenegdo*].** If he is worthy she is for him as his helpmate; if he is not worthy she strikes him.

The Gemara relates that Rabbi Yosei encountered Elijah the prophet and said to him: **It is written: I will make him a helpmate. In what manner does a woman help a man?**^N Elijah said to him: When a man brings wheat from the field, does he chew raw wheat? When he brings home flax, does he wear unprocessed flax? His wife turns the raw products into bread and clothing. Is his wife not found to be the one who lights up his eyes and stands him on his feet?

BACKGROUND

Mnemonic device – סִימָן: Because the Talmud was studied orally for many generations, mnemonic devices were necessary to remember a series of *halakhot* and the order in which they were taught.

HALAKHA

Is not a man – אֵינוֹ אָדָם: The Rema cites this teaching in the name of the *Tur*, in order to emphasize the importance of marriage (*Shulḥan Arukh, Even HaEzer* 1:1).

NOTES

Who lends a *selā* to a pauper, etc. – הַמְלוּחָה סָלַע לְעַנִּי וכו': *Tosafot* raise an apparent contradiction between this statement and the statement in tractate *Hagiga* (5a) that providing money to a pauper at his time of need brings trouble for the pauper. The Ritva explains that he is praised if he lends the pauper money for food. However, if the pauper's creditors force him to sell his belongings in order to pay his debt, which is not to his benefit, it is improper to provide the pauper with money by purchasing those belongings at reduced rates. Others explain that one is criticized if he covets the pauper's property and lends him money with the aim of taking something for himself when the loan is due. The *Iyyun Ya'akov* explains homiletically that the expression: His time of need, is referring to the lender. A lender who himself has fallen on troubled times and yet does not refrain from giving the pauper a loan is praiseworthy.

About him the verse states – עָלְיוֹ הַכְּתוּב אוֹמֵר: According to many commentaries, an earlier verse: “When you see the naked and you cover him, and you do not hide yourself from your own flesh” (Isaiah 58:7), is an important part of this proof, as it demonstrates that the context of the verse cited in the Gemara is helping the poor and taking responsibility to help one's relatives and neighbors (see *Yad Rama* and *Maharsha*).

Is not a man, etc. – אֵינוֹ אָדָם וכו': The *Maharsha* explains that in order to be complete, a man must participate in creation, either by raising children or by growing crops from the land.

Against him – כְּנֶגְדּוֹ: This is derived from the fact that the term *kenegdo* is superfluous, as the verse could simply have said: I will make him a helpmate. Alternatively, the *Meiri* explains that the word *kenegdo* itself can be interpreted to mean: Against him, i.e., opposed to him.

In what manner does a woman help a man – בְּמָה אִשָּׁה עוֹזְרָתוֹ לְאָדָם: The commentaries express surprise at both this question and its answer. Was Rabbi Yosei unaware of the assistance a wife provides her husband? And what is the point of such a simple response? The *Riaf* explains that the question was based upon the fact that although the main purpose of marriage is in order to have children, a woman is not merely man's helpmate in this regard, and therefore the verse does not refer to this aspect of their relationship. The *Meiri* explains that the main thrust of the answer is that the help a man receives from his wife provides him with his basic needs so that he has time for Torah study. Consequently, her assistance is not merely practical but enables him to achieve the ultimate goal of a Jewish man.

From Galia to Hispania – מגליא לאספמיא: Galia, or Gaul, is essentially modern-day France, while Hispania is Spain. Ships sailed back and forth frequently between the ports of France and Spain, especially when these two lands were Roman colonies. Commerce in the western Mediterranean serves here as an example of a matter that would seem to have no direct relevance to the Jewish people.

Conducting business – הפוכי בעסקא: In the talmudic era most Jews still worked in agriculture, although this occupation was becoming harder, as farmers were laden with heavy tax burdens. In addition, the potential profit margin of commercial transactions was higher than anything that could be garnered from farming land in which one had invested a comparable sum of money.

ואמר רבי אלעזר: מאי דכתיב "זאת הפעם עצם מעצמי ובשר מבשרי" מלימד שבא אדם על כל בהמה וחיה ולא נתקרה דעתו עד שבא על חיה.

And Rabbi Elazar said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23)? This teaches that Adam had intercourse^N with each animal and beast in his search for his mate, and his mind was not at ease, in accordance with the verse: "And for Adam, there was not found a helpmate for him" (Genesis 2:20), until he had intercourse with Eve.

ואמר רבי אלעזר: מאי דכתיב "ונברכו בך כל משפחת האדמה" אמר ליה הקדוש ברוך הוא לאברהם: שתי ברכות טובות יש לי להבריך בך: רות המואביה ונעמה העמונית. כל משפחות האדמה אפילו משפחות הדרות באדמה אין מתברכות אלא בשביל ישראל. כל גוי הארץ – אפילו ספינות הבאות מגליא לאספמיא אין מתברכות אלא בשביל ישראל.

And Rabbi Elazar said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "And in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed [nivrekhu]" (Genesis 12:3)? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Abraham: I have two good shoots^N to graft [lehavriki] onto you: Ruth the Moabite, the ancestress of the house of David, and Naamah the Ammonite, whose marriage with Solomon led to the ensuing dynasty of the kings of Judea. "All the families of the earth" means: Even families that live in the earth, i.e., who have land of their own, are blessed only due to the Jewish people. Similarly, when the verse states: "All the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him" (Genesis 18:18), it indicates that even ships that come from Galia to Hispania^B are blessed only due to the Jewish people.

ואמר רבי אלעזר: עתידים כל בעלי אומנות שיעמדו על הקרקע, שנאמר "וירדו מאניותיהם כל תפשי משוט מלחים כל חבלי הים על הארץ יעמדו". ואמר רבי אלעזר: אין לך אומנות פחותה מן הקרקע, שנאמר "וירדו" רבי אלעזר חזיא לה היא ארעא דשדי ביה כרבא לפותיא, אמר ליה: אי תשדייה לאוריך – הפוכי בעסקא טב מינך.

