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## REMNANTS OF THE "LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL" IN AFRICA-PART 1

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In my January-February 2009 Bulletin I described two "Lost Tribes of Israel" that live in India, the **Bene Israel** and the **Bnai Menashe**. There are a number of different groups in Africa that identify with Judaism, and in this Bulletin I will describe the most significant of these, the Ethiopian group known as the **Beta Israel**, though sometimes referred to as **Falashas** (the derogatory term by which they were referred to by other Ethiopians, meaning "exiles" or "strangers").

The Tanach tells us (1 Kings 10:1-13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-12) that the African Queen Sheba visited King Solomon and shared his bed, returning to Abyssinia carrying his son. According to Abyssinian/Ethiopian tradition, when Sheba's son, Menelik, became curious about his father he traveled to Israel where he visited Solomon. Upon leaving, Menelik stole the coveted Ark of the Covenant, bringing it back with him to the Abyssinian capital of Axum. Thus, according to the Ethiopian Jews, Axum became the true center of Zion.

Some historians, though, believe that the true ancestor of the **Beta Israel** is not Menelik but Dan, one of Jacob's sons, whose offspring migrated through the Nile valley to the ancient African kingdom of Cush. A 9th-century tradition, based on the story of Eldad ha-Dani (the Danite), maintains that during the rift between Rehoboam, son of Solomon, and Jeroboam, son of Nebat --leaders of the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel respectively --the tribe of Dan chose not to be drawn into tribal disputes. To avoid the impending civil war they resettled in Egypt. Once there, the Danites continued southwards up the Nile to the historic Land of Cush (today known as Sudan and Ethiopia) and found it to be rich in resources. Eldad ha-Dani himself was probably from this area. This tradition is also found in other medieval sources: Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinoro came across two Abyssinian Jewish prisoners of war in Egypt in the late 15th century and wrote that they claimed to be descended from the tribe of Dan; Rabbi David ben-Zimra ruled in his 16th century *responsa* that the Jews of Ethiopia were unquestionably Danites who had settled in Abyssinia, possibly even before the Second Temple period. Still others believe that the **Falashas** are not genetic descendants of Israel, but that they adopted Judaism well over two thousand years ago as either Yemenite or Egyptian traders flooded the Horn of Africa.

Whatever the true background of these people, since the fourth century CE. when King Ezana declared Christianity the official religion of his kingdom, **Beta Israel** have been outsiders in the Abyssinian/Ethiopian community. The **Beta Israel** had virtually no contact with other Jews from the fourth century until sixteenth century Portuguese traders reported their existence to the West. Though the traders told tall tales of the African's ancient Biblical rituals, the Western Jewish community rejected the idea that the **Beta Israel** had any real claim to Hebrew lineage. Nineteenth century Jewish scholar Joseph HaLevy and his pupil, Jacques Faitlovitch, were almost alone in bringing the **Beta Israel** cause to the Jewish community. Their unrelenting crusade to convince Orthodox Rabbinate to recognize the **Beta Israel** community culminated in the 1973 decree by Israel's Sephardic Chief Rabbi, Ovadia Yosef, that that the **Falashas** were descendants of the Tribe of Dan and should be allowed to emigrate to Israel under the Law of Return. In 1975 his Ashkenazic counterpart, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, concurred, and soon thereafter the Israeli Parliament agreed. A few **Beta Israel** began to migrate to Israel in the '70s and early '80s, but the real emigration came in 1985 when in *Operation Moses* Israel airlifted 15,000 Jews out of the midst of a harsh Ethiopian civil war. Three months later, *Operation Sheba* brought 500 more **Falashas** to Israel, but Ethiopia and Sudan closed the borders, holding almost 15,000 **Falasha** refugees in camps. In 1991 American diplomats convinced an advancing rebel army to stay out of Addis Ababa for three days so that Israel could airlift many of the remaining Jews to safety through *Operation Solomon*.

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## REMNANTS OF THE "LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL" IN AFRICA-PART 2

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In my January-February 2010 Bulletin I described one of the "Lost Tribes of Israel" that live in Africa, the Ethiopian group known as the **Beta Israel**, though sometimes referred to as **Falashas**. The next most significant group is the 500 or so **Abayudaya** of Uganda. Their story begins in the 1880s, when British missionaries converted the powerful warrior Semei Kakungulu to Christianity. He broke with the British in 1913 and joined the Malachites, a movement that combined Christianity with Judaism and Christian Science. Kakungulu became more and more a follower of Jewish tradition, and in 1919 he circumcised his sons and himself and declared his community Jewish. Soon the British could communicate with him no longer and forced him from Mbale. Kakungulu fled to the foothills of Mount Elgon to a village called Gangama, where he started a separatist sect known as Kibina Kya Bayudaya Absesiga Katonda (the Community of Jews who Trust in the Lord).

After his death, his followers split into two groups – one that retained a belief in Jesus and another, the **Abayudaya**, that became devout Jews. They maintained their traditions in total isolation until the '60s and '70s when the initial members of the **Abayudaya** community began to grow elderly. The community reached out to Israel and even had the first secretary of the Israeli embassy in Uganda visit them. In 1992, Matthew Meyer, a Brown University student studying in Kenya, heard of the **Abayudaya** and traveled to Mbale to spend Shabbat with them. He returned to the United States with photographs, cassettes of the community choir singing Hebrew prayers to African melodies, and letters from **Abayudaya** community members in both English and Hebrew. Since then other English-speaking travelers have visited the **Abayudaya**, bearing gifts such as a new Torah and money from the Brown University Hillel to build a synagogue.

There are three other groups in Africa with Jewish religious affiliation: (1) the **Lemba** of Malawi, Zimbabwe, and the Venda region of South Africa, (2) the **House of Israel** community of Sefwi Wiawso and Sefwi Sui in Western Ghana, and (3) a separate (unnamed) community of African Jews in Rusape, Zimbabwe. None of them have been accepted by rabbinic authorities as being Jews. The most famous of these groups is the **Lemba**, who were featured in the PBS NOVA television program The Lost Tribes of Israel, originally broadcast on February 22, 2000. The NOVA narrator, University of London anthropologist Tudor Parfitt, visited them, and saw that they observed some Jewish traditions, in particular the ritual slaughter of animals. He took DNA samples of the **Lemba** back to London and discovered that about 10% of them have the Y chromosome which is common among Cohanim.

The **House of Israel** community has a number of customs that were identical with those of the Jews: they avoided the consumption of pig-like animals, observed a day of rest on Saturdays, males were circumcised eight days after birth, and men and women were separated during female menstruation. In 1977, one of the community members, now known as Aaron Ahomtre Toakyirafa Toakyirafa, had a vision that the Sefwi people were one of the lost tribes of Israel.

Today Rusape's Congregation Betel, led by Rabbi Ambrose Cohen Mukawaza, has a community of about 4,000 blacks who consider themselves descendants of Jews. The origin of this community is as follows. In the 1880s William Saunders Crowdy, a black American Baptist deacon experienced a revelation in which he was told that Africans and African Americans are the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel and that he should initiate the return of black peoples to Judaism. In 1903 he passed his ideas on to Albert Christian, who moved to Africa and preached these ideas to the Zimbabwe community.

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## THE PASSOVER HALLEL

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The “trusty” Birnbaum siddur footnotes the Hallel prayer (page 566) with the following:

This so-called “*half-Hallel*” is likewise used on the last six days of *Pesach* by reason of the following tradition. When the Egyptians were drowning in the Red Sea on the seventh day of *Pesach*, God restrained the angels from singing his praise, saying, “How can you sing hymns while my creatures are drowning in the sea?” (Megillah 10b). In order not to make *Hol haMo’ed Pesach* appear as more important than the seventh day of *Pesach*, the Hallel is abridged throughout the last six days.

Though this is a nice story, it’s not the reason given in the Talmud for the half-Hallel on all but the first two days of Pesach. I’ll get to that in a moment. But first, what song did the angels want to sing? Not the Hallel. They wanted to sing the song angels always sing in praise of God, namely קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו (Isaiah 6:3).

So how did the singing of the Hallel get associated with the crossing of the Red Sea? Pesachim 117a has a very interesting discussion, which I paraphrase here. It first mentions that the “Song in the Torah” (i.e., the Song we now refer to as *Az Yashir* in Exodus 15) was uttered by Moses and Israel when they ascended from the Red Sea. This is followed by the question, “And who said this Hallel?” הלל זה מי אמרו So obviously there was some consideration by the Rabbis of the Talmud that, in addition to *Az Yashir*, Hallel was recited at the Red Sea.

The responses to this question are quite interesting. The Talmud gives an (anonymous) response, namely, “The prophets among them ordained that Israel should recite it [the Hallel] at every important epoch and at every misfortune ...and when they are redeemed they recite it in gratitude for their redemption.” Immediately there is a remark by Rabbi Meir, who says that all the Psalms were written by David, .and so, by implication, could not have been recited at the Red Sea. Once more the Talmud asks the question, “And who said this Hallel?” Now we get Rabbi Yosi saying that his son Eliezer contends that Moses and Israel did so when they ascended from the Red Sea, after which the Talmud interjects, “But some of his colleagues disagree with him, saying that David said [i.e., wrote] it.” The Talmud then editorializes, “But his [Eliezer’s] view is preferable to theirs [his colleagues].” Why? And here’s the Talmudic punch line: “How could you conceive of a Jew, before the time of David, slaughtering the Paschal offering or waving the lulav without singing Hallel?” Such logic! (For those who want to read further, the Talmud then goes on to speculate on the [non-Davidic] origin of the Hallel.)

