Love of God in the Talmud

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WHEN the Emperor Hadrian decreed that the Jews were no longer to study Torah, the illustrious Rabbi Akiba fearlessly continued to gather his disciples about himself, expounding to them the intricacies of the Law. Jailed and condemned to death about the year 132 A.D., he was led to execution at an hour when the Shema', Israel's solemn profession of faith in Yahweh, was to be recited. His disciples expressed astonishment that even in this extremity their master remained faithful to his duty. "All my days," he said, "I have been troubled by the words 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with...all thy soul,' which I understand to mean 'even if He takes your soul.' I said to myself: 'When shall I ever have the opportunity of fulfilling such a commandment?' Now that I have it, shall I not seize it?" 

1. The Shema', so called from its opening word, "Hear," is taken from Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41, to which is appended a liturgical conclusion. A literal interpretation of the injunctions contained in these verses resulted in the wearing of tefillin or leather strips ("You shall bind them at your wrist as a sign, and they shall be as pendants between your eyes"), and t'fillin or fringes on the prayer shawl ("Tell them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put on the fringe of each corner a blue thread"). The Shema' also enjoins the mezuzah, a small capsule attached to the doorpost, with the sacred words written on a parchment within ("You shall inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates"). For the complete text of this prayer, see Daily Prayer Book, trans. Philip Birnbaum (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1949), pp. 76-82.

2. Ber. 61b; cf. B. Talmud, Berakoth, p. 386. All talmudic quotations in this essay are based on The Babylonian Talmud, edited by Isidore Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935-48). In order to make it easier for the reader to grasp the rabbinic idiom, so distinct in language and logic, I do not always reproduce the text verbatim; at times I shorten it, at others I paraphrase it.

An explanation may be helpful of my use of the term "Torah." Some writers, the translators of the Babylonian Talmud among them, always speak of "the Torah," while others make a distinction between "the Torah," the five books of Moses, and "Torah," the whole body of Law built upon them by the rabbis, in other words, the Pentateuch and "the tradition of the ancients" (Mt 15:2) or biblical and talmudic law. Unless I quote, I make this distinction my own.
This episode discloses several characteristics of Jewish piety: a definite preoccupation with the exact fulfillment of God's will as the teachers of old saw it revealed in the Torah; a tenacity in the face of opposition; above all, a single-minded adherence to the Shema', the people's ancient declaration of faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Committed to memory by generations of Jewish children; recited evening and morning; strapped to the wrist with leather thongs; suspended like a jewel between the eyes; attached to the doorpost of every dwelling, the two hundred and forty-five words of this prayer have been assimilated by Israel with such intensity and ardor that it is not too much to say they have been burned into her heart. Although Rabbi Akiba died with the word 'ehad, "One," on his lips—as pious Jews were wont to do he prolonged that word, thus reciting only the first verse of the Shema': "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One"—his soul no doubt embraced the commandment of total love that follows almost immediately: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." To so great a love the act of faith, by its inner dynamism, must lead, and it was this love the dying Rabbi Akiba hoped to achieve.

The inner sources of a man's piety are not easy to determine; much of what affects him most deeply is left implicit, unexpressed. It is no less true of nations that their compelling motives, their spiritual outlook, their peculiar religious genius resist complete analysis or penetration. From a study of their prayers or their writings, religious and profane, we can arrive at some conclusions, but we must never ignore what remains unsaid. In the life of Israel, as in the life of Rabbi Akiba, the Shema', with its unrelenting daily imperative: "You shall love the Lord . . ." is just such a hidden stream. Within the legalistic framework of the Talmud, there are moments when the cold letters of the text glow with an inner warmth that is more truly the mark of the mystic and the theologian than that of the jurist. Like Ruth in the field of Boaz, an alert reader can follow after the teachers of Israel and glean a goodly sheaf of love from occasional expressions, casual comments or anecdotes, dropped by these masters in the course of their laborious and sometimes arid discussions.

3. Two recent studies, one Catholic, the other Jewish, have been of invaluable help in assembling the material for this article: Celsas Spicq, O.P., Agapé, Prolégomènès à une étude de théologie méso-téramentaire (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1955), pp. 143-163; Georges Vajda, L'amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du moyen âge (Paris: Vrin, 1957), pp. 34-67.

From the outset, the phenomenon of Jewish piety is neither a systematic treatise nor a devotional work, but a series of involved rabbinic principles of Judaism. Although the thought is often far from the plain words of the sages, it is not too much to say we are faced with a gradual task to set this mass of ideas into focus.

O.P., remarks:

For every well-attested statement be found some assertion that the rabbis held another view. Whether the rabbis held that God, whether they extended to Israel, we must remember the spiritual outlook of their contemporaries. Even when the rabbis expressed their convictions, their thought was often far from the plain words of the sages, it is not too much to say we are faced with a gradual task to set this mass of ideas into focus.

The problem of precision is a delicate one, and I hope not to quote nor to aim is not to judge, but to understand.

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A profound saying, although it be not to be found in the Talmud, is proof of His love, the love of even greater love: "For every well-attested statement be found some assertion that the rabbis held another view. Whether the rabbis held that God, whether they extended to Israel, we must remember the spiritual outlook of their contemporaries. Even when the rabbis expressed their convictions, their thought was often far from the plain words of the sages, it is not too much to say we are faced with a gradual task to set this mass of ideas into focus.


From the outset, the reader must be mindful that the Talmud is neither a systematic treatise with a carefully planned chapter on charity nor a devotional work intended to edify or to inspire. Rather is it a series of involved rabbinical discussions on the application of the legal principles of Judaism. To the modern reader, the talmudic line of thought is often far from clear, the interpretations given are not only of uneven authority but so often in conflict that it seems a hopeless task to set this mass of opinions in order. As Father Ceslaus Spicq, O.P., remarks:

For every well-attested idea [in rabbinical literature], there can always be found some assertion to the contrary. If we wish to know, for instance, whether the rabbis hold in higher esteem the love of God or the fear of God, whether they extend the duty of charity to enemies or restrict it to Israel, we must remember that the most opposed theses have had their defenders, and that practice was not uniform.4

The problem of presenting the talmudic teaching on love is thus a delicate one, and I hope I have not distorted the sense of the texts I am going to quote nor forced them into alien modes of thought. My aim is not to judge, but to present.