And Rabbi Elazar said: All craftsmen are destined^N to stand upon and work the land, as it is stated: "And all that handle the oar, the mariners, and all the pilots of the sea, shall come down from their ships, they shall stand upon the land" (Ezekiel 27:29). And Rabbi Elazar said: There is no occupation lowlier^N than working the land, as it is stated: "And they shall come down," implying that one who works the land is of lower stature than even a sailor. The Gemara similarly relates: Rabbi Elazar saw land that was plowed across its width.^N He said to it: Even if they plow you once more lengthwise, for further improvement, conducting business^B is better than farming with you, as the potential profits gained by selling merchandise are far greater than those from working the land.

רב על ליבני שיבלי, חונה דקא ניפן. אמר להו: אי ניפת איתגופי, הפוכי בעסקא טב מינך. אמר רבא: מאה וזוי בעסקא – כל זומא בשרא וחמרא, מאה וזוי בארעא – מילחא וחפורה. ולא עוד אלא מגניא ליה אארעא ומרמיא ליה תיגרי.

The Gemara relates a similar incident: Rav entered between the sheaves in a field and saw them waving in the wind. He said to them: If you want to wave go ahead and wave, but conducting business is better than farming with you. Rava similarly said: One who has a hundred dinars that are invested in a business is able to eat meat and wine every day, whereas he who has a hundred dinars worth of land eats only salt and vegetables. And what is more, working the land causes him to lie on the ground^N at night in order to guard it, and it draws quarrels upon him with other people.

NOTES

This teaches that Adam had intercourse, etc. – מלימד שבא אדם: According to an interpretation cited by the Maharsha, this does not mean that he literally engaged in sexual intercourse with the animals but rather that he conducted an investigation in order to find a suitable creature to be his mate, without success. *Akedat Yitzhak* explains this statement along the same lines, in greater detail.

Two good shoots, etc. – שתי ברכות טובות וכו': This exposition is based on the fact that the Torah uses the unusual expression *venivrekhu* to mean: They shall be blessed, as opposed to the more proper term *vehitbarkhu*. The Sages associated the word used in the Gemara with grafting [*havrakha*], as these women were grafted onto Abraham's family, i.e., they joined the Jewish people (Riaf; see Maharsha).

All craftsmen are destined, etc. – עתידים כל בעלי אומנות וכו': Rabbi Elazar's opinion toward working the land appears to be contradictory; previously he stated that one who does not own land is not a man, whereas here he stated that working the land is a lowly occupation. *Tosafot* explain that according to Rabbi Elazar, everyone should own land in order to grow food and build a house, but this does not mean that farming is a profitable occupation. The Maharsha interprets his comments about the future in this vein: Nowadays people seek a profession through which they can make money, but in the future they will be satisfied with little and will return to the land.

There is no occupation lowlier, etc. – אין לך אומנות פחותה: The proof is from the phrase "They shall come down," as it is more common to describe those who go to sea as descending to the sea. Consequently, it is clear that the unusual use of

descent in this verse to refer to returning to land is referring not a physical descent on the part of the sailors but rather to their social status (*Arukh LaNer*).

Land that was plowed across its width – ארעא דשדי ביה כרבא לפותיא: The Meiri cites a different version of the text, according to which a large pile of produce covered the entire width of the field. In this version Rabbi Eliezer said that even if the pile were large enough to cover the entire field lengthwise as well, farming the field would still not be a profitable enterprise.

Causes him to lie on the ground, etc. – מגניא ליה אארעא וכו': The Meiri explains that these are descriptions of poverty, as he lies on the ground because he cannot afford a bed, a sorry financial state that then causes constant arguments in his home (see Rashi).

Weave [teizul] – תיזול: The versions of Gemara cited by the *ge'onim* and Rabbeinu Hananel read *teidul* or *teidvil*. In Syriac this word means weaving, which ties in well with the idea that one should buy an item ready-made.

Mats [bistarkei] – ביסתרקי: Apparently a loanword from the Middle Iranian *bistarak*, meaning bedding, mattress, or cover.

Friend [shushevina] – שושבינא: This word is originally Akkadian, from where it was adapted into both Aramaic and Hebrew. Its primary meaning is the one who accompanies the groom to the wedding canopy and helps with some of the technical arrangements of the wedding, and so forth. Its meaning was broadened to a general term for a close friend.

NOTES

Close it up and do not enlarge it and plaster it – תְּסַדֵּם וְלֹא תִגְדַּלְתֶּם וְלֹא תִפְּצוּן: According to the Meiri this is an injunction to fix things quickly before they get worse, as it is easier to close up a hole than to plaster an entire wall. Similarly, he should replaster the wall in order to ensure that he will not have to build it again from scratch.

Calamity befalls...only, etc. – אֵלֶּיךָ בָּאָה...אֵלֶּיךָ וְכוּ: This complements the previous teaching: Just as the fate of the world depends on the Jewish people with regard to blessing, the same applies with regard to misfortune. Consequently, the Jewish people should know that their own fate as well as that of other nations lies in their hands (see Meiri and *Iyyun Ya'akov*).

Is there anything that is worse than death – וְיָמִי אֵיכָא מִיָּדִי – דְּקִשָּׁה מִמוֹתָא: Elsewhere the Sages list numerous problems that are worse than death, including captivity and famine. The *Iyyun Ya'akov* explains that it was due to these different possibilities that Rav sought to discover the precise nature of his mentor's blessing. Since he realized that Rabbi Hiyya had presumably also been giving him advice along with his blessing, he concluded that Rabbi Hiyya was referring to a bad wife. Furthermore, knowing that Rabbi Hiyya's own wife caused him to suffer, Rav realized that this must have been what he meant.

You should not do so – אַתָּה לֹא תַעֲבִיד הָכִי – Admittedly, it is permitted to depart from the truth for the sake of peace, but since in this case there is another way of achieving the same result, it is better not to grow accustomed to telling lies (Meiri; Rabbi Avraham min HaHar).