The issue of when the Hallel is said and not said, as well as when the Hallel is to be a full Hallel (Psalms 113-118 plus some closing prayers) or the [inappropriately named ] “half-Hallel,” (in which the first eleven verses of each of Psalms 115 and 116 are omitted) is discussed in Arachin 10a-b. There the Talmud contrasts Pesach with Succot, a holiday in which the full Hallel is said on all its days. It points out that each day of Succot has a different set of bullocks being sacrificed (starting with 13 bullocks on the first day, and reduced each day by one until, on the seventh day 7 bullocks are offered), whereas the same number of bullocks (2) are sacrificed on each of the days of Pesach (see the Mussaf for the Festivals, pages 680-687 of the Art Scroll Siddur, to check this out). And so, the Talmud says, to differentiate the sacrificial orders for Succot from the sacrificial orders for Pesach, the Rabbis decided to designate the last days of Pesach as having a different Hallel from that of Succot.

Okay, now that you’ve learned what the Talmud has to say on the subject, don’t you think Birnbaum’s footnote gives a better justification?

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## WHO WROTE THE HALLEL?

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In the last bulletin I (somewhat opaquely) presented the reason for the half-Hallel on all but the first two days of Pesach. The official reason given in the Talmud was that this was to remind us of the difference between the set of sacrifices on the last six days of Pesach (they are the same on all six days) and those on the last six days of Succot (they were different each day). The reason given in the Birnbaum *siddur*, namely that God restrained the angels from singing his praise, saying, "How can you sing hymns while my creatures are drowning in the sea?" made for a more pleasant justification, and so it's the one taught to us.

I alluded to the association of the Hallel (Psalms 113-118, sometimes referred to as Hallel Mitzrayim or the Egyptian Hallel<sup>1</sup>) with the crossing of the Red Sea and to the questioning in the Talmud of who was the author of the Hallel, but left the conclusion hanging, and so I thought I would explain matters a bit more in this bulletin. First of all, there is a statement in Pesachim 117a that, in addition to *Az Yashir*, Hallel was recited at the Red Sea by Moses and the Israelites. Immediately there is a remark by Rabbi Meir, who says that all the Psalms were written by David, and so, by implication, could not have been recited at the Red Sea. This is followed by the following stream of reprises "R. Eleazar said: Moses and Israel uttered it when they stood by the [Red] Sea... R. Judah said: Joshua and Israel uttered it when the kings of Canaan attacked them... R. Eleazar the Modiite said: Deborah and Barak uttered it when Sisera attacked them... R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: Hezekiah and his companions uttered it when Sennacherib attacked them. R. Akiba said: Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah uttered it when the wicked Nebuchadnezzar rose against them. ... R. Jose the Galilean said: Mordecai and Esther uttered it when the wicked Haman rose against them."

Hezekiah, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, Mordecai, and Esther came after David. But Joshua, Deborah, and Barak (and, of course, Moses) predate King David! No wonder the immediate response to the remark by Rabbi Meir is "R. Jose said: My son Eleazar maintains [that] Moses and Israel said it when they ascended from the [Red] Sea, but his colleagues disagree with him, averring that David said it. But his view is preferable to theirs."

The Talmud itself equivocates a bit about the origin of the Psalms. In Baba Batra 14b we find "David wrote the Book of Psalms, including in it the work of the elders, namely, Adam, Melchizedek, Abraham, Moses, Heman, Yeduthun, Asaph, and the three sons of Korah." So we already see an admission that David might have incorporated preexisting Psalms, including those written by Moses, into the collection.

The Soncino translation of the Psalms says in its introduction to Psalm 113, "Probably they [the Hallel chapters] originated after the return from Babylon to celebrate that event." Some of the arguments for this view are given by the Jewish Encyclopedia. It tells us that the Aramaic word "tagmulohi" (Psalm 116:12) would seem to indicate a late date; the thrice-repeated cry "I shall cut them down," (Psalm 118:10, 11, 12) with "the Lord hath chastened me sore," (Psalm 118:13) points to a bloody war, at first unsuccessful; the words "open to me the gates of righteousness" (Psalm 118:19) point to the recovery of the Temple: all these together make it probable that the "Hallel" psalms were written for the Feast of Hanukkah, during which they are still recited every morning.

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<sup>1</sup> There are two other "Hallels" mentioned in the Talmud. One, the "Great Hallel," is Psalm 136 (referred to in Pesachim 118a) and is included in the Shacharit service every Shabbat and Holiday. The other, the "Daily Hallel," consists of Psalms 145-150 (referred to in Shabbat 118b) and is said in every Shacharit service.

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## NEILAH

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We all know that Jews pray three times a day, with a morning service (*shacharit*), an afternoon service (*mincha*), and an evening service (*maariv*). We also know that an extra service (*musaf*, literally, “added on”) is tacked on to the end of the morning service on special occasions, such as Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh (the first day of the new month), Holidays, and some Fast Days. Yom Kippur is an extra-special occasion, as it has one more service, the *neilah* service, added to the standard four services expected on such a day. What is the origin of this service, and what is its significance?

The earliest mention of the *neilah* prayer is in the Mishnah, Taanit 26a, where it is stated that the priests are to pronounce the priestly blessings four times, namely in the *shacharit*, the *musaf*, the *mincha*, and the *neilat shearim*. The meaning of this phrase, *neilat shearim*, is the subject of discussion in the Jerusalem Talmud Taanit, where one set of rabbis interprets it quite prosaically as נְעִילַת שְׁעָרֵי הַיְכָל “the closing of the gates of the Temple” and another set interprets it poetically as נְעִילַת שְׁעָרֵי שָׁמַיִם “the closing of the gates of heaven.” It is the latter view that prevails today in the *neilah* liturgy, as seen obliquely in the prayer in line 5 on page 987 and most explicitly in the prayer at the top of page 1001 of the Birnbaum *machzor*.

Even in the time of the *amoraim* Rav (Abba Arika) and Shmuel (220-240CE) there was a debate [Yoma 87b] as to whether the *neilah* was to be a separate service, “What [is the prayer at] the closing of the gates? Rav said: An extra prayer. Shmuel said: “Who are we, what is our life?” Rav maintained that the *neilah* should be a separate service and should contain an *amidah*; Shmuel maintained that all that is required is the specific prayer beginning with מַה אֲנֵנו מַה הַיְיָנו (see the middle of page 971 of the Birnbaum *machzor* for the full text of this prayer).

The proof text behind Rav’s contention is a quote from a *baraita* (a text that did not make it into the Mishnah) of unknown origin, which, according to some scholars, is probably not older than the first half of the third century CE. The quote is found three times in the Talmud, in Yoma 87b, Niddah 8b, and Pesachim 3a. Here is the Yoma 87b version: “On the evening of the Day of Atonement one reads seven (benedictions) and then makes the confession, in the morning prayer one reads seven and makes confession, at *musaf* one reads seven and makes confession, at *mincha* one reads the seven and makes confession, and at *neilah* one reads the seven and makes confession.” The references to benedictions here are to the *amidah* in each of the services, where the count of the blessings is given. (Strangely, though, in Pesachim 3a the part about the *neilah* is not mentioned! Most scholars think that this is just a transcription error.) Just to nail this issue down, here is a quote from Shabbat 24b: “When the Day of Atonement falls on the Sabbath, he who recites the *neilah* service must refer to the Sabbath: it is a day when four services are obligatory.”

We follow Rav, but include in the *neilah* service the key prayer espoused by Shmuel, “Who are we, what is our life?” That prayer (page 971) is sandwiched between two others. The one following it, beginning with אַתָּה הַבְּדִלָּת, is also an old prayer, in that it appears in both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic *machzor*. But that which precedes it, אַתָּה נֹתֵן, is of much later origin, found at its earliest in thirteenth century *machzorim*. These three prayers, which come at the end of the *neilah* service, contain the essentials of the *neilah* service, and are worthy of your attention during the service.

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## CHANUKAH FAQs

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In past bulletins I have covered the main themes of Chanukah, namely the origins of Chanukah as presented in the Talmud (in my very first bulletin, December 1997) and in the four books of Maccabees (December 1998), and the dating of Chanukah on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev (December 2006). But I never covered details relating to the celebration of Chanukah. So here goes, in Q&A fashion.

Q: The miracle celebrated was that oil sufficient to burn for one day burned for eight days. So why not simulate the miracle by lighting eight candles the first day, seven the second day, etc., ending with one candle on the eighth day?

A: In Shabbat 21b Shammai opined that this is the way to light the candles, but Hillel argued in favor of starting with one candle and lighting an additional one every night, up to eight on the eighth night. Many reasons are given for each position, but Jewish law adopted the position of Hillel with the argument that “we promote in matters of sanctity but do not reduce” דמעלין בקדש ואין מורידין .

