

CHAPTER VIII.

A. During three days before the interment, experts repair to the cemetery and examine the dead whether they are really dead; [and although this is the custom of other nations], there is no fear of the prohibition of the deeds of the Amorites. [A1](#) It happened that one of the dead was examined (and found alive), and he lived twenty-five years after that; and to another one, that he begat five children before he died.

B. A canopy may be made for dead bridegrooms and brides, and either eatable or uneatable things may be hung on it. So is the decree of R. Meir. R. Jehudah, however, said: Only unripe things-viz., unripe nuts, unripe χαλλοξ, tongus of purple, and flasks of Arabian oil; but not when they are ripe, nor ripe pomegranates, nor flasks of sweet oil, as whatever hangs on the canopy, no benefit may be derived from it. [B1](#) Strings of fish, pieces of meat, may be thrown before the dead bridegroom or bride in the summer, [B2](#) but not in rain time; and even during

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the summer, they must not do so with cooked fish or other eatables which will be spoiled after they are thrown on the ground. Nuts and other fruit in shells, as they are not spoiled, may be thrown at all times. There is a rule that anything which may be spoiled must not be thrown.

C. Likewise wine and oil may be put in a water pipe in honor of live bridegrooms and brides. As it happened to Jehudah and Hillel the sons of R. Gamaliel, when they were the guests of Ben Zakkai in Babylon, [C1](#) the townspeople flooded the water pipes with wine and oil to honor them. Also the bodies of kings, and their clothes may be burned, their cattle ham-stringed, without fear that it is after the usages of the Amorites. The ceremony of burning clothes and other things is performed for the corpses of kings only, but not for princes. When Rabban Gamaliel died, Aquilas the proselyte, however, burned in his honor clothes of the value of eight thousand Zuz, and when he was asked why he did so, he answered: It is written [Jerem. xxxiv. 5]: "In peace shalt thou die; and as burnings were made for thy father," etc. Was not Rabban Gamaliel more worthy than a hundred kings, for whom we have no use? [C2](#)

D. The hair of a dead bride may be loosened; and the face of a bridegroom may be uncovered, and the marriage contract and the pen may be put by his side, without fear that so is the custom of the Amorites. There may also be put in the coffin the key and the pinkas (πιναξ) of the dead, to call the attention of others to mourn, as it happened with Samuel the Little, that his key and pinkas were put in his coffin, because he did not leave a son. And Rabban Gamaliel the Elder and R. Elazar b. Azariah lamented him, saying: "For this dead one it is meet to weep, it is proper to lament. When kings die they leave their thrones to their children, when rich men die they leave their wealth to their children, but Samuel the Little took with him the most precious thing in the world, and is gone!"

E. Before he died, he said: "Simeon and Ishmael are prepared for the sword, and all the

remaining people for being robbed, and great trouble will follow." And he spoke this in

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Aramaic. When this occurred, and R. Simeon b. Gamaliel and R. Ishmael were condemned to death, R. Ishmael was weeping; but R. Simeon said: I praise God that it is only two steps till I shall be received in the bosom of the righteous in the world to come, and you are weeping? And the former rejoined: Do I weep because we are going to be slain? I am weeping because we will be slain as if we were murderers and violators of the Sabbath. After they were executed, and R. Aqiba and R. Jehudah b. Etyra were informed, they put sackcloth on their loins, rent their garments, and said: Brother Israelites! If a good thing was to come for the whole world, these two sages would certainly have been the first to receive it; and now, as they were the first to be executed, it must be only for their benefit: they shall not see the great calamities which will follow after that. Woe! "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart" [Isaiah, lvii. 1]. "He shall come (to his father) in peace, they shall repose in their resting-place" [ibid., ibid. 2].

F. When R. Aqiba was executed, and R. Jehudah b. Baba and R. Hanina b. Teradion heard of it, they also arose, put sackcloth on their loins, rent their garments, and cried: Brothers, listen to us! R. Aqiba was not slain because of robbery nor because he had not observed the Law with all his might, he was slain only for an example, as it is written [Ezek. xxiv. 24]: "Thus shall Ezekiel be unto you for a token . . . then shall ye know that I am the Lord eternal." We are sure that within a few days there will not be a place in the whole of Palestine where corpses of the people will not be lying about. It was said that scarcely had a few days passed, when a canine appetite dissipated the whole world, which lasted from that time for a twelvemonth.