1

A Profound saying, attributed to Rabbi Akiba, sees God's love for man as love for His image: "Beloved is man in that he was created in the image of God." No philosophical deduction, Rabbi Akiba's concept is based on the word of God; if His making us in His image is proof of His love, then His taking us into His confidence is token of even greater love: "Out of superabundant love was it made known to man that he had been created in God's image."5

4. Spicq, op. cit., p. 144. On the same note of caution, Spicq remarks: "The documents at our disposal were written considerably later than the time of Christ; while they record much earlier traditions, one can never be certain that they have preserved these traditions in all their purity. This reservation is particularly pertinent to a study of the notion of 'ahabah, love, when one keeps in mind the progressive emphasis given to the theology of charity by the rabbis at the beginning of the Christian era." (Ibid., pp. 143-144.) Yet, except for an occasional reference to the New Testament, I do not attempt to offer a critical appraisal of the possible interdependence of Christian and rabbinical teachings on the various aspects of love. It is enough to remember Father Spicq's warning about the respective ages of the two traditions.

6. Ibid.
Not words alone, events as well, disclosed this mystery to man: It was in the course of history, the history of the chosen people, that God progressively revealed His true Self. No wonder, then, that the rabbis, when thinking of the love God bears for mankind, find it reflected in His successive interventions on behalf of the people He set aside for Himself. "Beloved are Israel in that they were called children of the All-present. It was a mark of superabundant love that it was made known to them that they were called children of the All-present." 7 God's love for Israel, then, is not so much a reasoned conclusion as a spiritual conviction, an observation of faith.

So compelling and all-absorbing is Israel's relationship with her Lord that the rabbis show little interest in defining God's attitude to mankind in general. Love means preference, means election, and clearly Israel has been preferred—elected into love. Indeed, the rabbis hold that the universe was created for Israel's sake. God is made to say, speaking, strangely enough, in the language of the Roman army:

My daughter, twelve constellations were created by me in the firmament, and for each constellation I created thirty hosts, and for each host, thirty legions, and for each legion, thirty cohorts, and for each cohort, thirty maniples, and for each maniple, thirty camps, and to each camp I have attached three hundred and sixty-five thousands of myriads of stars, corresponding to the days of the solar year, and all of them I have created only for your sake. . . . I can no more forget you than a mother can forget her suckling child. 8

For the rabbis, Israel is the bride of Yahweh, and the Song of Songs the nuptial hymn that celebrates her union with the Lord. Applying its words to herself, she says to her Bridegroom: "O God, set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm (Cant 8:6)." To this the rabbis hear Him reply: "Not upon my heart, or upon my arm, will I place you, for there the memory of you will not always be before me; 'I have graven you upon the very palms of my hands' (Is 49:16), where you are always in my sight." 9

7. Ibid.
9. Ta'an. 49b; cf. B. Talmud, Ta'anith, p. 11. According to Rabbi Akiba, the Song of Songs is the holiest of all the books of the Old Testament: "The whole world is not as worthy as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel. For all the writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies." (Yad. 3:5; cf. B. Talmud, Yadayim, p. 559.)
In other texts, it is for the sake of the beloved patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that the people of Israel are called the children of God. Abraham, the first of proselytes, was tried by God many times and never faltered; this was "to make known how great was the love of Abraham our father." Those who love God as he did are his true children and disciples and will share in his reward. Because of its eminence, God's fatherhood must be distinguished from the relationship between a human parent and his children: Not only is He infinitely interested and solicitous, but His power also knows no limit and His sovereignty is universal. For this reason, His title "Our Father" is consistently coupled with that other: "Our King." Still, His authority respects the dignity of man's free choice. "Everything is in the hands of heaven, except the fear of heaven, as it says: 'And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God?' (Deut 10:12)." The Father does not force His children, He guides them.

His fatherhood differs from human fatherhood in still another respect. Even when His children wander astray, He keeps faith; even when they have lost every claim to be called "children of Abraham," God is compassionate and merciful. According to Rabbi Samuel ben Nahmani, the Holy One will one day say to Abraham: "Your children..."
have sinned against me." And Abraham will answer that, for the sanctification of God's name, they ought to be exterminated. Then the Holy One will address Jacob whose own unruly family should have given him understanding; his judgment, too, will be to have the children of Israel wiped out. Finally, the Holy One will turn to Isaac: "Your children have sinned against me." But he will counter: "Sovereign of the universe, are they my children and not your children? You called them once 'Israel, my son, my firstborn' (Ex 4:22). Now you say they are my sons, not your sons." 16 This, in the opinion of Rabbi Samuel, is the plea that God seeks and hears.

The intensity of this fatherly love is brilliantly developed in a parallel passage that describes a conversation between God and the prophet Hosea. When the Holy One complained to the prophet: "Your children have sinned," Hosea suggested that God exchange them for another nation more deserving of His affection. "Said the Holy One, blessed be He: 'What shall I do with this old man? I will order him to go and marry a harlot and beget for himself children of harlotry, and then I will order him to send her away from his presence. If he is able to send her away, so too will I send Israel away!'" After two sons and a daughter were born to the prophet, he is told to leave his wife. "Sovereign of the universe, I have children by her, and I can neither divorce her nor expel her!" "If that is the case with you, whose wife is a harlot and whose children are the children of harlotry, so that you know not whether they are your own or another's, then how do you say to me of Israel, my children, the children of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob: 'Exchange them for a different people'?" 17

The principle in this piece of rabbinical interpretation is simply that a son, even in his rebellion, is still a son. A father's relationship with his child is not destroyed, even though that relationship be implicitly or explicitly repudiated. Rabbi Judah disputes this view: "When you behave as sons, you are designated sons, but when you do not behave as sons, you are not designated sons." 18 Rabbi Meir, on the other hand, insists that whether the children of Israel behave as sons or not, they remain God's designated sons, for it is said: "They are stupid children (Jehovah's descendants) but never when the sons in whom there are those who argue that not good sons but sons of Israel the prophet: "And I said unto them: 'You are sons of Israel. But what is eternal. He does not mean Israel's infidelity.'