Q: Should the candles be put into the menorah from left to right or right to left (as you face the menorah), and should they be lit from left to right or right to left?

A: On the first night we light the candle on the far right side of the Menorah, and every night thereafter we add a candle to the left of that. However, when we light on the second night, and all the subsequent nights, we start by lighting the (new) left candle and then we move left to right, lighting the others candles. In other words, the candles are positioned on the right side of the menorah but we light from left to right (because one pays honor to the newer item first).

Q: Where should the menorah be placed?

A: Shabbat 21b: “It is incumbent to place the Hanukkah lamp by the door of one's house on the outside; if one dwells in an upper chamber, he places it at the window nearest the street.”

Q: When should the menorah be lit on Friday night?

A: Before lighting the Shabbat candles.

Q: When should the menorah be lit on Saturday night?

A: After the completion of the Havdalah.

Q: May women make the blessing over the candles and/or light the candles?

A: The gemara in Shabbat 23a states that women have an obligation to light Chanukah candles because “they were also part of the miracle” שאף הן היו באותו הנס (meaning either that they were in the same danger as the men were or that they played a key role in bringing about the salvation). According to Shabbat 21b the mitzvah of Chanukah is an obligation that each house have a candle lit, and a woman certainly can do so and thus may light for others. This point was made in Orchot Chaim, a 14<sup>th</sup> century work by Rav Aharon HaKohein of Lunel, France, who stated that, though the obligation of a man is with regard to his household, a woman has the ability to fill this role on his behalf.

Q: May minor children make the blessing over the candles and/or light the candles?

A: Many decisors (*poskim*<sup>1</sup>) permit a child to light with the blessings.

Q: What are the origins of the Ashkenazic custom of eating *latkes* and of the Sephardic custom of eating *sufganiyot* on Chanukah?

A: The common denominator between *sufganiyot* and *latkes* is that they're deep-fried in oil, supposedly commemorating the miracle of the oil of the Chanukah menorah. Potatoes were more common in Ashkenzic countries while the Sephardic countries had more access to wheat; hence, each culture took what was available, fried it up, and served it. Since neither plain fried potatoes nor fried flour are the most appetizing foods, both cultures augmented the taste of their dishes with apple sauce for *latkes* and jelly for *sufganiyot*.

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<sup>1</sup> see Igros Moshe O.C. 3:95, Y.D. 1:137 and Y.D. 3:52-2, Eishel Avraham (Tanina) O.C. 679

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## THE YESHIVAH OF SHEM AND EVER

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The rabbis speculated about Isaac's absence both in the verse (Genesis 22:19) where, after the aborted sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, only Abraham is cited as "returning to his young men" and in the section (Genesis 23:1-20) about the funeral of Sarah. The midrashic text Bereshit Rabba 56:11 says, "Rabbi Berachya in the name of the Rabbis explained that Abraham sent Isaac to Shem in order to study torah." A second temporary disappearance is that of Jacob. The Talmud (Megillah 17a, in a computation too involved to summarize here) concludes that 14 years elapsed between the time that Jacob got Isaac's blessing and the time that he arrived at Laban's house, and says that Jacob spent that time in the "house of Ever." Rashi explains the phrase "the children agitated within her" (Genesis 25:22) with the story that whenever Rebecca, pregnant with Jacob and Esau, passed the "doors of torah of Shem and Ever" Jacob tried to exit the womb and whenever she passed the "doors of idolatrous worship" Esau tried to exit the womb. Further, in explaining the phrase "she went to inquire of Hashem" Yalkut Shimoni Toldot 110 says that Rebecca went for an explanation of this agitation to the house of study of Shem and Ever. So who are Shem and Ever? What was this house of study? And how could they teach torah there centuries before the Torah was given to Moses?

Shem was one of Noah's three sons, born in Jewish calendar year 1558 and lived 600 years. Ever was one of Shem's great grandsons, born in Jewish calendar year 1723 and lived 464 years. (Jacob was born in Jewish calendar year 2108, so both Shem and Ever were still around at his birth. For a perspective of the time line from Adam to Jacob, see page 53 of the Art Scroll Chumash.) Shem is blessed by Noah (Genesis 9:26) with a strange blessing, "Blessed is Hashem, the God of Shem." Nedarim 32b says that Melchizedek, referred to in Genesis 14:18 as "a priest of God the Most High," was really Shem. Ever had two sons, Peleg and Yoktan, and in the entire listing of the offspring of Shem (Genesis 10:21-29) only Peleg (פלג) was singled out for comment, namely, "for in his days the peoples of the earth were dispersed (נפלגה הארץ)." Rashi (based on Rabbi Yosi ben Halafta's opinion in Bereshit Rabba 37:7) comments that this proves that Ever was a prophet, because he gave his son a name in anticipation of a future event. In any event, these little bits of allusion to Shem and Ever in Genesis were enough for the rabbis to build them up as priests, prophets, and men of God.

So what do such folks do? They build a yeshiva! How did the rabbis deduce that? From the blessing Noah gave to Jafeth (Genesis 9:27), "but he will dwell in the tents of Shem." What were these "tents" that one such as Shem would have? A yeshiva. Because what is the typical verb used to depict living in a tent? וישב ("vayeshev"), whose root is the same root as the noun "yeshiva," a place where one sits and studies. And when Genesis 25:27 says that Jacob "sat in tents" ישב אהלים, which "tents" do the rabbis say he "sat" in? Yeshivas Shem and Ever!

So what did they study in this yeshiva? One obvious response is "the seven Noachide laws" (a concise listing of these laws can be found on page 53 of the Art Scroll Chumash). There is some discussion in Sanhedrin 56b about the origin of the Noachide laws, with one opinion being that it originated in the Garden of Eden. But, regardless of origin, they were certainly appropriate study material at this yeshiva. But there may have been more. The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 14b) says "there is a tradition that the tractate Avodah Zarah of our father Abraham consisted of four hundred chapters, whereas we have only five." Since the subject of Avodah Zarah is idolatry, which was so rampant in those days, the rabbis impute that not only was there so much to study then but that this was the subject matter of the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever.

To end on a stranger note, in 2006 some archaeologists confirmed the existence of a powerful king named Eber ruling at the city of Ebla, in Northern Syria, at the time that Genesis places Ever. They also found the use of "El" appearing in personal names. Was this the site of the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever? Syria says "No!"

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## THE THIRTY SIX RIGHTEOUS MEN

The basis for three works of fiction, the post-Holocaust novel The Last of the Just by Andre' Schwartz-Bart, the thriller The Righteous Men by Sam Bourne, and To Dusty Death by Manes Sperber, is that in each generation there are 36 righteous men upon whose presence the world's existence depends. What's the origin of this concept?

In Sanhedrin 97b (and repeated in Sukkah 45b) we find the saying by Abbaye (278-338 CE), "The world must contain not less than thirty-six righteous men (תלתין ושישה צדיקים) in each generation..." The proof text he gives is Isaiah 30:18, "Blessed are all they that wait *for him*" לוֹ הוֹקִי כֹל אֲשֶׁר יִלְוֶה. The numerical value of לוֹ ("for him") is thirty-six. This led to the tradition cited above, which first appeared in late medieval times in Eastern Europe. These 36 men (called, in Yiddish, *lamed-vavniks*, where *lamed-vav* refers to its numerical value of 36) are unknown to the rest of the world, performing their righteous deeds in secret.

Interestingly, medieval Islamic mystics held the belief that there are in the world 40 saints who "live unrecognized by their fellow men while contributing to the continued maintenance of the world through their good deeds." Yet there is no concept like the *lamed-vavniks* among Sephardic Jews. Also, this notion of 36 righteous men was not the only count associated with this concept in Jewish lore. In some manuscripts of Midrash Genesis Rabbah 49:2, we find that Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai (~150 CE) said that the world cannot stand without thirty righteous men. The proof text for that is the statement in Genesis 18:18 "Abraham will surely become יהיה) a great and mighty nation," where the numerical value of יהיה is 30.

These righteous men need not appear overtly righteous. A prototype that has been set forth of one of the 36 righteous men is Pentakaka (פנטקקה), mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud Taanit 1:4. Pentakaka got his unusual name for committing five sins every day. He (1) hired prostitutes, (2) was an attendant in a theatre, (3) took prostitutes clothes to the bathhouse, (4) danced and performed before them, and (5) beat a drum before them. Yet, when there was a drought in Israel and prayers for rain bore no results, Rabbi Abbahu (250-320 CE) was told in a dream that he should ask Pentakaka to pray for rain. He did and the rains came, after which Rabbi Abbahu asked Pentakaka "What good deeds have you done?" To which Pentakaka replied, "Once when I was cleaning the theater, a woman came and stood behind the post and wept. 'What is wrong with you?', I asked her. She answered, 'My husband is in prison. I came here to hire myself out as a prostitute to get enough money to set him free.' Hearing that, I sold everything I had including my bed and bedding. I gave her the money and told, 'Go and redeem your husband but please keep yourself free of sin.'" This one righteous act by such a miscreant was sufficient to make Pentakaka qualified to successfully pray for rain for Israel.