G. When R. Hanina b. Teradion was seized by the government they sentenced him to the stake, his wife to the sword, and his daughter to a house of prostitution. He inquired: To what have they sentenced the poor thing (his wife)? And he was answered: To the sword! Whereupon he exclaimed the following passage: "Righteous is the Lord in all his ways [Ps. cxlv. 17]. When she asked to what the rabbi was sentenced, she was answered: To the stake. Whereupon she exclaimed the passage: "Great in counsel, and mighty in execution," etc. [Jer. xxxii. 19]. When he was to be burned they wrapped him in the Holy Scrolls, and his daughter cried and threw herself on the ground. He said to her: My daughter! If thou weepest and throwest thyself on the ground over me, is

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it not better I should be consumed by a fire which was kindled in this world than by a fire which is not kindled (Gehenna)? As it is written [Job, xx. 26]: "A fire not urged by blowing." And for the Holy Scrolls! Knowest thou not that the Torah is fire itself, and no fire can consume another? The parchment only is burned, but the letters fly away. Thou must also know that the great servants of the king are mostly beaten through the lesser, as it is written [Hosea, vi. 5]: "Therefore did I hew (them) down by means of the prophets, I slew them by the work of my mouth." [G1](#)

H. R. Aqiba said: There is a king who has four sons. One is struck and is silent; the second rebels; the third prays for mercy; and the fourth says to his father: Strike me (because I am deserving). Abraham was struck but was silent, as it is written [Gen. xxii. 2]: "Take now thy

son, thy only one, whom thou lovest, even Isaac . . . and offer him there for a burnt-offering." He ought to have said: The other day thou didst tell me: "For in Isaac shall thy seed be called" [Gen. xxi. 12]? and nevertheless it is written [ibid. xxii. 3]: And Abraham rose up early in the morning," etc. Job was struck and rebelled, as it is written [Job, x. 2]: "I will say unto God, do not condemn me: let me know for what cause thou contendest against me." Hezekiah was struck, and he prayed for mercy, as it is written [II Kings, xix. 15]: "And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord," etc. According to others, even Hezekiah rebelled, because he said: "Did I not do what is good in thy eyes?" [ibid. xx. 3]. [Hi](#) But David is the one who said to his father: Strike me (because I am deserving), as it is written [Psalms, li. 4]: "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

I. The study of the Torah must not be interrupted till the soul is out of the dying one. When R. Simeon the son of R. Aqiba was ill, [ii](#) he (R. Aqiba) did not absent himself from the college, but inquired about him through messengers. The first

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messenger announced that he was yet ill. He nevertheless said to the disciples: "Question!" The second announced that he was worse, and still he did not interrupt his studies. The third one announced that he was in the struggle of death, and yet he said: "Question!" till the fourth one announced the death. Whereupon he arose, removed his phylacteries, rent his garments, and said to them: "Brother Israelites, listen to me! Till now we were obliged to study the Law; now, however, we are obliged to honor the dead." A great multitude assembled to bury the son of R. Aqiba. He said: "Bring me out a bench to the cemetery." He sat down and said: "Brother Israelites, listen! (You have assembled) not because I am a sage, for there are greater sages than I; not because I am rich, for there are richer men than I. If the men of the south know Aqiba, why should the Galileans know him? If the men know Aqiba, what have the women and the children to do with Aqiba (but here is not Aqiba, here is the Torah)? Oh! your reward will be great, ye have done homage to the Law. I am consoled, and had I even seven sons and buried them all, I would be consoled, [not that one is desirous of burying his children], but because I know that he will inherit the world to come; because it is known to all that he was given to philanthropic activity, to whom a sin never reaches." (See Yomah, p. 138.)

Moses, who was himself righteous, and was given to philanthropic activity, the reward of the public was counted to him, as it is written [Deut. xxxiii. 21]: "He executed the justice of the Lord, and his judgments with Israel." Jeroboam the son of Nebat sinned and induced the public to sin: the sin of the public was counted to him, as it is written [I Kings, xiv. 16]: "For the sake of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who induced Israel to sin."

J. (There is a tradition): The reward of virtue is brought about by a meritorious person (Sabbath, p. 55); *e.g.*, Israel was destined to be redeemed from Egypt, as it is written [Gen. xv. 14]: "And afterward shall they go out with great substance." But as Moses and Aaron were meritorious persons, it was done through them. The same is the case with the receiving of the Torah: they would have received it without Moses' Aaron, and the generation of the desert, as it is written [Proverbs, ii. 7]: "He treasureth up sound wisdom for the righteous." The paragraph of judges [Ex. xv. 18] would be said, even if Jethro would not appear. The same is the case with the paragraph

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about the second Paschal lamb, it would be said even if the defiled men were not under the requirements of law [Numb. ix. 7]; and the same is with the paragraph of inheritance, it would be written without the daughters of Zelophchad.