אָמַר רַב פָּפָא: זֵרַע וְלֹא תִזְבִּין. אַף עַל גַּב דְּבִי הִדְדִי מִנְהוּ – הֲנִי מִבְּרַכָּן. זְבִין וְלֹא תִיזוּל, הֲנִי מִלִּי – בִּיסְתָרְקִי. אֲבָל גְּלִמָּא – לֹא מִיִּתְרַמְיָא לִיהּ.

טוֹם וְלֹא תִשְׁפִּיץ, שְׂפוּץ וְלֹא תִיבְנֵי, שְׂכַל הָעוֹסֵק בְּבִנְיָן מִתְמַסְכֵּן. קְפוּץ וְזִבִין אֲרָאָה, מִתּוֹן נָסִיב אֵיתְתָּא, נְחִית דְּרָאָה נָסִיב אֵיתְתָּא, סָק דְּרָאָה בְּחַר שׁוּשְׁבִינָא.

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בַּר אֲבִינָא: אֵין פּוֹרְעָנֹת בְּאָה לְעוֹלָם אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבְלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, שְׁנָאֵמַר "הִכְרַתִּי גוֹיִם נִשְׁמֹו פְּנוֹתֵם הַחִרְבְּתִי חוּצוֹתֵם" וּבְתִיב "אֲמַרְתִּי אֶךְ תִּירָאִי אוֹתִי תִקְחִי מוֹסָר".

רַב הוּהּ מִפְּטָר מִרְבִּי חֵיָא, אָמַר לִיהּ: רַחֲמֵנָא לִיזְלֵךְ מִמִּידִי דְקִשָּׁה מִמוֹתָא. וְיָמִי אֵיכָא מִיָּדִי דְקִשָּׁה מִמוֹתָא? נִפְקֵי, דִּק וְאִשְׁכַּח "וּמוֹצֵא אֲנִי מִרְ מִמוֹתָא אֵת הָאִשָּׁה" וְגו'. רַב הוּהּ קָא מְצַעֵרָא לִיהּ דְּבִיתָהּ, כִּי אָמַר לֵהּ "עֲבִידִי לִי טְלוּפְחִי" עֲבָדָא לִיהּ חִימְצִי, "חִימְצִי" – עֲבָדָא לִיהּ טְלוּפְחִי.

כִּי גָדַל חֵיָא בְּרִיהּ, אִפְיֹךְ לֵהּ. אָמַר לִיהּ: אֵיעִלִיָא לָךְ אֲמֹךְ! אָמַר לִיהּ: אֲנָא הוּא דְקָא אִפְיֹכְנָא לֵהּ. אָמַר לִיהּ: הֲיִינוּ דְקָא אֲמַרִי אֵינְשֵׁי דְנִפְיֹק מִיָּךְ – טַעֲמָא מִלְפָּנֶיךָ. אֵת לֹא תַעֲבִיד הָכִי, שְׁנָאֵמַר "לְמַדּוּ לְשׁוֹנֵם דְּבַר שְׁקָר הֵעִיד" וְגו'.

Rav Pappa^b said: Sow your own produce and do not buy it. Even though they are equal to each other in value, these that you sow will be blessed. Conversely, buy your clothes rather than weave [teizul]¹ them yourself. The Gemara comments: This applies only to mats [bistarkei]¹, but with regard to the cloak one wears, perhaps he will not find it precisely to his liking, and therefore he should make his own cloak, which fits his measurements.

Rav Pappa further advised: If there is a hole in your house, close it up and do not enlarge it and then plaster it,ⁿ or at least plaster it and do not knock it down and build it again. As, whoever engages in construction becomes poor. Hurry to buy land so that you do not lose the opportunity. Be patient and marry a woman who is suitable for you. Descend a level to marry a woman of lower social status, and ascend a level to choose a friend [shushevina].¹

Rabbi Elazar bar Avina said: Calamity befalls the world onlyⁿ due to the sins of the Jewish people, as it is stated: "I have cut off nations, their corners are desolate; I have made their streets waste" (Zephaniah 3:6), and it is written: "I said: Surely you will fear Me, you will receive correction" (Zephaniah 3:7). This indicates that other nations were punished so that the Jewish people would mend their ways.

The Gemara cites more statements with regard to wives. When Rav^p was taking leave of his uncle and teacher, Rabbi Hiyya, upon his return from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia, Rabbi Hiyya said to him: May the Merciful One save you from something that is worse than death. Rav was perplexed: Is there anything that is worse than death?ⁿ He went, examined the sources, and found the following verse: "And I find more bitter than death the woman, etc." (Ecclesiastes 7:26). Rabbi Hiyya was hinting at this verse, and indeed, Rav's wife would constantly aggravate him. When he would say to her: Prepare me lentils, she would prepare him peas; if he asked her for peas, she would prepare him lentils.

When Hiyya, his son, grew up, he would reverse the requests Rav asked him to convey to her, so that Rav would get what he wanted. Rav said to his son Hiyya: Your mother has improved now that you convey my requests. He said to Rav: It is I who reverse your request to her. Rav said to him: This is an example of the well-known adage that people say: He who comes from you shall teach you wisdom; I should have thought of that idea myself. You, however, should not do so,ⁿ i.e., reverse my request, as it is stated: "They have taught their tongue to speak lies, they weary themselves to commit iniquity, etc." (Jeremiah 9:4). If you attribute such a request to me, you will have uttered a falsehood.

PERSONALITIES

Rav Pappa – רַב פָּפָא: Rav Pappa, from the fifth generation of Babylonian *amora'im*, was a student of both Abaye and Rava in Pumbedita. After Rava's death Rav Pappa established an academy in Neresh, where he was joined by his close friend, Rav Huna, son of Rav Yehoshua, who was appointed chief lecturer. Many of Rava's students came to study under Rav Pappa, who had more than two hundred students attending his lectures.

Rav Pappa's father was a wealthy merchant and supported him throughout many years of Talmud study. Rav Pappa became a wealthy businessman in his own right and a successful brewer of date beer. He also prospered in other business ventures. The Talmud records that he engaged in trade with both Jews and gentiles and had a reputation for fairness and generosity in his business dealings. Rav Huna became his partner in many such undertakings and became wealthy as well.