Gershom Scholem, the great Hebrew University scholar of Jewish mysticism, published a paper in 1962 entitled "The Tradition of the Thirty-Six Hidden Just Men" (reprinted in his book, The Messianic Idea in Judaism) in which he connects the number 36 to the Egyptian/Hellenistic notion of 36 celestial decans, each of which rules ten days of the year, which were then personified into watchmen of the Universe. Later, each sign of the Zodiac was given three faces and each decan bore the name of one of the Biblical characters from Adam to Ezra. This idea was eventually taken into Kabbalistic literature.

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## OUR DAILY BLESSINGS

The Talmud (Menachot 43b) quotes Rabbi Meir as saying, "A man is required to say one hundred blessings daily." And so the Rabbis speculate on how this should be accomplished. It is said of Rabbi Hiyya the son of Rabbi Awia that he endeavoured to make up this quota by the use of spices and delicacies, each of which required a separate blessing. More seriously, the rabbis started counting down the morning blessings, as follows: (*These are now all incorporated in the shacharit service, and so I will cite the page numbers from the Art Scroll Siddur.*) When he wakes he should say, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who restorest souls to dead corpses" (p. 18). And of course there's the blessing over the washing of the hands (p. 14), the blessing after going to the bathroom (p. 14), the blessing over the tallit (p.4), and the blessings over the tefillin (p. 6). Then follows a list of 14 blessings (Berachot 60b) which have now been incorporated into the beginning of the *shacharit* prayers (p.18-20), where I have interpolated the blessing number for easy reference.

When he hears the cock crowing he should say: (#1) "Blessed is He who has given to the cock understanding to distinguish between day and night".

When he opens his eyes he should say: (#5) "Blessed is He who opens the eyes of the blind".

When he stretches himself and sits up he should say: (#7) "Blessed is He who looseneth the bound".

When he dresses he should say: (#6) "Blessed is He who clothes the naked".

When he draws himself up he should say: (#8) "Blessed is He who raises the bowed".

When he steps on to the ground he should say: (#9) "Blessed is He who spread the earth on the waters".

When he commences to walk he should say: (#11) "Blessed is He who makes firm the steps of man".

When he ties his shoes he should say: (#10) "Blessed is He who has supplied all my wants".

When he fastens his girdle he should say: (#12) "Blessed is He who girds Israel with might".

When he spreads a kerchief over his head he should say: (#13) "Blessed is He who crowns Israel with glory".

Even the blessing that follows these blessings (p.20), "Who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids," and "Who bestowest lovingkindness upon Thy people Israel" appears in this list. [Just for completeness, blessing #14, "Who gives strength to the weary," is not to be found in the Talmud, but was instituted later by the composers of the *siddur* and is cited in the Shulchan Aruch as an Ashkenazi custom.]

What is interesting is the origin of blessings #2-#4 of this morning set, not mentioned above. Their source is the following from Menachot 43b and Jerusalem Berachot 63b:

A man is bound to say the following three blessings daily: "Blessed art Thou... Who hast not made me a heathen (שלא עשאני גוי)" [other editions of the Talmud say "Who has made me an Israelite (שעשאני ישראל)"], "... Who hast not made me a woman (שלא עשאני אשה)"; and "... Who hast not made me a brutish man (שלא עשאני בור)". (*No, I didn't misspell עשני; that's the way it is spelled in the Talmud! A.M.*)

The Jerusalem Talmud goes on to explain the reason for each of these blessings. For not making me a woman, it is because women are not obligated to perform the *mitzvot* (על המצוות); for not making me a brutish man, it is because, as cited in Avot 2:6 "brutish men are not fearful of sin" (שאינן בור ירא חטא); for not making me a heathen, it is because heathens are not considered to be anything (שאינן הגוים כלום), as can be seen from the Isaiah 40:17 proof text, read on *Shabbat Nachmu*, "all nations are as nothing to Him" (כל הגוים כאין נגדו).

And you should recognize that the "brutish man" (בור) has been replaced by "slave" (עבד) in the Orthodox *siddur*. Why is that? All this is based on an exchange quoted in Menachot 43b between Rabbi Aha ben Jacob and his son. Rabbi Aha once overheard his son saying "... Who hast not made me a brutish man," whereupon he said to him, "And this too!" (כולאי האי נמי) [*This is an unclear response. Rashi tries to clarify it by saying that what Rabbi Aha meant was that this blessing savors somewhat of conceit. He gives an alternative explanation, that there is no reason to make this blessing since a brutish man is also bound by all the mitzvot.*] Said the son, "Then what blessing should I say instead?" Rabbi Aha replied, "... Who hast not made me a slave".

I would quit at this point, except that the Talmud goes on with the story: The son then asked “And is not that the same as a woman?” [*Rashi comes to the rescue, by explaining that all the son meant was that with regard to the performance of mitzvot a woman and a slave are on the same footing, citing Hagigah 4a, “every precept which is obligatory on a woman is obligatory on a slave; every precept which is not obligatory on a woman is not obligatory on a slave”*] Rabbi Aha’s response, “A slave is more contemptible.” [*Again Rashi to the rescue: The son meant, “Because a slave and a woman are equivalent, I need only say one blessing.” And Rabbi Aha meant, “And say the blessings anyway, so that your blessing count is the full set of three.”*]

These three blessings have evoked lots of comments and variants through the ages, so much so that a treatise on these, The Three Blessings by Yoel H. Kahn, was recently published by Oxford University Press. When Rabbi Hertz, the Chief Rabbi of England, edited the Authorized Daily Prayer Book in 1948 he replaced גוי with נכרי, “a foreigner.” (For completeness, let me add that all Orthodox *siddurim* have “Who has made me according to His will” as the substitute blessing said by women.) When in 1946 the Conservative movement wrestled with the issue of the connotations of these blessing, they decided to retain them in the service, though in positive rather than negative form. That Siddur replaced “Who hast not made me a heathen” with “Who has made me an Israelite,” (שעשני ישראל), consistent with variant editions of the Talmud. It also replaced “Who has not made me a woman” with “Who has made me in Thine image” (שעשני בצלמו) and “Who has not made me a slave” with “Who has made me free” (שעשני בן חורין). Whatever their form, they all contribute to our daily requirement of 100 blessings.

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## CANTILLATION OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

*(Following is an expanded version of my talk at the erev Shavuot tikun. I apologize for this redundancy to those who heard that presentation, and hope that your seeing it in print will help clarify what I said then.)*

A look at the Ten Commandments as printed in the Hertz Chumash (Exodus 20:2-15, p. 294; Deuteronomy 5:6-18, p.765) will tell you that almost every word is annotated with two different cantillation marks (“tropes” indicating how the word is to be chanted by the Torah reader). Here, for example, is Exodus 20:8 as copied from Hertz:

זְכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ

By contrast, the Art Scroll Chumash prints the Ten Commandments in a format with only one cantillation mark per word (see p. 406 and p. 968), as in this example:

זְכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ

and reprints the Ten Commandments with a different set of cantillation marks elsewhere in the book (p. 415 and p. 979, respectively), as in this example:

זְכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ

In the case of the Deuteronomy Ten Commandments the Art Scroll Chumash explains that those on p. 968 are to be used when one reviews this material whereas those on p. 979 are to be used by the Torah reader for the public chanting of the Ten Commandments. In the case of the Exodus Ten Commandments, which is read not only in the normal course of Torah readings but also on the first day of Shavuot, the Art Scroll Chumash explains that those on p. 406 are to be used when one reviews this material whereas those on p. 415 are to be used by the Torah reader for both public chantings of the Ten Commandments. The two sets of cantillations have been dubbed “lower” and “upper,” with the upper cantillation being the one that is chanted aloud by the Torah reader. (Here “upper” and “lower” do not refer to the position of the trope relative to the letter; they are referring merely to the more exalted and less exalted manner in which the Torah is read.)

What the Art Scroll Chumash describes is the custom today, as it has always been in Sephardic congregations. But a look at the history of Ashkenazic Torah reading tells a different story. Chizkuni’s commentary on Exodus (written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century) says that the lower cantillation is used by the Torah reader for both the regular reading of the Exodus version and of the Deuteronomy version, whereas the upper cantillation is used by the Torah reader for the Shavuot reading of Exodus. This led to confusion not only among the congregants but for the Torah reader. In a responsum on this matter by the 16th-17th-century halachic authority Rabbi Benjamin Slonik, he reiterated that this was the Ashkenazic tradition, but then launched into a diatribe against the Torah readers of his day. “Because the congregations selected their cantors based on their vocal artistry and their repertoires of gentile melodies, rather than their competence in Hebrew grammar, the Torah readers were constantly mixing together elements from the two distinct Trope traditions. This produced a meaningless hodgepodge, and the congregation that heard such a chanting did not fulfill the minimum standards of proper scriptural reading for even a single verse!” This probably marked the beginning of the evolution from Chizkuni’s description to the Art Scroll Chumash’s description of the way the Exodus Ten Commandments are to be read. (The Conservative Chumash Etz Hayim, though, still cites the Chizkuni description of the Ashkenazic practice; see page 1509.)