Because the subtitle is most perfectly denoted in perpetual betrayals, the following is in the terms: loving. The Hebrew roots willing and lovingly The are you, O Lord, for Israel."

One of the most baffle his heavenly Father of rain was desperately informed God that "Your children have move from here unless become but only in some Holy One had sent not enough to fill the earth fell in drops as big to destroy the world."

17. Pes. 87a-b; cf. B. Talmud, Pesahim, pp. 460–462.
18. Kid. 36a; cf. B. Talmud, Kiddushin, p. 177.

19. Ibid.; see also B. Talmud, Rosh, p. 9.
If the love of God in the Talmud is eternal, He does not change. In the end He will triumph over Israel’s infidelity.

Because the sublime disparity between the Father and His children is most perfectly demonstrated by His constancy in the face of their perpetual betrayals, Yahweh’s relationship with Israel is best conveyed in the terms: loving-kindness, mercy, graciousness, compassion, pity. The Hebrew roots הָדָּד, הָנָּנָה, רָמָּה, הָמָּל, point to divine attributes most willingly and lovingly recalled by His wayward children. “Blessed are you, 0 Lord, for you bestow loving-kindness upon your people Israel.” 20 The rabbis even go to the extreme of having God pray to Himself: “May it be my will that my mercy may suppress my anger, and that my mercy may prevail over my other attributes, so that I may deal with my children in the attribute of mercy and on their behalf stop short of the limit of strict justice.” 21

One of the most charming examples of the power of a child over his heavenly Father is that of Honi the Circle-Drawer who, when rain was desperately needed, drew a circle round about himself and informed God that he would not budge from it until He sent rain. “Your children have turned to me because they believe me to be a member of your household. I swear by your great name that I will not move from here until you have mercy upon your children.” Rain did come but only in small drops; the people then complained that the Holy One had sent just enough rain to release Honi from his oath but not enough to fill the cisterns and wells. When Honi prayed again, rain fell in drops as big as barrel tops, so that all feared God was about to destroy the world. Once more Honi prayed, the rain stopped, and

stupid children (Jer 4:22).” He reminds those who declare that Israel’s descendants may well be called sons when they act foolishly, but never when they lack faith, of the words of Scripture: “They are sons in whom there is no faith (Deut 32:20).” And for the sake of those who argue that when the children of Israel serve idols, they are not good sons but sons who act corruptly, he recalls the prediction of the prophet: “And it shall come to pass that, instead of that which was said unto them: ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said unto them: ‘You are the children of the living God’ (Os 2:1).” 19 His love is eternal. He does not change. In the end He will triumph over Israel’s infidelity.

19. Ibid.; see also B.B. 10a; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Bathra, pp. 45–46.
the people went into the fields rejoicing. At this point, Simeon ben She’ah reproached the Circle-Drawer, but not without grudging admiration: "Were it not that you are Honi, I would have placed you under the ban. What shall I do to you who act so petulantly before the All-present? And yet He grants your desire! You are like a son who speaks: 'Father, bathe me in warm water, wash me in cold water, and he does it; give me nuts, give me almonds, give me peaches, give me pomegranates, and he gives them to him.'"

To the rabbinical mind such fatherly indulgence in no way lessens personal responsibility in the children nor does it justify want of concern for their duty of serving Him. On the contrary, the "excesses" of God's loving-kindness are a never-ending invitation to greater fidelity and increased effort. In times of discouragement and national calamity, they are a constant reminder that the Lord does not abandon His chosen ones, and in times of moral decline and decadence they are the basis of the bitter self-reproach that alone can lead the loved one back to the Loving One. He alone can say: "Even if your sins be as many as the years that have continued in uninterrupted fashion from the six days of creation until now, yet they shall be as white as snow." This emphasis on God's clemency and compassion for Israel is not meant to encourage presumption or national exclusivism; it is a corollary of the fact that God demands more from those He loves the more. As a man's awareness of his place in God's sight is sharpened and refined, his sense of inadequacy deepens; he relies all the more on the pity of Him who chooses as His instruments the weak and the unworthy. It is in this spirit that the prophet prays:

O Lord, the great and awful God, who keepest covenant and mercy with them that love thee and keep thy commandments, we have sinned, and have dealt iniquously, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, and have turned aside from thy commandments and from thine ordinances. . . . We do not present our supplications before thee because of our righteousness, but because of thy great compassions.

(Dan 9:4–5, 18)

22. Ta’an. 23a; cf. B. Talmud, Ta’anith, pp. 115–117.
23. See Ber. 7a; cf. B. Talmud, Berakoth, p. 32.
24. Shab. 89b; cf. B. Talmud, Shabbath, p. 425. The Masoretic text of this quotation from Is 1:18 reads: “Even if your sins be like scarlet,” but the word shanim can also be understood to mean years, and it is this interpretation that the text develops.

Not even the reverses that befell Jacob or Esau could solve the problem. The perennia why live all the days of the strong and why are they not solved to make room for the weak and the unworthy? Affliction, childlessness, loneliness—these may be tokens of the immanent gloom that may be the lot of the future. If a man examine his position, he may be able to answer: Affliction is the lot of the strong; loneliness is the lot of the unworthy. For it is said: "Chasten your sons and your daughters, according to their own age" (Eccl 12:5). Then he adds: "If it be a sin of life, it will be solved to make room for the weak and the unworthy."

The rabbis also declare that "chastenings are the study of Torah." These are not two great blocks of study, but to the study of Israel. What is the joy of pleasure! R. Aqiva said: "Chastenings must be done according to the laws of the Torah, unclean loss of blood, etc., and what will be the punishment of the body because of the body?"