Rav Pappa had great respect for the Sages, and upon entering a city he would immediately call upon the rabbinic head of the community. Once, Rav Pappa felt that he had spoken inappropriately about one of the Sages, and he took upon

himself a personal fast as penance for his act. He was reluctant to offer final rulings in various areas of *halakha*, and he often chose to be stringent in accordance with both opinions in the Talmud rather than rule in accordance with a single opinion.

Rav Pappa was blessed with ten sons, all of whom were Torah scholars. Traditionally, the names of the ten sons of Rav Pappa are recited as part of the ceremony at the completion of the study of a tractate. While the source of this tradition is unclear and the identities of the sons are uncertain as well, the Rema suggests that it commemorates the celebrations made by Rav Pappa with his sons upon completing a course of study.

Rav – רַב: Rav, whose full name was Rabbi Abba ben Ayvu, was the first, and perhaps the greatest, of the Babylonian *amora'im*. Known as Abba Arikha because of his great height, Rav established the academy in Sura which lasted eight hundred years, through the period of the *ge'onim*. In addition to the visiting students who attended the academy only during the *kalla* months of Adar and Elul, the Gemara reports that twelve hundred full-time students studied in the academy throughout the year.

In his youth, Rav traveled to Eretz Yisrael with his uncle, Rabbi Hiyya, where he studied under Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, the editor of the Mishna. He traveled back and forth between Israel and Babylonia until he settled in Babylonia in the year 219 CE. Rav's greatness is apparent not only in the large number of *amora'im* who were his students and who quote him throughout the Talmud, but also by the fact that in addition to his status as the first *amora*, he is recognized as the last of the *tanna'im* and consequently was permitted to disagree with tannaic rulings.

Rav's teachings are found throughout both the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Talmuds. Among his many rulings are several that concern issues of marriage, such as his ruling that a man should not marry a woman without first meeting her, and that underage girls should not be married until they are old enough to state whom they want to marry. His rulings in the area of ritual *halakha* were invariably accepted, although the rulings of his colleague Shmuel were accepted in criminal and financial matters. Rav's son, Rabbi Hiyya, followed in his father's footsteps and became a great scholar; his other son, Ayvu, was a merchant.

רבי חייא הוה קא מצערא ליה דביתהו. כי הוה משכח מידי – צייר ליה בסודריה, ומייתי ניהלה. אמר ליה רב: והא קא מצערא ליה למר! אמר ליה: דינו שמיגדלות בנינו, ומצילות אותנו.

The Gemara relates a similar story. Rabbi Ḥiyya's wife would constantly aggravate him. Nevertheless, when he would find something she would appreciate, he would wrap it in his shawl and bring it to her. Rav said to him: Doesn't she constantly aggravate you? Why do you bring her things? Rabbi Ḥiyya said to him: It is enough for us that our wives raise our children and save us

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NOTES

עונותיו מתפקקין – *mitpakekin*: According to Rashi, *mitpakekin* means sealed. Riaf explains that Rashi means not that his sins are entirely forgiven, but that they are sealed up, pending his behavior after marriage. The *Arukh*, however, understands *mitpakekin* as meaning to become loosened.

Matza or motze – **מצא או מוצא**: Some commentaries explain that in addition to alluding to the two verses this phrase is a question on its own: *Matza* means a good find, while *motze* refers not to someone who finds an item, but to the author of the book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon, who found, i.e., realized and publicized, that a bad wife is more bitter than death. The *Arukh LaNer* explains the fact that the word *matza* is in past tense indicates an unusual occurrence, whereas *motze* is the more common usage.

Her rival is at her side – **צרתה בצדה**: The Meiri explains that he should threaten to marry another woman.

A day of heavy rain – **יום סגריר**: Just as one cannot escape the continual dripping in a leaky house by escaping outside on a rainy day, this husband suffers from a continuous downpour of abuse from which he cannot escape (Maharsha).

מן החטא. מקרי ליה רב יהודה לרב יצחק בריה: "ומוצא אני מר ממות את האשה". אמר ליה: כגון מאן? כגון אמך.

from sin. We should therefore show our gratitude to them. The Gemara cites a related incident: Rav Yehuda was teaching Torah to Rav Yitzhak, his son, and they encountered the verse: "And I find more bitter than death the woman" (Ecclesiastes 7:26). His son said to him: For example, whom? His father replied: For example, your mother.

והא מתני ליה רב יהודה לרב יצחק בריה: אין אדם מוצא קורת רוח אלא מאשתו ראשונה, שנאמר "יהי מקורך ברוך ושמח מאשת נעורייך". ואמר ליה: כגון מאן? כגון אמך. מתקיף תקיפא. ועבירי מיעברא במלה.

The Gemara asks: Didn't Rav Yehuda teach Rav Yitzhak, his son, the following *baraita*: A man finds peace of mind only with his first wife, as it is stated: "Let your fountain be blessed, and have joy from the wife of your youth" (Proverbs 5:18), and his son said to him: For example, whom, and his father responded in this case as well: For example, your mother. This indicates that Rav Yehuda did find peace of mind with his wife. The Gemara answers: She was aggressive and forceful, but she was easily appeased.

הכי דמי אשה רעה? אמר אביי: מקשטא ליה תכא, ומקשטא ליה פומא. רבא אמר: מקשטא ליה תכא, ומיהדרא ליה גבא.

The Gemara asks: What are the circumstances when a woman is considered a bad wife? Abaye said: She arranges a table for him and arranges her mouth for him at the same time. In other words, although she prepares food for him, she verbally abuses him while he eats. Rava said: She arranges a table for him and then turns her back to him, displaying her lack of interest in his company.

אמר רבי חמא בר חנינא: כיון שנשא אדם אשה – עונותיו מתפקקין. שנאמר "מצא אשה מצא טוב ויפק רצון מה". במערבא, כי נסיב אינש איתתא אמרי ליה הקי: מצא או מוצא? מצא – דכתוב "מצא אשה מצא טוב", "מוצא" – דכתוב "ומוצא אני מר ממות את האשה".