Someone asked me how we know that the 14 verses of Exodus and the 13 verses of Deuteronomy are supposed to be collapsed into 10 commandments. The answer is found in Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13, and Deuteronomy 10:4, each of which refers to עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים which is now commonly translated as “ten commandments” (though Hertz translates it literally as “ten words”). In my January 2003 Bulletin I discussed the controversy among Jewish scholars as to the specification of the first two commandments (you can find that issue on our synagogue website, where all my

previous “front pages” are available in pdf form).

One of the purposes of the trope is to delineate the end of each sentence. These are delineated by the use of a small vertical bar (called *sof pasuk*, literally “end of sentence”; see the | under the ׀ in the Hertz excerpt as an example) under the last word of the sentence. One way to determine how to organize the fourteen verses in Exodus 20:2-15 into ten commandments is to use the upper trope as a guide. For example, if you look at Exodus 20:13 (page 410 of the Art Scroll Chumash) you will find that commandments 6, 7, 8, and 9 are all contained in one sentence. Use of the upper trope delineates them into four distinct commandments (see page 415 of the Art Scroll Chumash). Similarly, use of the upper trope clearly defines commandments 3, 4, 5, and 10. Unfortunately, even the upper trope does not help in determining where commandment 1 ends; commandments 1 and 2 are run together and there is only one *sof pasuk*, to be found at the end of this concatenation of two commandments. And hence the controversy that I referred to in my January 2003 Bulletin is unresolved by the use of the upper trope.

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**JONAH**


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There has been a flurry of interest lately in the book of Jonah. Harold Bloom, the noted literary critic at Yale University, devotes a section of his forthcoming book, The Shadow of a Great Rock: A Literary Appreciation of the King James Bible, to Jonah, calling it “my favorite book in the Bible.” In his latest book, Beginnings, Meir Shalev analyzes the text of Jonah. And the Jewish Theological Seminary has recently announced that Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky, an assistant professor of Bible, will be lecturing on “The Book of Jonah: A Seriously Funny Book.” Since Jonah is the centerpiece of the Yom Kippur *mincha* service, I thought it would be of interest to look carefully at that book.

First of all, who was Jonah? There is a Jonah son of Amittai mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25, living in a town of the tribe of Zebulun, near Nazareth in around 750 BCE. This Jonah is also traditionally identified as the unnamed “one of the sons of the prophets” (see 2 Kings 9:1) who anointed Jehu as the king of the ten tribes of Israel in 843 BCE. There are, however, linguistic arguments indicating that the Book of Jonah was probably written in the fifth century BCE.

For those who don't know the details of the story, here is a quick summary. Jonah is told by God to go to Nineveh (the capital of Assyria, NE of Israel) to proclaim their wickedness and imminent punishment. He instead fled in the opposite direction, to Tarshish (most likely Tartessus, in the southwest of Spain) by boat from Jaffa. God created a great storm. The sailors prayed to their gods, while Jonah went below to sleep. The shipmaster berated Jonah for not praying. Meanwhile the sailors determined by lot that Jonah was the passenger causing the storm. When Jonah confessed that it was because of him that the storm beset them, and asked that they cast him into the sea, the sailors nevertheless rowed hard to try to get to shore. When they could not, they prayed that they not perish for what they were about to do, and they cast Jonah into the sea. The seas stopped raging, and the sailors then offered a sacrifice unto God. Meanwhile God “prepared a great fish<sup>1</sup>” to swallow up Jonah. He was in the belly of the fish for three days. Jonah prayed, and God “spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.” God once again told Jonah to go to Nineveh and deliver His message, which he did. The Nineveh-ites proclaimed a fast, put on sackcloth and ashes, and prayed. God did not destroy Nineveh. Jonah was upset with God for His decision. Jonah complained, went to the outskirts of the town, built a *sukkah* and sat in it to “see what would become of the city.” Perhaps, he thought, God would relent and destroy Nineveh after all. God prepared a קיקיון (usually translated as a “gourd,” sometimes a “ricinus plant,” perhaps more properly a “castor-oil tree”) to give Jonah additional protection from the sun, and then prepared a worm the next morning that killed the gourd, after which the sun beat down on Jonah's head and he fainted. When Jonah awoke he was angry with God for killing the gourd, to which God replied that just as Jonah had pity on the gourd, which had come and gone in one day and to whose growth Jonah had made no contribution, shouldn't He, God, have pity on Nineveh, who are His handiwork? And so the book abruptly ends.

Why was Jonah reluctant to perform what God ordered him to do? If his prophesy were indeed meant to be predictive, he could have performed it from Israel. Since he was ordered to go to Nineveh, Jonah figured that the reason for the order was to give the Nineveh-ites a chance to repent, in which case (as actually happened) God would rescind his declaration to destroy Nineveh. And if that happened (a) Jonah would look like a false prophet, (b) God's word might be considered false, (c) the repentance of the Nineveh-ites would reflect badly on the behavior of the Israelites, who, despite repeated prophetic warnings, did not repent, and/or (d) Jonah would have saved the people who would ultimately destroy Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> This got morphed into “whale” when the William Tyndale, author of the King James Bible, translated the Greek work κητος in the Matthew 12:40 reference to Jonah's plight, as “whale” instead of “big fish.”

So why does Kalmanofsky call it a “funny book” and Bloom liken it to a Jonathan Swift satire? Because of Jonah’s behavior. Jonah is the only prophet to run away from his appointed task. Both Moses and Jeremiah tried to evade their appointment as prophet, but in the end soldiered on. Remember also that, while the storm is raging around the boat, Jonah went below deck to take a nap. He seemed to be indifferent to the plight of the rest of the people on board the boat. As Shalev summarizes the situation, the sailors “showed greater character and moral fiber than did the Hebrew prophet Jonah. He ran from God and they prayed to Him. He fell asleep and they rose to the occasion. He was indifferent to their fate and they were good-hearted and merciful and made every effort not to harm him. He endangered their lives but they risked theirs for him.” In the end we see that Jonah was not really a prophet, but only a self-centered messenger boy. And this is why Bloom feels that the book should properly not be included in the Twelve Prophets but rather in the Writings, along with Job.

The story itself has been considered as an allegory, where in one version Jonah represents Israel, his disappearance into the sea represents Israel’s exile, and his ejection onto dry land represents the restoration of Israel to its land. In this allegorical interpretation, Jonah’s fleeing from the duty that God had laid upon him represents Israel’s fleeing from performing God’s commandments.

It has also been considered a parable, designed to teach a lesson. The minor lesson, indicated by verse 3:10, is that “God saw their [the Nineveh-ites] works,” to which the Talmud comments (Taanit 2.1) that it was their good deeds and sincere repentance, not the sackcloth and fasting, that swayed God. The major lesson is that even the Gentiles are worthy of God’s forgiveness. And, because the theme of the book is “repent and you shall be saved,” it is read on Yom Kippur. I hope as you read the book of Jonah along with Bob Goldstein during Yom Kippur *mincha* you look closely at the text and get not only the message of the book but nuances of the story.

לשנה טובה תכתבו ותהתמו

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**CHANUKAH, JUDITH, AND CHEESE**


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In my coverage of the main themes of Chanukah in past bulletins, one of the details I discussed was the special foods of Chanukah, *latkes* and *sufganiyot*. What I didn't mention, though, is an additional tradition, that of eating cheese on Chanukah. (No, I'm not getting Chanukah confused with Shavuot!) In his 16<sup>th</sup> century commentary on the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law, Rabbi Moshe Isserles of Krakow said (Orach Chayyim 670:2), "some say that one should eat cheese on Chanukah" *י"א שיש לאכול גבינה בהנוכה*, citing as his authorities the Kol Bo, an anonymous 14<sup>th</sup> century halachic work published in Provence, and the Ran (Rabbi Nissim ben Reuven of Girona, a famous 14<sup>th</sup> century rabbinic authority). Orach Chayyim goes on to give a reason for the eating of cheese, namely "because the miracle occurred through milk which Judith fed the enemy" *לפי שהנמ נעשה בחלב שהאכילה יהודית את האויב*. An earlier cite, that merely links Judith to Chanukah, is the Tosefot to Megillah 4a, written in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, that comments on the law that it is incumbent upon women to hear the megilla on Purim by saying, "the main miracle on Purim was via the hands of Esther and on Chanukah via the hands of Judith."

The obvious natural questions to ask are, "Who is this Judith, who is unmentioned in the Book of Maccabees, and what's the reference to the milk she fed the enemy all about?" Both the Kol Bo and the Ran tell essentially the same story, namely that Judith was the daughter of Yohanan the High Priest, who fed the Greek king a cheese dish in order that he become thirsty and drink a lot and get drunk and lie down and fall asleep, after which she cut off his head and brought it to Jerusalem, and when the Greek army saw that their king was dead they all fled. This story may be a conflation of two other stories, one about Judith and Holofernes found in the apocryphal Book of Judith and the other the story of Jael and Sisera in the Book of Judges.