What is true?
Not even a father's affection and concern rule out the trials and reverses that are the lot of every man born into this world, be he Jacob or Esau, Isaac or Ishmael. Just and unjust, both must suffer. The perennial problem: "Why does the way of the godless prosper, why live all the treacherous in contentment?" (Jer 12:1) cannot be solved to man's complete satisfaction. Still, the Talmud tries this answer: Afflictions in this world, even those as severe as leprosy and childlessness, need not be penalties or signs of divine displeasure; they may be tokens of God's esteem and pledges of happiness in the world-to-come. "If a man sees that painful sufferings visit him, let him examine his conduct. If after examining himself he finds nothing objectionable, let him attribute it to the neglect of the study of Torah. But if he does not find himself at fault in this, let him be sure that his afflictions are yissurin me 'ahabah, chastenings of love. For it is said: 'And the Lord was pleased with him, hence He crushed him with disease' (Is 53:10)." Raba, to whom these words are attributed, goes on to warn that the chastenings of love must be accepted with love and quotes in support of it another part of the Isaiah verse: "To see if his soul would offer itself in restitution." Then he adds: "Just as the trespass-offering must be brought by consent, so the suffering must be endured with consent." 25

The rabbis do not agree as to the propriety of applying the term "chastenings of love" to afflictions that entail an interruption in the study of Torah or in daily prayer. Surely a man deprived of these two great blessings cannot consider himself the object of God's pleasure! R. Abba, however, reasons that even afflictions of this kind must be included among the "chastenings of love," for if, according to the Torah, a slave is given his freedom in return for the unjust loss of one of his teeth or one of his eyes (see Ex 21:26–27) what will be the recompense of the man who suffers in his whole body because he is deprived of study or prayer? 27

What is true of personal suffering is also true of the trials of the

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25. The Confraternity edition of the Bible reads this verse from one of the Servant Songs somewhat differently: "But the Lord was pleased to crush him in infancy. If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the Lord shall be accomplished through him." The Bible of Jerusalem and many other translations agree with the Confraternity version. 26. Ber. 5a; cf. B. Talmud, Berakoth, p. 18. 27. See Ber. 5a; cf. B. Talmud, Berakoth, p. 19.
nation. "The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Israel three precious gifts, and all of them were given only through sufferings. These are the Torah, the land of Israel, and the world-to-come." 28 However little he may comprehend the adversities that beset him, the pious Israelite can never admit that his suffering is meaningless; with Nahum of Gamzu he likes to say: "Even this is for the best!" 29

A father's love that leaves the education of his children in their own hands would be meager indeed. Hence the Father in heaven gives personal guidance and discipline to His children through the Torah, which is the expression of His innermost thoughts and plans, and which surpasses all human wisdom, all philosophy. In the eyes of the rabbis, it is the blueprint for the building-up of God's household here on earth, the supreme gift of His love: Beloved are Israel in that an instrument more desirable than gold was given them, an instrument wherein the world had been created, God's Torah. 30 Precious is His teaching and desirable: "With every word that went forth from the mouth of the Holy One, the whole world was filled with the fragrance of sweet spices, for 'His lips are as lilies dropping liquid myrrh' (Cant 5:13)." 31

Far from exhausting the pious Jew under their weight, however minute and exacting, however seemingly trivial, are tokens of a Father's concern lest His children go astray: "Beloved are Israel, for the Holy One surrounded them with precepts: tefilim on their arms and on their heads, zizit on their garments, and mezuzot on their doorposts." When they are without them, as David was on entering the bath and seeing himself naked, they need not fear the absence of precepts, for even then they bear in their flesh circumcision. 32 There is no activity, no time of day exempt from the sanctity of the

sanctity of the precepts of Torah, not spontaneous acts, but rather because they were demanded and acknowledged as do good deeds being "the hidden." 33 For the precepts of the Father are tokens of the required: "One precept another, for the one precept, and the other precept, and the further transplanting of the precepts." 34

The gift of the Ten Commandments, that, according to the rabbis, was the divine prodigy which could only be given to the honor of the universe, was: "He has come to an earthly station; for nine hundred and ten generations, you are terrified at this claim until he was irrefutably Decalogue, he comes to an earthly station; the honor given to the honor given enslaved by Pharaoh, the words: 'You shall worship him out of the land. And you need to remember..." 35

28. Ibid.
29. Ta'an. 21a; cf. B. Talmud, Tavnith, p. 105. Nahum gained his title from his habit of saying, no matter what befell him: "Even this—gam zu—is for the best." There is also Rabbi Akiba's saying: "Whatever the All-merciful does is for good." (Ber. 6a b; cf. B. Talmud, Berakoth, p. 380.)
30. See Ab. 3:14; cf. B. Talmud, Aboth, p. 38.
32. See Men. 43b; cf. B. Talmud, Menahoth, p. 262. Psalm 118 [119] abounds in enthusiastic expressions of love for God's law: "In the way of your decrees I rejoice. In your statutes I delight. Had not your law been my delight, I should have perished in my affliction. Your decrees are my inheritance forever, the joy of my heart they are. See how I love your precepts, O Lord. I keep your decrees and love them deeply" (vss. 14, 16, 92, 111, 159, 167 among many others).

33. 'A.Z. 3a; cf. Talmud, Baba Kamma, p. 104a.
34. Ab. 4:2; cf. Jer. 6:16.
I. The gift of Torah is so lordly, and its recipients are so pitiable that, according to rabbinical legend, the angels protested against this divine prodigality. When Moses ascended into the divine Presence to be given the Torah, the heavenly ministers exclaimed: “Sovereign of the universe, what business has one born of woman among us?” “He has come to receive the Torah,” God answered, only to be met with the dismay of His court: “The secret treasure you have hidden for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the world’s creation, you now intend to give to flesh and blood?” Moses was terrified at this unexpected opposition and did not dare defend Israel’s claim until he was encouraged by God Himself. The case he presented was irrefutable. In a point-by-point analysis of the wisdom of the Decalogue, he showed that each of its commandments applied only to an earthly situation and that the angels, therefore, ought not resent the honor given to man. “Did you go down into Egypt and were you enslaved by Pharaoh?” he asked them. “To whom other than Israel can the words apply: ‘I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt’ (Ex 20:2)? Do you dwell among idol-worshippers as we do? To whom, then, should be addressed these words: ‘You shall have no other gods’? Do you perform work that you need to rest and keep the Sabbath holy? Do you have business

sanctity of the divine law. Good and noble deeds are to be performed not spontaneously, not from sheer joy of doing what is right, but rather because they are commanded. “He who is commanded and acts,” the Talmud teaches, “stands higher than he who is not commanded and acts, for there is a greater reward in store for those who do good deeds when so bidden, than for those who do them unbidden.” For him who is faithful in his obedience to the numerous precepts of the Law, the reward is an ever-deepening consciousness of the requirements of God’s holy will, thus he is led towards an ever more exact fulfillment of what is expected of him. As the rabbis see it: “One precept draws another precept, as one transgression draws another, for the recompense for performing a precept is a further precept, and the recompense for performing a transgression is a further transgression.”