Rabbi Ḥama bar Ḥanina said: Once a man marries a woman his iniquities crumble [*mitpakekin*],^N as it is stated: "Whoever finds a wife finds good, and obtains [*veyafek*] favor of the Lord" (Proverbs 18:22). In the West, i.e., Eretz Yisrael, when a man married a woman they would say to him as follows: *Matza* or *motze*?^N In other words, they would ask the groom if the appropriate passage for his wife is that verse, which begins with the word *matza*, as it is written: Whoever finds [*matza*] a wife finds good, or whether the more appropriate verse is the one beginning with the word *motze*, as it is written: "And I find [*motze*] more bitter than death the woman" (Ecclesiastes 7:26).

אמר רבא: אשה רעה מצוה לגרשה, דכתוב "גרש לך ויצא מדון וישובות דין וקלון". ואמר רבא: אשה רעה וכתובתה מרובה – צרתה בצדה, דאמרי אינשי: בחברתה ולא בסיתתא. ואמר רבא: קשה אשה רעה כיום סגריר, שנאמר "דלף טורד כיום סגריר ואשת מדינים נשתדה".

Rava said: It is a mitzva to divorce a bad wife, as it is written: "Cast out the scorner and contention will depart; strife and shame will cease" (Proverbs 22:10). And Rava said: A bad wife whose marriage contract settlement is too large for her husband to pay in the event of a divorce, her rival wife is at her side.^N In other words, the only way for him to improve matters is to take another wife. As people say in the well-known adage: The way to trouble a woman is with her peer and not with a thorn. And Rava said: A bad wife is as troublesome as a day of heavy rain,^N as it is stated: "A continual dropping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike" (Proverbs 27:15).

Whose food is dependent on his money [kaspō] – שְׂמֹזוֹנוֹתָיו תְּלוּיִן בְּכַסְפוֹ: The version of the text cited by the Meiri reads: Whose food is dependent on his palm [kappō]. In other words, although manual labor is laudable, if it is one's only source of income, he will not earn a comfortable living.

LANGUAGE

Habbarim – חֲבָרִים: This designation for Zoroastrian priests comes from the term “*hōver hāver*” (Deuteronomy 18:11), referring to acts of sorcery. It implies that these priests were seen as involved in various magic rituals.

ואמר רבא: בא וראה כמה טובה אשה טובה – וכמה רעה אשה רעה. כמה טובה אשה טובה – דכתיב “מצא אשה מצא טוב.” אי בגוה משתעי קרא – כמה טובה אשה טובה משבחא, אי בתורה משתעי קרא – כמה טובה אשה טובה שהתורה נמשלה בה. כמה רעה אשה רעה – דכתיב “ומוצא אני מר ממות את האשה.” אי בגוה משתעי קרא – כמה רעה אשה רעה שהכתוב מגנה, אי בגוה משתעי קרא – כמה רעה אשה רעה, שגוה נמשלה בה.

And Rava said: Come and see how good a good wife is and how bad a bad wife is. How good is a good wife? As it is written: Whoever finds a wife finds good. If the verse speaks of her, a wife, this demonstrates how good a good wife is, as the Bible praises her. If the verse speaks metaphorically of the Torah, it nevertheless indicates how good a good wife is, as the Torah is compared to her. Conversely, how bad is a bad wife? As it is written: “And I find more bitter than death the woman.” If the verse speaks of her, this demonstrates how bad a bad wife is, as the Bible condemns her. If the verse speaks metaphorically of Gehenna, it still demonstrates how bad a bad wife is, as Gehenna is compared to her.

“הנני מביא רעה אשר לא יוכלו לצאת ממנה.” אמר רב נחמן אמר רבה בר אבוחה: זו אשה רעה וכתובתה מרובה. “נתנני ה’ בידי לא אוכל קום” אמר רב חסדא אמר מר עוקבא בר חיאיא: זו אשה רעה וכתובתה מרובה. במערבא אמרו: זה שמוזונותיו תלוין בכספו.

The Gemara cites further statements on the same issue. The verse states: “Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape” (Jeremiah 11:11). Rav Nahman said that Rabba bar Avuh said: This is a bad wife whose marriage contract is large. Similarly, with regard to the verse: “The Lord has given me into the hands of those against whom I cannot stand” (Lamentations 1:14), Rav Hisda said that Mar Ukva bar Hiyya said: This is a bad wife whose marriage contract is large. In the West, Eretz Yisrael, they said this verse is referring to one whose food is dependent on his money.^N He is forced to purchase his food with cash, as he does not possess land of his own.

“בניך ובנותיך נתונים לעם אחר” אמר רב חנן בר רבא אמר רב: זו אשת האב. “בגוי נבל אכעיסם” אמר רב חנן בר רבא אמר רב: זו אשה רעה וכתובתה מרובה. רבי אליעזר אומר: אלו המינים. וכן הוא אומר “אמר נבל בלבו אין אלהים” וגו’.

With regard to the verse: “Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people” (Deuteronomy 28:32), Rav Hanan bar Rava said that Rav said: This is a reference to the children’s father’s wife, their stepmother. With regard to the verse: “I will provoke them with a vile nation” (Deuteronomy 32:21), Rav Hanan bar Rava said that Rav said: This is a bad wife whose marriage contract is large. Rabbi Eliezer says that these are apostates, and so too the verse states: “The vile man has said in his heart: There is no God, they have dealt corruptly” (Psalms 14:1), which proves that an apostate is called vile.

במתניתא תנא: אלו אנשי ברבריא ואנשי מרטנאי, שמהלכין ערומים בשוק. שאין לך משוקץ ומתועב לפני המקום יותר ממי שמהלך בשוק ערום. רבי יוחנן אמר: אלו חברים. אמרו ליה לר’ יוחנן: אתו חברי לבבל, שגא נפל. אמרו ליה: מקבלי שוחדא. תריץ יתיב.