Let's look at these stories in chronological order. Judges 4:17-22 relates the story, set in the 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE, of how Sisera, the Canaanite commander, fled after his army was defeated by the Israelites under Deborah and Barak, got to the tent of Jael, a Kenite woman, and asked her for water. Instead Jael opened a bottle of milk and gave him this to drink. Sisera fell asleep and Jael hammered a tent pin through Sisera's temple and killed him. The Book of Judith was written in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and tells a story, set in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, of how Judith, a beautiful widow, who was upset with her Jewish countrymen for not trusting God to deliver them from their Assyrian conquerors, went to the camp of the enemy general, Holofernes, slowly ingratiated herself with him, promising him information about the Israelites. Gaining his trust, she was allowed access to his tent one night. The text says "And Holofernes was made merry on her occasion, and drank exceeding much wine, so much as he had never drunk in his life." (Judith 12:20) As Holofernes lay in a drunken stupor Judith took a sword and decapitated him. The Assyrians, having lost their leader, dispersed, and Israel was saved. So we have two woman-kills-general stories, one involving "milk" and one involving "Judith." But neither took place on Chanukah, a 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE event.

The Book of Judith, not being in the canon, was relatively unknown to medieval Jews. But a story called Ma'aseh Yehudit, the Story of Judith, appeared in eighteen different versions in medieval times, and two of these versions had Judith feeding Holofernes milk or cheese. One version, published in 1763, says that Judith "opened the milk flask and drank and also gave the king to drink, and he rejoiced with her greatly and he drank very much wine, more than he had drunk in his entire life." Another manuscript says that Judith asked her maid to make two "levivot" (*latkes*), and the maid made them very salty and added slices of cheese, and Holofernes ate them and then drank his wine, etc. So the Jael story got conflated with the Judith story. Now we have a clue as to how the story got conflated with Chanukah: the cheese was mixed into the *latkes*! To connect the story to Chanukah, Judith was given a pedigree, namely as the daughter of Yohanan the High Priest (and therefore Judah Maccabee's aunt), and the Judith/Holofernes story was moved from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Thus are midrashim and customs born.

**HAPPY CHANUKAH**

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## PAPPUS BEN YEHUDAH

In his afternoon talk Rabbi Ysoscher Katz, our recent Scholar-in-Residence, cited a passage in Gittin 80a describing that Pappos ben Yehuda locked his wife up whenever he went away. He used this to underscore a point of his talk, namely that if one didn't know who Pappos ben Yehuda was one wouldn't understand the significance of this citation. And so he turned to Rashi, which explained that Pappos ben Yehuda was the husband of "Magdala" (בעלה של מגדלא). Rabbi Katz went on to explain that Pappos ben Yehuda was, according to the Talmud, the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and that associating his name with a particular practice was a way of the Talmud not looking favorably on that practice.

Fascinated with this reference to Jesus's forebears, I decided to research further into the Pappos-Mary-Jesus nexus. When I searched my CD version of the Babylonian Talmud for פפוס I found a citation to Sanhedrin 67a. But when I went to my Soncino printed text I found the section referring to Pappos was missing. (It is included, though, in the Steinsaltz Talmud.) Here is the section, along with the Steinsaltz translation:

וכן עשו לבן סטדא בלוד, ותלאוהו בערב הפסח. - בן סטדא? בן פנדירא הוא - אמר רב חסדא: בעל - סטדא, בועל - פנדירא. - בעל פפוס בן יהודה הוא - אלא: אמו סטדא. - אמו מרים מגדלא נשיא הוא! - כדאמרי בפומבדיתא: סתת דא מבעלה  
 "and thus they did to the son of Stada in Lod, and they hanged him on the eve of Passover." "[Was he] the son of Stada?" {*An anonymous rabbi answered:*} 'He was the son of Pandera!' Rav Hisda said: 'The husband was Stada, the lover was Pandera.' {*The anonymous responder said:*} 'The husband was the son of Yehudah! Rather, his mother was Stada.' {*Another participant said:*} 'His mother was Miryam, the woman's hair dresser {*magdala מגדלא in Aramaic*}! As they say in Pumbedita: That one strayed {*stat da סתת דא in Aramaic*} from her husband.'"

These passages and others are thoroughly analyzed in two books, Christianity in Talmud and Midrash, by Travers Herford (published in 1903) and Peter Schäfer's 2007 work, Jesus in the Talmud. But first, why is this (and a similar passage in Shabbat 104b) missing from most printed editions of the Talmud? Because they were censored, so as not to incite the Catholic population.

Some random observations: (1) In Vatican 108<sup>1</sup>, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Talmud manuscript in the Vatican Library, the phrase "he is Jesus the Nazarene" is also included in this text. (2) Miryam (Mary) was nicknamed Magdala because of her hair dresser profession; the Mary Magdalene in Luke 8:2 is introduced as "Mary (called Magdalene)", which some assume to be a reference to the town of Magdala, on the Galilee. (3) From this we see that Pappos ben Yehudah is the rabbinic name for Mary's husband, whose name we know from the Christian literature as Joseph. (4) Jesus's true father was deemed to be someone named Pandera. This may be the origin of the corrupted Yiddish name for Jesus, namely "Yoshke Ponderic". (5) Note that the text says that the son of Stada was hung, not crucified. The association with Jesus is more explicit in the censored Sanhedrin 43a, which says that "Jesus the Nazarene was hung on *erev Pesach*." One Talmud manuscript even reads "on Sabbath eve and *erev Pesach*." The most accepted crucifixion year is 33AD, so I looked up *erev Pesach* for that year on my perpetual Jewish calendar app, and, if one disregards the Gregorian calendar adjustment, one finds that *erev Pesach* of 33 CE fell on a Friday!

Let's conclude with some chronology. The Mishnah was completed in about 200 CE; the Gemara began its development then and was completed in about 800 CE. So the participants in the Talmudic discussion about Jesus, as recorded in the Gemara, were far removed from the events of Jesus's time. Rav Hisda, for example, lived in Babylonia and died in 309 CE. One citation (Berachot 61b) has Pappos ben Yehuda in a dialogue with Rabbi Akiba. Jerusalem Baba Batra 16b and Berachot 21a has him in a dialogue with Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Gamaliel. All three were second century rabbis. So the reliability of the association of Pappos ben Yehuda with Jesus is open to question.

<sup>1</sup> All the manuscripts that I cite here can be accessed in the Online Treasury of Talmudic Manuscripts at Hebrew University. I will add a link to this site to our synagogue website.

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**THE FOUR SONS**


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One of the more fascinating parts of the Haggadah is the section in which we read about the four sons. The section begins with the phrase כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה תורה, “Relative to four sons does the Torah speak.” But where do we find the Torah speaking about four sons?

There are four places in which the Israelites are instructed to “tell thy sons.” In Exodus 12:26-27 we are told “And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ Then you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover, who passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians, and saved our houses’.” Further in Exodus 13:8 “And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, “This is done because of that which the Lord did to me when I came forth out of Egypt.” Still further in Exodus 13:14 we find “And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ that you shall say to him, ‘By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of slavery’.” Finally, in Deuteronomy 6:20-21 “And when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What do the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, mean, which the Lord our God has commanded you?’ Then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand’.”

There must be a reason for the inclusion of four such statements about what to tell one’s sons, and the Rabbis interpret this repetition as a set of instructions for handling four different types of sons, the wise, the wicked, the simple, and the one who is unable to ask a question. The question in Deuteronomy 6:20 was associated with חכם, the wise son. (There is, however, one slight alteration in the Haggadah. The Deuteronomic word אתכם translated as “you” is replaced in the Haggadah with אותנו, “us.” This is to indicate that the wise son considers himself a part of the community.) The question of Exodus 12:26 was associated with רשע, the wicked son. The question in Exodus 13:14 was associated with תם, the simple son. And the unasked question of Exodus 13:8 was associated with שאינו יודע לשאל, the son who was unable to ask a question.

As to the answers to these sons given in the Haggadah, the ones to the simple son and to the son who was unable to ask a question are indeed those given in their associated verses of the Torah. But the Haggadah gives responses to the wise and the wicked son different from those in the Torah. The wise son is told effectively to go study the laws of Pesach; as for the wicked son, you are told to “punch him in the teeth” and tell him that if he were in Egypt he would not have been among those saved.

The answers in the Haggadah do not jibe with the answers given in the fourth century CE Jerusalem Talmud Pesachim 70b. There the Haggadic answer to the wise son is instead given to the simple son, referred to there as טיפש, “fool,” and the answer to the simple son is given to the wise son. And in that source the question raised by the wicked son is expanded, and there is no mention of a punch in the teeth. There is also a discrepancy between these two and that of the second century CE Mechilta d’Rabbi Ishmael. Since the earliest known complete Haggadah manuscript dates to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, we can conclude from this that the current text evolved from a redaction of earlier material.

The Four Sons are depicted in many Haggadot in interesting ways. The Lowell Haggadah, published in 2005, illustrates the Four Sons by equating them with Deborah the Wise, King Ahav the Wicked, Lot the Simple, and Adam and Eve, Who Know Not How to Ask. Some of the depictions appear on the next page (you can see that page in color on the synagogue web site). You can see the myriad of interpretations of the sons, as a function of the time and place of publication of the Haggadah. You should note in particular the depiction of the wicked son, typically armed and aggressive. Note the lack of kippot on three of the sons in the Eisenstein 1920 picture, and the Hitler-like figure in the Szyk 1940 Haggadah.