K. The Temple also would have been built without David and Solomon, as it is written [Ex. xv. 17]: "The sanctuary, O Lord, which *Thy hands* have established." In the time of Haman, Israel would have been redeemed also without Mordecai and Esther, as it is written [Lev. xxvi. 44]: "And yet for all that, though they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I loathe them to *destroy* them utterly." But all that was done through the above-mentioned, because a reward shall be brought about by a meritorious person.

L. The same is true of the reverse. Israel was destined to be enslaved, even if Pharaoh should not have existed, as it is written [Gen. xv. 13]: "And they will make them serve, and they will afflict them four hundred years." Israel would worship the idols even if Jeroboam b. Nebat should not have existed, as it is written [Deut. xxxi. 16]: "And then will this people rise up and go astray." The paragraphs of the blasphemer and the violator of Sabbath would have been written even if the blasphemer and the stick-gatherer should not have existed. Israel was destined to be slain by the sword, even if the persecutors [L1](#) at different times should not have existed, as it is written [Amos, ix. 10]: "By the sword shall die all the sinners of my people." Jerusalem would have been destroyed also, without Nebuchadnezzar and his associates, as it is written [Micah, iii. 12]: "Therefore for *your sake* shall Zion be ploughed up as a field, and Jerusalem shall become ruinous heaps, and the mount of the house as forest-covered high places." But all this was done through the above-mentioned, because of the rule that the chastisement for sin is dealt out through a sinner, and this was explained by Papus and Lulianus his brother to Trajan their prosecutor. (Taanith, p. 48.)

M. Those who are more particular in interpreting the verses of the Scriptures said: It is written [Deut. xii. 3]: "And ye shall overthrow their altars." Wherein have the wood and stone sinned (to be destroyed)? It must be only because people have stumbled through them. From this is to be drawn an

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a fortiori conclusion: Wood and stones which have neither virtue nor sin, neither goodness nor wickedness, because people have stumbled through them, if the Torah nevertheless decided their destruction, so much the more he who causes his neighbor to sin, and inclines him from the path of life to the path of death, deserves to be destroyed! In the same manner they explained the following: It is written [Lev. xx. 16]: "Then shalt thou kill the woman and the beast." If the woman has sinned, in what has the beast sinned? It must be only because the woman has sinned with it, it must be killed; as otherwise, whenever it would be seen in the street, people would say: "This is the beast through which so and so was stoned." And also here they draw the same *a fortiori*: An animal which has no virtue, etc., like the wood and stones, and nevertheless the Torah decided that it must be stoned--a man who causes his neighbor to depart from the path of life to the path of death, so much the more must he suffer for it.

N. An *a fortiori* conclusion is also to be drawn from the stones of the altar; namely, it is written [Deut. xxvii. 5]: "Thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them," and it is also written [Ex. xx.

22]: "For if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it." Why, then, shall iron be unfit for the altar more than any other metal? It is because the sword is an unpropitious event and the altar is a propitious one, and a sign of curse must be removed from the thing which is forgiveness. Now, is this not all *a fortiori*: The stones of the altar which do not see, hear, talk, neither eat nor drink, but only because they made peace between Israel and their heavenly Father, the Torah said they should not be cut with iron, "Of whole stones shall they build the altar of the Lord God" [Deut. xxvii. 6], we see then that the stones which bring peace in the world must not come in contact with iron and must be whole--the students who in themselves are a forgiveness to the world, so much the more must they not come in contact with evil things, in order to be perfect before the Holy One, blessed be He?

Footnotes

[30:A1](#)

CHAPTER VIII.

A. Lev. xviii. 3.

[30:B1](#) B. Therefore only unripe things were allowed, lest one should use them if they were ripe.

[30:B2](#) It must have been a custom at that time to throw some things which were prepared for the wedding feast. It is certainly difficult to explain, without a particular knowledge of this obsolete custom. Naumburg, however, maintains that it was done for a live bridegroom and bride; but we do not agree with him, for the reason that this is not mentioned in Berachoth, where it is enumerated what is to be done to honor the bride and bridegroom.

[31:C1](#) C. These were Jehudah the second and Hillel his brother the grandsons of Rabbi; and b. Zakkai must have been a prominent person in Babylon.

[31:C2](#) In Abodah Zarah, 11a, is stated that burning of clothes was also done for princes, and Aquilas' deed was used as a support without any explanation.

[33:G1](#) G. This is Leeser's translation, but the Talmud takes it literally--that the prophets were slain through the sin of Israel.

[33:H1](#) H. It means that this expression is a protest against his affliction, as it was not proper to remind the Lord of His good deeds.

[33:I1](#) I. See above, p. 18. The entire occurrence is repeated here at length, with some changes; therefore we leave it as it is in both places.

[35:L1](#) L. In Yalkut is mentioned Balaam instead of persecutors, but it seems to us to be proper

as explained here.

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