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sanctity of the divine law. Good and noble deeds are to be performed not spontaneously, not from sheer joy of doing what is right, but rather because they are commanded. “He who is commanded and acts,” the Talmud teaches, “stands higher than he who is not commanded and acts, for there is a greater reward in store for those who do good deeds when so bidden, than for those who do them unbidden.” For him who is faithful in his obedience to the numerous precepts of the Law, the reward is an ever-deepening consciousness of the requirements of God’s holy will, thus he is led towards an ever more exact fulfillment of what is expected of him. As the rabbis see it: “One precept draws another precept, as one transgression draws another, for the recompense for performing a precept is a further precept, and the recompense for performing a transgression is a further transgression.”

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dealings so that you are liable to take the name of God in vain? Have you fathers and mothers to honor? Are you envious of others or tempted, that you need to be warned against murder, adultery, or theft?” After this impassioned plea the angels straightway withdrew their objections; each of them was moved to love Moses and bestow a gift upon him.\textsuperscript{35}

II

To the Torah’s message of love, the rabbis hold, there is only one conceivable response: complete surrender and adherence to its many and minute ordinances and, through them, to the Torah’s Giver. Love cannot be sterile; it must express itself concretely and persistently. Since to the rabbinic mind God’s love is revealed through the Torah, Israel’s love manifests itself in fidelity to the same Torah. Even before she heard the full details of His plan, Israel impetuously committed herself to its fulfillment, the rabbis maintain. This burst of ardent confidence was supremely pleasing to the Lord, who tenderly said to her: “Thou hast ravished my heart with one of your eyes (Cant 4:9).” This meant that her good intention, “one of her eyes,” was acceptable, even before it could be put into action, even before she looked at Him with “both of her eyes.”\textsuperscript{36} A further illustration of Israel’s generosity in accepting the Law rabbinic exegesis draws from Exodus 24:7, where the people cry out: “We will do” before saying: “We will hearken.” This causes God to wonder: “Who revealed to my children this secret of the ministering angels—first they fulfill and then they hearken?”\textsuperscript{37}

Regard for the Torah is part of Israel’s consciousness, as even a cursory reading of the postexilic and New Testament writings verifies. This respect is intensified in postbiblical times, and it is no surprise to find it dominant in a legal corpus like the Talmud. There, God is said to have attached a condition to His blessing on the works of creation: “If Israel accept my Law, all will be well, but if not, I shall reduce you to a guilty of excess, divine origin of wisdom. One marriage contract and their God. C.
Lord is said to have His own, provider. He turn to the power of love in the world, in the world.”\textsuperscript{39}

Cult of the Law is this that Jesus condemned the Torah does demand the way of perfection, for all piety. “The man should not say: I am God’s creature and mother and mother and me.

In this light we see, ba-areg, the unless the Law, they did spiritually impure, morally encourage to can promote the spirit of divine Presence.”\textsuperscript{41}

I am God’s creature, I rise early for my Lord, not presume to do it, I say: “I do much and A man may do much holy heart to heaven.”\textsuperscript{42}

This, after all, is the Lord is said in one text: “In all

\textsuperscript{35} Shab. 88b–89a; cf. B. Talmud, Shabbath, pp. 421–423.
\textsuperscript{36} See Shab. 88b; cf. B. Talmud, Shabbath, p. 419.
\textsuperscript{37} Shab. 88a; cf. B. Talmud, Shabbath, p. 418. The angels are thought to possess this secret of unquestioning generosity because Psalm 102[103]:20 declares: “Bless the Lord all you His angels . . . who fulfill His word, who hearken to the voice of His spoken word. . . .” Intriguing though the rabbinic interpretation is, it ignores the parallelism of the verse. To “hearken to His voice” is just another way of saying to “fulfill His commands.”

\textsuperscript{38} A.Z. 3a; cf. B. Talmud, Menahoth, 41.
\textsuperscript{39} Ber. 6a; cf. B. Talmud, Menahoth, 42.
\textsuperscript{40} Ber. 17a; cf. B. Talmud, Menahoth, 40.
\textsuperscript{41} See Ket. 111b; cf. B. Talmud, Menahoth, 41.
\textsuperscript{42} Ber. 17a; cf. B. Talmud, Menahoth,
reduce you to a state of chaos." 38 No doubt, in this the rabbis are guilty of excess, but to understand them, one must remember the divine origin of the Law and its virtual identification with divine wisdom. One must remember, too, that to them the Torah was a marriage contract, the bond of union and fidelity between the people and their God. Commenting on Deuteronomy 26:17-18—where the Lord is said to have made a pact with Israel that she be particularly His own, provided she keep all His commandments—the rabbis have Him turn to the people: "You have made me the only object of your love in the world, and I shall make you the only object of my love in the world." 39

Cult of the law easily degenerates into cult of the letter, and it was this that Jesus condemned. But as the revelation of God's intention, the Torah does demand sensitive attention. For the rabbis, it is the way of perfection, its knowledge being an indispensable foundation for all piety. "The goal of wisdom is repentance and good deeds; a man should not study Torah and Mishnah and then despise his father and mother and teacher and his superior in wisdom and rank." 40

In this light we must read the many texts condemning the ammi ha-'areq, the unlettered country folk. Ignorant of the fine points of the Law, they did not observe them; hence they were considered ritually impure, men to be avoided. Still, the rabbis hold out some encouragement to them: By helping support a scholar of Torah, they can promote the study of the Law indirectly, and thus adhere to the divine Presence. 41 The rabbis of Jabneh used to say:

I am God's creature, and my fellow, the am ha-'areq, is God's creature. I rise early for my work, and he rises early for his work. Just as he does not presume to do my work, so do I not presume to do his work. If you say: "I do much and he does little," remember what we have learned: A man may do much or little; it is all the same, provided he directs his heart to heaven. 42

This, after all, is the aim of revelation, to direct man's heart to God. All the essential principles of the Torah can be summed up in one text: "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct..."
your paths (Prov 3:6)."  