From the Floersheim Haggadah, 1502, Germany



sage

with fez and sword

blank look

child with father

From the Children's Haggadah, 1937, United States



Liberman, Chicago, 1879

Prague, 1526

Leipnik Haggada, 1738 Amsterdam



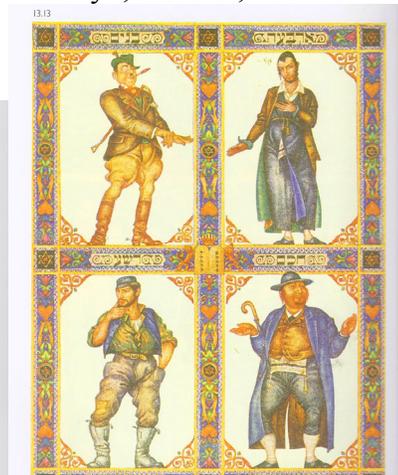
Steinsaltz, 1998



Eisenstein, New York, 1920



Szyk, London, 1940



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## INSIDE "THE RED TENT"

In 1997 Anita Diamant published a best-selling novel, The Red Tent, telling the story of Dinah, Jacob's daughter, in her own voice. Those who have read the book should contrast it with the story I am about to unfold. Those who haven't might want to pick it up after reading what I will report here, namely the story of Dinah according to various Midrashim, some of them contradictory of each other.

Dinah's birth is announced in Genesis 30:12. She is the only one of Jacob's daughters that is mentioned by name in the Torah. (There may have been others. Some argue that there were others, because of the reference "and his daughters" (ובנותיו) in Genesis 37:35 and 46:14; others argue that this refers to daughters-in-law and/or granddaughters. But the discrepant count of Leah's offspring in 46:14 is used to argue that Jacob had two unnamed daughters.) Baba Batra 123a speculates that Dinah was born with a twin sister, and only her birth is announced so that when one gets to Genesis 34, recounting her rape by Shechem the Hivite, we have a backward reference to her birth. Jubilees 33:22, though, states unequivocally that Dinah was Jacob's only daughter.

The rape story has a bit of a "blame the victim" aspect, as it opens with the phrase "and Dinah went out...to visit the daughters of the land," where the verb ותצא connotes coquettish or promiscuous conduct. (In fact, in describing God's choice of the organ from which to fashion Eve, the Midrash says that God ruled out the foot because He knew in advance of Dinah being a gadabout.) This verb was also used to describe the incident when Leah got Jacob to go to bed with her instead of with Rachel (Genesis 30:16), which leads the Midrash to say, "As the mother so was the daughter." Another story has it that it was not Dinah's fault at all. Rather, Shechem already had his eye on Dinah, and so hired women dancers and singers to perform in the street to entice Dinah out, for, as the Midrash says, "She was a woman, and all women like to show themselves in the street."

The Midrash recounts that when Jacob introduced Leah and her progeny to Esau (Genesis 33:7) he hid Dinah in a box for fear of Esau seeing her and wanting to marry her. It goes on to further say that God said to Jacob, "If thou hadst married off thy daughter in time she would not have been tempted to sin, and might, moreover have exerted a beneficial influence upon her husband." At this point God said that Jacob would have to marry her off to Job, who, according to the Midrash, was a grandson of Esau. So one version of the Dinah story has her as Job's second wife, who then bore him seven sons and three daughters.

Another version of the aftermath of the story in Genesis 34 has Dinah, pregnant with Schechem's child, ashamed to go back to her family, prevailing on her brother Simon to marry her. He did so, had a daughter named Asnat, who magically was whisked to Egypt [I won't go into the details of that Harry Potter-like story] wearing an amulet given to her by Jacob, landed on the doorstep of and was adopted by Potiphar, and later married Joseph (who recognized the amulet that she always wore). Nachmanides's comment on this arrangement is that Dinah only lived in Simon's house, but that Simon had no marital relations with him. Other interpreters take the reference in Genesis 46:10 to Simon's son Saul of a Canaanite wife as a reference to Dinah, and that she was called so because when she died Simon buried her in Canaan. Still others say that she died in Egypt and that her body was brought from Egypt to Israel (along with Joseph's) and pinpoint her grave as Arbel, on the border of Lake Galilee.

Still another version of the aftermath (Jubilees 34:15) is that when Jacob learned of Joseph's death (Genesis 37:34) both Bilhah, one of Jacob's concubines, and Dinah could not survive the grief and passed away in that month. That is contradicted by another Midrash which has Bilhah bringing the message of the death of Jacob to Joseph, as well as by the explicit reference to Dinah moving to Egypt with the family (Genesis 46:14).

As I said, this is not what transpired in The Red Tent. Perhaps someone will craft a novel out of the Midrashic lore about Dinah. But then it won't have the feminist slant that made Diamant's book the best seller that it was.

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## WHAT DID THE MENORAH LOOK LIKE?

The Torah describes the specifications of the Menorah in Exodus 25:21 and the construction of the Menorah in Exodus 37:17. In both places the term for the base of the Menorah is ירכה, which Rashi expands on with the following definition and description: ירכה. הוא הרגל של מטה העשוי כמין תיבה, ושלושה רגלים יוצאין הימנה ולמטה  
"That is the foot of the resting place that is constructed like an ark, and three legs come out rightward and downward."

This is how the Menorah is depicted in a carving on stone in a 70 CE Bar Kochba rebellion tunnel to Jerusalem, on a pillar in Capernaum, and in three contemporary decorative pins:



But if you look below at the depiction in the Art Scroll *chumash* (page 451), you will find quite a different base, that of a *chanukia* with three small feet (two showing). Next to the Art Scroll depiction is a drawing of the menorah made in Maimonides's own hand, between 1168 and 1204, in his manuscript Perush Hamishnayot, illustrating his comments on the description of the Menorah in Menachot 3:7. Next to these are Menorahs on two ancient coins, the first on a coin issued by the last Hasmonean king, Mattathias Antigonus, around 40BCE and the second on a coin from the second temple era. All have that circular base. Also, two other archeological discoveries have different bases, the first from a Menorah in Ostia, Italy dating from the second century CE, and the second found in 2009 in an ancient synagogue in the town of Migdal. (To see more of these, go to <http://www.jewishgiftplace.com/Ancient-Menorahs.html>)



So what are we to make of the Menorah adopted by Israel as its national symbol? The way some see it, this Menorah was based on the depiction of the Menorah on the Arch of Titus in Rome, as well as other later depictions of the menorah such as the one in a statue in Genoa given at left.



Daniel Sperber, a Talmud professor at Bar Ilan University, speculates that, in his attempt to Romanize the Temple, King Herod added a foundation to the Menorah in the style of the temple of Didyma. Rabbi Yitchak Herzog, chief rabbi of Israel in 1948, objected to the adoption of this symbol, both because of its inauthenticity and because it was a symbol of the subjugation of the Jews. The justification for this design is that it symbolizes the Menorah's "return" from the Arch of Titus, where it symbolized defeat, humiliation and disgrace, and is now in a place of honor as the emblem of the State of Israel, as a testimony to the eternity of the Jewish people.



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**THE OLDEST TORAH**


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The Torah has two organizations, one organization being *sidrot* (the 54 weekly portions to be read on Shabbat) and *aliyot* (the subdivision into portions read for each person called to the Torah) and the other being chapter and verse. The division of the Torah into *sidrot* and *aliyot* was done during the Babylonian captivity (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE), to organize the readings each Shabbat and to insure that the entire Torah would be completed in one year. The origin of the chapters and the numbering of verses within the chapters came about for a completely different reason, namely in order to create a concordance to the Torah, a reference work wherein one could look up each word in the Torah and find the citation in which the word appears. One could of course have numbered the verses in each of the five books and cited each word by “book and verse.” Or, given that this scheme is unwieldy, they could have numbered the verses in each *sidra* and cited each word by “*sidra* and verse.” But the first concordance creators were Christian, who thought it would be easier to divide each of the five books into chapters and cite each word by “chapter and verse,” and divided the Torah into 187 chapters.

Some attribute the first modern system of dividing the Bible into chapters to Catholic Cardinal Hugo de Sancto Caro in around 1244, who was compiling a concordance to the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible. Others credit Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury between 1207 and 1228 with dividing the Bible into the chapters we use today.<sup>1</sup> In 1445 Mordecai Nathan (Isaac Nathan ben Kalonymos) divided the Hebrew Old Testament into chapters for the development of his concordance, the first one done in Hebrew.

The chapter designations were not Jewish in origin. But what about the verses? The designation of verses is definitely of Jewish origin, and it is one of the cantillation marks (the “tropes” that the Torah reader uses to indicate how each word is to be chanted) that delineates the end of each verse. The specific cantillation mark that does this is the vertical bar ׀ that appears below the last word in each verse, called a סוף פסוק (*sof pasuk*, literally “end of sentence”). There is a debate in the Talmud as to whether the cantillations were revealed to Moses at Sinai or were a later development (see Nedarim 37), but in any event they are of ancient origin and were passed down from generation to generation by memorization, until finally a musical notation describing the cantillation of each word was developed and a text was created which associated the proper cantillation mark with each word of the Torah.