It was taught in a *baraita* with regard to the verse: “I will provoke them with a vile nation,” that these are the inhabitants of Barbarya and the inhabitants of Martenai,^B who walk naked in the marketplace, as none is more despised and abominable before the Omnipresent than one who walks naked in the marketplace. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: These are the *Habbarim*,^L a sect of Persian priests. The Gemara relates: When they said to Rabbi Yoḥanan: The *Habbarim* have come to Babylonia,^B he shuddered and fell of his chair, out of concern for the Jews living there. They said to him: There is a way to deal with their persecution, as they accept bribes. Upon hearing that not all was lost, he straightened himself and sat in his place once again.

BACKGROUND

Barbarya and Martenai – ברבריא ומרטנאי: Barbarya is a land in northern Africa, called Βαρβαρία in Greek, meaning foreign place. Their language sounded to the Greeks as though they were saying *barbarbar*, and consequently, the Greeks considered them to be uncivilized and primitive. The term has been used in various forms through the generations and in different languages, and it is still used today as the name for the local tribe, the Berbers as well as in the term barbarian, referring to uncivilized people.

Martenai is a version of the Roman province Mauritania, also in northern Africa, roughly corresponding to modern-day Morocco.

The Gemara is apparently referring to members of tribes from those two areas who were unaccustomed to wearing clothing, or who wore merely loin cloths.

אתו חברי לבבל – The *Habbarim* have come to Babylonia – The *Habbarim*, also called the *Amgoshim* in the Talmud, were priests of the Persian religion, Zoroastrianism. While the Parthians controlled Persia and Babylonia the *Habbarim* did not enjoy important status, but at the beginning of the period of the *amora'im* the Sassanid dynasty rose to power, and as devout adherents to their religion they gave the *Habbarim* great control. Apparently, it was the *Habbarim* who initiated harsh decrees against the Jews. Rabbi Yoḥanan was therefore shocked and dismayed when he heard that they had reached Babylonia, then the largest Jewish center in the Persian Empire, with the new rulers. Nevertheless, it seems that this tribe of priests was corrupt and foolish, and through bribery and negotiations the Jews were able to withstand their decrees.

Issue decrees against the Jewish people with regard to three matters – גָּזְרוּ עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה: Some commentaries maintain that information about the decrees was included in the report delivered to Rabbi Yohanan, who proceeded to explain the reason for each decree. The Maharsha asks how it was possible that Babylonian Jews committed these transgressions. He explains that in the case of the priestly gifts, they would take on a gentile partner in order to be exempt, as one is exempt from giving the gifts to a priest if the animal was owned jointly by a Jew and a gentile. Furthermore, they actually performed ritual immersion, just not in precise accordance with halakhic requirements. Finally, they rejoiced on the gentiles' holidays on the pretext that the gentiles in their vicinity were not really idol worshippers.

Because the Jews rejoice on the holidays of the gentiles – מִפְּנֵי שְׂשֻׁמִּיּוֹת בְּיוֹם אִידִם: The Maharsha, the Maharshal, and other commentaries attempt to explain how this punishment fits the crime. The Meiri explains that idols are considered dead, and therefore the Jews were punished for celebrating a festival of the dead by having their own deceased relatives mistreated.

A plague to her husband – צָרַעַת לְבַעֲלָהּ: The Maharsha explains that as a man's wife is considered like his own flesh, a bad wife is like a plague on his own body. The *Arukh LaNer* suggests that this is a hint that just as a plague is a personal affliction that distances one from others, the same is true of a bad wife.

גָּזְרוּ עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה מִפְּנֵי שְׁלֹשָׁה; גָּזְרוּ עַל הַבְּשָׂר – מִפְּנֵי הַמַּתְנֹת, גָּזְרוּ עַל הַמְרֻחָצוֹת – מִפְּנֵי הַטְּבִילָה,

קָא מְחַטְטֵי שְׂבָבֵי – מִפְּנֵי שְׂשֻׁמִּיּוֹת בְּיוֹם אִידִם, שְׁנָאֵמַר "וְהִיטָה יַד ה' בְּכֶם וּבְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם," אָמַר רַבָּה בַר שְׁמוּאֵל: זוֹ חֲטוּטֵי שְׂבָבֵי, דְּאָמַר מַר: בְּעוֹן חַיִּים – מֵתִים מִתְחַטְטִין.

אָמַר לִיהִי רַבָּא לְרַבָּה בַר מַרִּי: כְּתִיב "לֹא יֵאָסֵפוּ וְלֹא יִקְבְּרוּ לְדוֹמֵן עַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה יְהוּ" וְכִתִּיב "וְנִבְחַר מוֹת מֵחַיִּים." אָמַר לִיהִי: נִבְחַר מוֹת לְרָשָׁעִים, שְׁלֵא יַחֲיוּ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְיִחַטְּאוּ וְיִפְּלוּ בְּגֵהֶנָּה.

כְּתוּב בְּסֵפֶר בֶּן סִירָא: "אִשָּׁה טוֹבָה – מִתְּנָה טוֹבָה לְבַעֲלָהּ." וְכִתִּיב "טוֹבָה בְּחִיק יֵרָא אֱלֹהִים תִּנְתֵּן. אִשָּׁה רָעָה – צָרַעַת לְבַעֲלָהּ." מֵאֵי תִקְנִיתִיהָ – יִגְרֶשְׁנָה וְיִתְרַפָּא מִצָּרַעַתָּהּ. "אִשָּׁה יָפָה אֲשֶׁרִי בְּעֵלָהּ, מִסְפֵּר יָמָיו כְּפָלִים."