In order that a man may think of God in all he does and cleave to Him in bad as well as in good times, he must be absorbed heart, soul, and strength in the love of God. All striving toward Him ought to be for the purest of motives.

One should not say: "I shall read Scripture that I may be called a sage; I shall study that I may be called rabbi; I shall study to be an elder and sit in the assembly of elders," rather should one learn out of love, and honor will come in the end, as it is written: "Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart"; and it is also said: "Her ways are ways of pleasantness"; also: "She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her and happy is everyone that retains her" (Prov 7:3; 3:17, 18). Do good deeds for the sake of their Maker, and speak of the words of the Torah for their own sake. Do not make of them a crown wherewith to glorify yourself.

Love engendered by what passes, dies, as did the fancy of Amnon for Tamar, but love inspired by what endures is lasting.

A passage in the tractate Soṭah distinguishes, according to the purity of their intention, seven types of Pharisee. Forgetting the slight variations in the interpretation of this text, there is first the Pharisee who performs his religious duties with unnecessary ostentation, second the Pharisee who is scrupulous that he act from love it rather than from fear of penalties. Judah that a man occupies himself with the commandments, even if he was expected of him there for me to do so, and not to reward him from the rest: tho interpretation of the Talmud, were of the fear of penalties.

Who will remove the fear of penalties that he occupies himself with the commandments, even if it was expected of him there for me to do so, and not to reward him from the rest: tho interpretation of the Talmud, were of the fear of penalties.

The relative merits of a man's piety was a subject of discussion. Joshua ben Hycam, the One, blessed be He, Who will remove the fear of penalties that he occupies himself with the commandments, even if it was expected of him there for me to do so, and not to reward him from the rest: tho interpretation of the Talmud, were of the fear of penalties.

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and speak of the words of
them a crown wherewith
the fancy of Amnon for
fasting. 46

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Beth-el, "God is a home."

The same thought appears
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Talmud, Berakoth, p.102.
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1; cf. B. Talmud, Aboth,
master in the expectation
serve the master without
of heaven be upon you."
In Scripture, the term "fear of the Lord" does not imply cringing terror, as it might in English, but rather reverential awe. It is almost synonymous with what theology calls the "virtue of religion." What distinguishes "fear of the Lord" from "love of the Lord" is that one responds to His majesty and power, while the other answers His loving-kindness. Hence, when asked by two of his disciples which was better, to act out of the love of God or the fear of Him, Raba declined to commit himself: "Both of you are righteous rabbis, but one is actuated by love, the other by fear." 50

In the rabbinical attitude towards God, there is not only scrupulous obedience to the written law and the oral traditions, not only quiet submission to the discipline of suffering, but also a sense of humble gratitude: "So long as the soul is within me, I give thanks unto thee, O Lord, my God, and the God of my fathers. . . ." 51 The thanksgiving of the devout Jew rests first of all on His past mercies, especially on the gift of divine election. Each member of the community ought to regard the blessings and favors bestowed on his fathers as granted to him.

In every generation a man is bound to regard himself as though he personally had gone forth from Egypt. . . . Therefore it is our duty to thank, praise, laud, glorify, exalt, honor, bless, extol, and adore Him who wrought all these miracles for our fathers and ourselves; He brought us forth from bondage into freedom, from sorrow into joy, from mourning into festivity, from darkness into great light, and from servitude into redemption. Therefore let us say before Him, hallelujah. 52

It is as much a man's duty to bless God for evil that comes his way as it is to bless Him for the good. 53 He is to be thanked for shooting stars, earthquakes, thunderclaps, storms, lightnings, deserts, mountains, hills, seas, rivers, rain, indeed, for all of His works. He is to be thanked when one receives good news or bad, for the Holy One, blessed be He, is all-merciful, and whatever He does is good. The smallest details of daily life are occasions of gratitude and praise.

50. Ibid.
51. Ber. 60b; cf. B. Talmud, Berakoth, p. 378. The fact that one is privileged to praise the Lord and thank Him in a worthy manner is in itself a source of wonderment: "We give thanks to thee, O Lord our God, because we are able to give thee thanks." (See Sot. 4oa; cf. B. Talmud, Sotah, p. 197.)
53. See Ber. 34a; cf. B. Talmud, Berakoth, pp. 327–328.

III

GOD loves and is loved in the heart of the son is to beat the bride with that of her—all who are dear to the other. Divine man from above move him. Three are the cornerstones for Him, and our love for way: "The world is based on the practice of kindliness."

To maintain God’s world

The rabbis do not waver at for human society. Accord

54. See Ber. 60b; cf. B. Talmud
55. Ab. 1:2; cf. B. Talmud, A
"If a man occupies himself with charity, and prays with the congo me and my children from an B. Talmud, Berakoth, p. 59.) To Israel’s exile and subjugation, it is mystery of the Incarnation.
not imply cringing awe. It is almost of religion." What "the Lord" is that one other answers His disciples which was Him, Raba declined, rabbis, but one is not only scrupulous not only quiet a sense of humble the thanks unto thee, ... " The thanks-mercy, especially the community ought for His fathers as granted

If as though he per- it is our duty to thank, praise Him who wrought forth from running into festivity, into redemption.

evil that comes his to be thanked for lightnings, deserts, of His works. He for the Holy He does is good. gratitude and praise.

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44. See Ber. 6ob; cf. B. Talmud, Berakoth, pp. 378-379.
55. Ab. 1:2; cf. B. Talmud, Aboth, p. 2. Another talmudic passage has God say: "If a man occupies himself with the study of the Torah and with the works of charity, and prays with the congregation, I account it to him as if he had redeemed me and my children from among the nations of the world." (Ber. 8a; cf. B. Talmud, Berakoth, p. 59.) Touching though the thought is that God shares Israel's exile and subjugation, it is strange in view of the rabbinic resistance to the mystery of the Incarnation.