The Torah scroll is written without delineation of sentence endings, and without the superposition of the vowels or cantillation marks that we find in our *Chumashim*. And so the vowels associated with each word were also passed down from generation to generation by memorization, until finally a notation describing each vowel was developed and a text was created which associated the proper vowels with each word of the Torah.

Moreover, each word is composed of syllables, of which (usually) only one is stressed or accented. The proper accentuation of each word was also passed down from generation to generation by memorization, until finally someone decided to notate where to accentuate each word by placing the cantillation mark for that word onto the syllable which is to be accented. And the printed text had to accentuate each word of the Torah properly.

And so it was that handwritten texts were created (much like books today) not on scrolls but on pages into which each word of the Torah was written, along with its vowels and cantillations, and with the cantillation placed on the

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Paul Saenger of the Newberry Library has just published a paper, “Jewish Liturgical Divisions of the Torah and the English Chapter Division of the Vulgate Attributed to Stephen Langton,” in which he displays manuscript evidence of chapter divisions that predate Langton’s.

appropriate syllable. These works are called codexes. As with all such works, errors crept in, spelling errors, accentuation errors, vocalization (i.e., vowel) errors, and cantillation mark errors.

The development of these codexes took place in three separate areas, Babylonia, Tiberias, and the south of Israel, beginning in about 700 CE. By about 1000 CE the creation of these codexes was concentrated in Tiberias, centered around three groups of scribes, one led by Shlomo Halevi ben Buya'a, a second led by David ben Naftali, and a third led by Aharon ben Asher, the fifth generation of a family of codex creators. Given the differences between these various groups on the appropriate spelling, vocalization, accentuation, and cantillation of the words of the Torah, Aharon ben Asher took upon himself the task of creating a definitive text. He decided to rely for correct spelling on an otherwise unmarked text created by ben Buya'a, and used it as the base upon which he superimposed the vocalization, cantillation, and accentuation. This text was, to his mind, the most accurate representation of all the elements of the *Tanach* (the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings), and was completed by 930 CE.

Meanwhile, David ben Naftali created his own version of a codex, unfortunately not preserved. An 11<sup>th</sup> century scholar, Mishael ben Uziel, compared these two and published a book, *Sefer haHilufim* ("Book of Differences"), in which he found more than 1,200 biblical passages in which the ben Asher codex and the ben Naftali codex disagreed on some element.

The ben Asher codex was moved to Jerusalem when the Yeshiva of the Land of Israel moved thereto from Tiberias, It remained there until either 1071, when Jerusalem was sacked by the Turks, or 1099, when the Crusaders conquered Jerusalem. Whatever the circumstances, it ended up in the hands of the Jewish community in Fostat, Egypt, on the east bank of the Nile. In 1165 Maimonides moved to Fostat, and, after studying it, declared that the ben Asher codex was the definitive authoritative *Tanach*. (cf. *Sefer Ahava* 8:4),

The situation for the Jews of Fostat declined after the Mamluks conquered it in 1262, and in 1375 the chief rabbi of Fostat (Maimonides's great-great-great grandson) moved to Syria and ultimately settled in Aleppo, perhaps bringing with him the ben Asher codex. In any event, we know that it was there by 1479 based on the eyewitness account by a visiting Jewish scholar from Aden. It was then dubbed the Aleppo Crown and is referred to today as the **Aleppo Codex**.

The ben Asher codex remained in Aleppo's Great Synagogue until 1947, when an Arab mob led a pogrom against the Jews, stormed, ransacked, and burned the synagogue. There are conflicting accounts about how 295 (of perhaps 480) pages of the Aleppo Codex survived the pogrom and got to Israel in 1958. (If you want to read about this, see the New York Times Magazine of July 25, 2012 or the recent book *The Aleppo Codex* by Matti Friedman, reviewed in the Wall Street Journal on June 12, 2012). Except for the end of the Torah beginning at Deuteronomy 28:17, the books of the Torah are missing, perhaps burned in the pogrom. The lower floor of the Israel Museum's Shrine of the Book is dedicated to the Aleppo Codex and other exhibits connected to it. Actually, only a few pages are displayed, as most of the pages of the Aleppo Codex are stored in a safe place in the museum.

The oldest surviving complete codex is the **Leningrad Codex**, completed in Cairo in 1008 by Shmuel ben Yaakov, and housed in the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg. It appears to be a work in which the scribe was trying unsuccessfully to harmonize an existing codex with that of the Aleppo Codex. The **British Museum Codex** (dated 950 CE) is an incomplete manuscript of the Pentateuch, containing Genesis 39:20 through Deuteronomy 1:33.. The **Cairo Codex**, the oldest complete codex of the Prophets, written by Moses ben Asher in 895CE, is now in the care of the Karaite community in Israel.

לשנה טובה תכתבו ותחתמו

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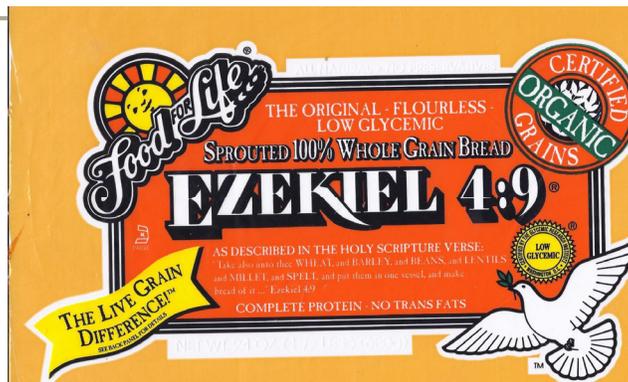
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## FOOD IN JEWISH RELIGIOUS TEXTS

What inspired this Bulletin piece is a loaf of bread. Not any loaf of bread; rather, a flourless low glycemic sprouted 100% whole grain bread, under Kof-K kashrut supervision, named Ezekiel 4:9, sold by a California company called Food for Life Baking Company. I immediately looked up the bread's namesake quote, and here it is: "And take wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, millet, and spelt, and put them in one vessel, and make bread of them."



This led me to consider whether there are other Biblical or Talmudic sources which give admonitions and advice about the preparation of food and its consumption. (A companion piece that I'm writing about drinking will be distributed by email to Kiddush Club members.)

Fortunately, I had at hand Dr. Fred Rosner's translation of the 1911 treatise by Julius Preuss, Biblical and Talmudic Medicine. Preuss presents five rules of proper eating, giving a number of proof texts from the Talmud for each of them, which I excerpt in the following:

1. *Eat moderately.* Reb Hiyya said (Gittin 70a) "Indulge not too freely in a meal which you enjoy"
2. *Eat simply.* Rabbi Hisda said (Shabbat 140b) "When one can eat barley bread but eats wheaten bread he violates the Deuteronomy 20:19 injunction against excessive destruction."
3. *Eat slowly.* Rabbi Yehuda said (Shabbat 152a) that one of the three things that prolongs a man's years is "the drawing out of a meal"
4. *Eat a standard diet.* Samuel said (Sanhedrin 101a) "Change of diet is the first step to indigestion."
5. *Eat only during the day.* Abaye said (Yoma 74b) "Let him who has a meal eat only in daylight."

The Talmud gives other prescriptions about food. One such is in Pesachim 42: "Our Rabbis taught: Three things were said of Babylonian *kutah* (a preserve consisting of sour milk, breadcrusts, and salt): it closes up the heart, blinds the eyes, and emaciates the body. It closes up the heart, on account of the whey of milk; and it blinds the eyes, on account of the salt; and it emaciates the body, on account of the stale crusts. Our Rabbis taught: Three things increase one's motion, bend the stature, and take away a five hundredth part of a man's eyesight. They are these: coarse black bread, new beer, and raw vegetables. Our Rabbis taught: Three things decrease one's motion, straighten the stature, and give light to the eyes. These are they: white bread, fat meat, and old wine... white bread of fine meal; fat meat of a goat which has never given birth; old wine which is at least three years old. Everything that is beneficial for the one is harmful for the other, and what is harmful for one is beneficial for the other, save moist ginger, long peppers, white bread, fat meat and old wine, which are beneficial for the whole body."

The Rabbis were also not vegetarians. Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah said (Hullin 84a) "A man who has a *maneh* may buy for his stew a liter of vegetables; if he has ten *maneh* he may buy for his stew a liter of fish; if he has fifty *maneh* he may buy for his stew a liter of meat; if he has a hundred *maneh* he may have a pot (of meat) set on for him every day." Regarding eggs, Reb Jannai said in the name of Rabbi, "An egg is superior in food value to the same quantity of any other kind of food. Rabin said: A lightly roasted egg is superior to six *kaysi* of fine flour. Reb Dimi added, "A hard baked egg than four; and a boiled egg is better than the same quantity of any other kind of boiled food except meat." (see Berachot 44b).

Regarding fruits, the most prominent in the Talmud are dates and pomegranates, which were served as a separate course, with figs and grapes served as dessert (see Berachot 41b). As to vegetables, Reb Huna said (Erubin 55b) "No scholar should dwell in a town where vegetables are unobtainable." And, when asked whether there is any kind of boiled vegetable of which one can make a meal, Rab Ashi responded (Berachot 44b) "the stalk of cabbage." בתאבון!