"הַעֵלֶם עֵינֶיךָ מֵאִשָּׁת חֵן פֶּן תִּלְכַּד בְּמִצְדוֹתָהּ. אֵל תֵּט אֶצֶל בַּעֲלָהּ לְמִסוֹךְ עִמּוֹ יַיִן וְשִׁכָר, כִּי בְתוֹאֵר אִשָּׁה יָפָה רַבִּים הוֹשְׁחָתוּ, וְעֲצוּמִים כָּל הַרוּגִיָּה." רַבִּים הָיוּ פְּצָעֵי רוּכַל הַמְרַגְלִים לְדַבֵּר עֲרוּהָ, כְּנִיּוֹץ מִבְּעִיר גְּחָלָהּ, כְּכִלּוֹב מֵלֵא עוֹף בֵּן בְּתִיָּהֶם מֵלֵאִים מְרֻמָּה,

Apropos the *Habbarim*, the Gemara cites the following statement of the Sages: The *Habbarim* were able to issue decrees against the Jewish people with regard to three matters,^{NB} due to three transgressions on the part of the Jewish people. They decreed against meat, i.e., they banned ritual slaughter, due to the failure of the Jewish people to give the priests the gifts of the foreleg, the jaw, and the maw. They decreed against Jews bathing in bathhouses, due to their neglect of ritual immersion.

Third, they exhumed the dead from their graves because the Jews rejoice on the holidays of the gentiles,^N as it is stated: "Then shall the hand of the Lord be against you and against your fathers" (1 Samuel 12:15). Rabba bar Shmuel said: This verse is referring to exhuming the dead, which upsets both the living and the dead, as the Master said: Due to the iniquity of the living, the dead are exhumed.

Rava said to Rabba bar Mari: It is written: "They shall not be gathered nor buried; they shall be for dung upon the face of the earth" (Jeremiah 8:2), and it is written: "And death shall be chosen rather than life" (Jeremiah 8:3). If death will be so indecent that their bodies will not even be buried, why would people choose death over life? Rabba bar Mari said to him: The latter verse does not refer to the previously described state of affairs, but rather it means: Death is preferable for the wicked, as it is better that they not live in this world and sin and consequently descend into Gehenna.

The Gemara cites more statements concerning women. It is written in the book of Ben Sira:^B A good wife is a good gift for her husband. And it is written: A good one will be placed in the bosom of a God-fearing man; a bad wife is a plague to her husband.^N What is his remedy? He should divorce her and he will be cured of his plague. A beautiful wife, happy is her husband; the number of his days are doubled. His pleasure in her beauty makes him feel as though he has lived twice as long.

Turn your eyes from a graceful woman who is married to another man, lest you be caught in her trap. Do not turn to her husband to mix wine and strong drink with him, which can lead to temptation. For on account of the countenance of a beautiful woman many have been destroyed, and her slain is a mighty host. Furthermore, many have been the wounded peddlers. This is referring to men who travel from place to place to sell women's jewelry. Their frequent dealings with women lead their husbands to harm the peddlers. Those who accustom themselves to licentious matters are like a spark that ignites a coal. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit.

BACKGROUND

Issue decrees against the Jewish people with regard to three matters – גָּזְרוּ עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה: It is possible that the decrees mentioned here are linked to the beliefs of the *Habbarim*, which included a complex set of laws concerning ritual purity. According to this cult, land possesses special sanctity; therefore, in addition to not burying their dead, they made every effort to remove corpses from their places of burial. Perhaps the decree barring Jews from bathhouses was due to the fact that the *Habbarim* considered the Jews impure. Furthermore, it is reasonable to suggest that the ban against ritual slaughter was also related to these laws.

However, it is also possible that these decrees were promulgated in Eretz Yisrael as well, which would indicate that they were not promulgated by the *Habbarim*, but were rather part of a general campaign to suppress Judaism.

The book of Ben Sira – סֵפֶר בֶּן סִירָא: The book of *Ben Sira*, also called the *Wisdom of Sira* and *Ecclesiasticus*, was one of the first works composed after the closing of the biblical canon. It was written before the Hasmonean period by Shimon ben Yehoshua ben Sira, a resident of Jerusalem and a younger contemporary

of Shimon HaTzaddik. The book was widely available and very popular. The author's grandson, who lived in Alexandria, translated it into Greek in 132 BCE, making it available to those who could not read the original Hebrew.

In the Septuagint, and consequently in many other translations, *Ecclesiasticus* is one of the books of the Bible. The Sages considered it apocryphal and even criticized those who read it, both because its council is uneven in value and due to the fact that people confused it with the *Alphabet of Sira*, a book of folk wisdom of dubious worth. In any case, the Sages quotes the book of *Ben Sira* on many occasions, and sometimes even treated it as one of the sacred writings. They certainly did not refrain from citing its good advice in their sermons, or from making use of its wisdom.

For centuries, the book was known only through translations, but recent discoveries on Masada, among other places, have unearthed large portions of the work in Hebrew. As it was not a sacred book, copyists apparently allowed themselves certain liberties, which accounts for the different versions of the text. Moreover, it seems that the Sages of the Talmud were able to cite it from memory.

The souls of the body – הַנְּשָׁמוֹת שֶׁבַּגּוּף: Many early commentaries explain that the body is referring to the place where the souls are kept. The *Arukh* states that it is a curtain before the Divine Presence with the images of all people destined to be born. Rabbi Avraham min HaHar cites a homiletic explanation that the final redemption will not arrive until all mankind's physical powers are worn out, and he is ready to become a receptacle for the spiritual.

As my soul yearns for Torah – שֶׁנַּפְשִׁי חֲשָׁקָה בַּתּוֹרָה: Rabbi Avraham min HaHar explains that ben Azzai claimed he had such desire and fervor for Torah that he had no room left for other passions. He adds that this is why the Rambam says that this claim can be made only by one who is not troubled by his evil inclination.

HALAKHA

The mitzva of marriage – מִצְוַת נְשׂוּאִין: A man who does not marry is considered like one who sheds blood, diminishes the Divine Image, and causes the Divine Presence to depart from the Jewish people. Upon his marriage, his transgressions vanish, as per the Gemara (*Shulhan Arukh, Even HaEzer* 1:1).

My soul yearns for Torah – נַפְשִׁי חֲשָׁקָה בַּתּוֹרָה: One whose soul yearns for Torah like ben Azzai, to the extent that his constant attachment to Torah study prevents him from getting married, is not considered a sinner, provided that he is not tempted by his evil inclination. Even so, he should not proceed in this manner *ab initio* (*Taz; Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhos Ishut* 15:3; *Shulhan Arukh, Even HaEzer* 1:4).