Upon awakening, a devout Jew is to say: "Blessed art thou who restorest their souls to the dead"; when he opens his eyes: "Blessed is He who opens the eyes of the blind"; when he stretches himself: "Blessed is He who loosens the bound"; when he dresses: "Blessed is He who clothes the naked"; when he rises: "Blessed is He who raises the bowed"; when he steps upon the ground: "Blessed is He who spread the earth upon the waters"; when he begins to walk: "Blessed is He who makes firm the steps of man"; when he ties his shoes: "Blessed is He who has supplied all my wants." Above all, He is to be blessed for having sanctified His people with the gift of His commandments for, in the eyes of the rabbis, commandments more than anything else are the mark of His abounding love for Israel. And to them, fidelity in the observance of the commandments, whether written in the Law or handed down by tradition, is the measure of Israel's love for Him.54

III

God loves and is loved in return, but love does not end there; if the heart of the son is to beat with that of his Father, and the heart of the bride with that of her Beloved, their loves must be coextensive—all who are dear to the one must be dear to the other. In the family God has acquired for Himself here below, all members are responsible, one for the other. Divine affection and support streaming down on man from above move him to gratitude, but also to fraternal charity. Three are the cornerstones of the world: God's love for us, our love for Him, and our love for our fellow man. The Talmud says it this way: "The world is based on three things: Torah, divine service, and the practice of kindliness." 55

To maintain God's world as He wills it, is the responsibility of man. The rabbis do not waver at the role of fraternal love as a firm basis for human society. According to the tractate Baba Batha, ten strong
things have been created in the world, but of all of them charity alone is completely dependable. It alone survives every assault:

Rock is hard but iron cleaves it. Iron is hard but fire softens it. Fire is hard but water quenches it. Water is strong but the clouds bear it. Clouds are strong, but the wind scatters them. The wind is strong but the body bears it. The body is strong but fright crushes it. Fright is strong but wine banishes it. Wine is strong but sleep works it off. Death is stronger than all, and charity saves from death.66

Indispensable as an element in God’s design for mankind, where shall charity be sought, if not among the members of God’s own household? Hence the rabbis see the children of Israel distinguished from the nations by three characteristics: They are merciful, reverent, and benevolent. Only he who cultivates these three qualities is fit to join this nation.67 Merciful they must be, for the Lord has been merciful to them, and reverent, for reverence His majesty demands. Their benevolence must be perceptive and this is, according to the rabbis, the main reason for Judaism’s vast and detailed legal tradition. The word the rabbis use for help to the needy is justice. In the Bible this word bears a rich variety of meanings but, no matter what its precise sense in a given scriptural passage, for the rabbis it always means “charity.” Still the rabbis and the Bible are at one when Rabbi Judah ben Korha says that where there is strict justice there is no peace and where there is peace there is no strict justice, for in peace strict justice is exceeded. And where there is strict justice there is no charity, and where there is charity there is no strict justice. The kind of justice with which charity and peace abide is arbitration.68

The great rabbis of the past sought “to build a fence around the Torah,” that is, to add precept to precept, in an effort to insure that the original divine commands be fully kept.69 Thus they held that in a man’s dealings with his fellow, the one certain way of preserving justice is to go beyond love God are “those who destroy a life.”60 Thence we learn who destroy a life.61 But that is yours and what is yours belongs to you.62

The law of charity the rabbis teach: “Charity is equal to love God are ‘those who destroy a life.’ “Whoever turns away his neighbor: That is the way of charity and peace abide is arbitration.68

The great rabbis of the past sought “to build a fence around the Torah,” that is, to add precept to precept, in an effort to insure that the original divine commands be fully kept.69 Thus they held that in a man’s dealings with his fellow, the one certain way of preserving 60. Shab. 88b; cf. B. B. 5a; Talmud, Gittin, p. 151.
62. B. B. 9a; cf. B. Taal.
63. Suk. 49b; cf. B. Taal.
64. Shab. 31a; cf. B. B. 108.
65. The gentle Hillel gave to the proselyte, on the condition thereof; go and learn.
66. B. B. 108; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Batbra, p. 47. Here and later in the paper, “charity” is used in its everyday sense, that is, assistance to those in need, and not in the full sense St. Paul gives to the word, especially in 1 Corinthian 13.
67. See Yeb. 72a; cf. B. Talmud, Yebamoth, pp. 535–536. The remark is addressed to the Gibeonites, whose vindictiveness (see 2 Kg 21:1–10) only emphasizes the moderation and humanity expected of Israelites.
68. See Sanh. 6b; cf. B. Talmud, Sanhedrin, p. 22.
69. According to one rabbinical opinion, Jerusalem was destroyed because the judgments of her courts complied only with biblical law, without going beyond its requirements. (See B.M. 30b; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Megila, pp. 188–189.)
justice is to go beyond the requirements of strict justice. Those who love God are "those who are insulted but do not insult, hear themselves reviled without answering, act through love and rejoice in suffering." 60 They do not stand on their rights, nor do they say as ordinary human justice dictates: "What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours." Even less do they imitate the wicked whose attitude is: "What is mine is mine and what is yours is mine," or that of the unlearned who destroy all order with their practice of: "What is mine is yours and what is yours is mine." No, the pious, respecting the rights of others, claim nothing for themselves: "What is mine is yours, what is yours belongs to you." 61

The law of charity is so broad and imperative, that Rabbi Assi can teach: "Charity is equal to all the other religious precepts combined." 62 Again, Rabbi Eleazar, commenting on the prophetic injunction: "It has been told to you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you (Mic 6:8)," maintains: "To do justly means to act in accordance with justice; 'to love mercy' refers to acts of loving-kindness, and 'to walk humbly with thy God' refers to attending funerals and dowering a bride for her wedding." 63 For the talmudic masters the commandment of loving one's neighbor as oneself means to apply to him the same standards of understanding and generosity we like to see applied to ourselves. The famous Rabbi Hillel stated it in a negative way: "What is hateful to you, do not do unto your neighbor: That is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it." 64 But the Talmud does not lack positive