“אל תצור צרת מחר כי לא תדע מה ילד
יום, שמא מחר בא ואיננו נמצא מצטער
על העולם שאין שלו.” “מנע רבים מתוך
ביתך, ולא הכל תביא ביתך. רבים יהיו
דורשי שלומך, גלה סוד לאחד מאלף.”

The Gemara quotes additional statements from the book of Ben Sira: **Do not suffer from tomorrow's trouble**, that is, do not worry about problems that might arise in the future, **as you do not know what a day will bring.** Perhaps when tomorrow comes, the individual who was so worried will **not** be among the living, and **he was consequently upset over a world that is not his.** Prevent a crowd from inside your house, do not let many people enter, and **do not even bring all your friends into your house.** Make sure, however, that a crowd seeks your welfare, and that you have many allies. **Reveal a secret to only one in a thousand**, since most people are unable to keep a secret.

אמר רבי אסי: אין בן דוד בא עד שיכלו
כל הנשמות שבגוף שנאמר “כי רוח מלפני
יעטוף ונשמות אני עשיתי.” תנאי, רבי
אליעזר אומר: כל מי שאין עוסק בפריה
ורבייה – כאילו שופך דמים שנאמר “שופך
דם האדם באדם דמו ישפך” וכתוב
בתריה “ואתם פרו ורבו.”

Rabbi Asi said: **The Messiah, son of David, will not come until all the souls of the bodyⁿ have been finished**, i.e., until all souls that are destined to inhabit physical bodies will do so. **As it is stated:** “For the spirit that enwraps itself is from Me, and the souls that I have made” (Isaiah 57:16). It is taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Eliezer says: **Anyone who does not engage in the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply is considered as though he sheds blood**, as it is stated: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6), and it is written immediately afterward: “And you, be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 9:7).

רבי יעקב אומר: כאילו מומעט הדמות,
שנאמר “כי בצלם אלהים עשה את
האדם” וכתוב בתריה “ואתם פרו” וגו'.
בן עזאי אומר: כאילו שופך דמים, וממעט
הדמות, שנאמר “ואתם פרו ורבו.”

Rabbi Ya'akov says: **It is as though he diminishes the Divine Image**, as it is stated: “For in the image of God He made man” (Genesis 9:6), and it is written immediately afterward: “And you, be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 9:7). **Ben Azzai says:** It is as though he sheds blood and also diminishes the Divine Image,^h as it is stated: “And you, be fruitful and multiply,” after the verse that alludes to both shedding blood and the Divine Image.

אמרו לו לבן עזאי: יש נאה דורש ונאה
מקיים, נאה מקיים ואין נאה דורש.
ואתה – נאה דורש ואין נאה מקיים!
אמר להן בן עזאי: ומה אעשה שנפשי
חשקה בתורה, אפשר לעולם שיתקיים
על ידי אחרים.

They said to ben Azzai: **There is a type of scholar who expounds well and fulfills his own teachings well**, and another who **fulfills well and does not expound well.** But you, who have never married, **expound well on the importance of procreation, and yet you do not fulfill well your own teachings.** **Ben Azzai^p said to them:** **What shall I do, as my soul yearns for Torah,^{nh}** and I do not wish to deal with anything else. **It is possible for the world to be maintained by others**, who are engaged in the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply.

תנאי איך, רבי אליעזר אומר: כל מי
שאינו עוסק בפריה ורבייה – כאילו שופך
דמים, שנאמר “שופך דם האדם” וסמך
ליה “ואתם פרו” וגו'. רבי אליעזר בן עזריה
אומר: כאילו ממעט הדמות, בן עזאי
אומר: וכו'. אמרו לו לבן עזאי יש נאה
דורש וכו'.

It is similarly taught in another *baraita* that Rabbi Eliezer says: **Anyone who does not engage in the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply is considered as though he sheds blood**, as it is stated: “Whoever sheds the blood of man,” and it is stated near it: “And you, be fruitful and multiply.” Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya says: It is as though he diminishes the Divine Image. **Ben Azzai says:** It is as though he both sheds blood and diminishes the Divine Image. **They said to ben Azzai:** **There is a type of scholar who expounds well**, etc.

תנו רבנן: “ובנחה יאמר שובה ה' רבותי
אלפי ישראל”

The Sages taught with regard to the mitzva to be fruitful and multiply: “And when it rested, he would say: **Return, Lord, to the ten thousands of the thousands of Israel**” (Numbers 10:36).

PERSONALITIES

Ben Azzai – בן עזאי: This is Shimon ben Azzai, one of the *tanna'im* of Yavne. Despite the fact that he was never ordained, which is why he is known by name alone, and usually simply as ben Azzai, he was considered among the greatest of the Sages and was renowned for his wisdom.

It appears that he did not study Torah in his youth, but only after he met Rabbi Akiva's daughter, who promised to marry him if he would become a scholar. Ben Azzai indeed went and studied under Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Yishmael, and principally Rabbi Akiva. He was one of Rabbi Akiva's outstanding students and was eventually considered a disciple-colleague of Rabbi Akiva's, whom he considered to be the foremost scholar of his generation.

It is unclear whether he married Rabbi Akiva's daughter at all,

or whether he married and separated from her a short while later. Due to his great passion for Torah he dedicated himself entirely to its study. It is therefore said about him that when ben Azzai died diligence in Torah study ceased (*Sota* 49a). His teachings of *halakha* and *aggada* are cited in the Mishna, in *baraitot*, and in the Talmud. It seems that he even established a body of students of his own in his hometown of Tiberias.

Ben Azzai also studied esoteric wisdom, and is listed as one of the four Sages who entered the orchard, i.e., the deepest secrets of Torah knowledge. He is said to have: Glimpsed at the Divine Presence and died (*Hagiga* 14b), and the verse “Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His pious ones” (Psalms 116:15) is applied to him.