60. Shabo 88b; cf. B. Talmud, Shabbath, p. 419; see also Git. 36b; cf. B. Talmud, Gittin, p. 151, and Yom. 234; cf. B. Talmud, Yoma, p. 104.
61. Ab. 5:10; cf. B. Talmud, Aboth, p. 67.
62. B.B. 9a; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Batra, p. 41. In the same book we read: "Whoever turns away his eyes from one who appeals for charity is considered as if he were serving idols." (B.B. 51a; d. B. Talmud, Baba Batra, p. 292; see also Keth. 37b; d. B. Talmud, Kethuboth, p. 206, Pes. 75a; cf. B. Talmud, Perahim, p. 388, So. 8b; cf. B. Talmud, Sotah, p. 35, Sanh. 45a, 52a, 52b; cf. B. Talmud, Sanhedrin, pp. 294, 352, 353.)
expressions of the golden rule. Rabbi Jose teaches: "Let the property of your fellow be as precious unto you as your own," and Rabbi Eliezer: "Let the honor of your friend be as dear to you as your own." 65

The rabbis make a distinction between zedakah, "charity" or almsgiving, and gemilut hasadim, a term difficult to translate, meaning "deeds of love," "tokens of kindness," or simply "loving-kindness." Of the two, gemilut hasadim, is by far the nobler. It is in three respects that it excels charity: Charity requires no personal involvement, only money, but loving-kindness demands one's person and one's money. Charity can be given only to the poor, loving-kindness to both the rich and the poor. Charity can be carried out only among the living; loving-kindness, however, reaches both the living and the dead. The dead, the rabbis say, are shown kindness if one attends their burial. Again, the reward of charity depends entirely upon the extent of the kindness that inspires it, for it is said: "Sow to yourselves according to your zedakah, your charity, but reap according to your hesed, your loving-kindness (Os 10:12)." 66 Greater than any gift of money is the gift of the heart: "He who gives a small coin to a poor man obtains six blessings (see Is 58:7–9), but he who addresses to him words of comfort obtains eleven (see 58:10–12)." 67

Generosity and personal concern in the well-being of others reflect, indeed, continue God's own loving-kindness: "He who executes charity and justice is regarded as though he had filled all the world with kindness, for it is said: 'He loves charity and justice, the earth is full of the loving-kindness of the Lord' (Ps 32[33]:5)." 68 Hence the rabbis like to refer to the Pentateuch and the acts of divine benevolence it records as an illustration of the devout Jew's way of life. When it tells that the Lord God made coats of skin for Adam and his wife, they see there the pattern for our care of the naked. When they read that He buried Moses in a valley, they find in it the exemplar of our duty toward the dead. 69 Thus Rabbi Hama takes "You shall walk after the Lord your God (Deut 13:5)" to mean that a man ought to imitate the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He: clothing the naked as He clothed Adam and Eve (see Gen 3:21), visiting the sick as He visited the sick, as He comforts the sorrowful, as He can bury the dead. 70 The fact that it is said: "the Torah should associate, and he shall love when he finds compassion to the heart of the aggrieved," 71 implies that God will impel one to do more perfect acts.

If someone says to him: "I have no money, the wise, is it not said: "The poor is his brother and he should assist him" (see Jer 7:19). The righteous has said: "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

On the other hand, if one says: "I have no money, how can I help?" the Jew to reflect upon the maxims of the Torah. 72

Be thou of the pious, and thou one who studies the Torah. 73

Make your study extend to practical moral maxims, but do much, much more. 74

67. B.B. 9b; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Batra, p. 44.
68. Suk. 49b; cf. B. Talmud, Sukkah, p. 233.
69. See So. 14a; cf. B. Talmud, Sofoah, pp. 72–73.
70. See ibid.
71. Ber. 61a.
72. Shab. 13b; cf. B. Talmud, Shabbat, p. 112.
73. Yom. 81b; cf. B. Talmud, Yom, p. 81b.
74. Ab. 1:12.
75. Ab. 1:15.
sick as He visited Abraham (see 18:1), comforting the mourners as He comforted Isaac after the death of his father (see 25:11), burying the dead as He buried Moses (see Deut 34:6). Again, by the fact that God was "best man" for Adam and Eve (see Gen 2:22) "the Torah teaches a maxim of behavior, that a man of eminence should associate himself with a lesser man in acting as his best man, and he should not take it amiss." 72 Better than any of the rabbis quoted does Abba Saul sum up the godlike orientation of brotherly love when he says: "Be thou like Him: Just as He is gracious and compassionate, so be thou gracious and compassionate." 73

If this principle of conduct is observed, the example of the few will impel others to wish to know God more clearly and serve Him more perfectly:

If someone studies Scripture and Mishnah, and attends on the disciples of the wise, is honest in business, and speaks pleasantly to persons, of him people will say: "Woe unto people who have not studied the Torah, for this man has studied the Torah—look how fine his ways are, how righteous his deeds. He is a true servant of the Lord. Of him does Scripture say: "Thou art my servant Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (Is 49:3). 78

On the other hand, a man whose study of the Torah is belied by a corrupt life, profanes the divine Name. The responsibility of every Jew to reflect God's glory in this world has made the rabbis utter maxims open to misunderstanding because they stress peace and harmony in man's relationship with his fellows.

Be thou of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace. Be thou one who loves his fellow creatures, and thus brings them to the Torah. 74

Make your study of the Torah a matter of fixed regularity; speak little, but do much; and receive all men with a pleasant countenance. 75

70. See ibid.
72. Shab. 133b; cf. B. Talmud, Shabbath, p. 670. This injunction of Abba Saul, a teacher of the second century A.D., is obviously akin to the saying of Jesus: "Be merciful, therefore, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36).
73. Yom. 86a; cf. B. Talmud, Yoma, p. 427. This observation by a rabbi who lived at the turn of the second century reminds one of Jesus' call: "Let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16).
Be quick to render service to a superior and easy of approach to a suppli-ant and receive all men with cheerfulness.\textsuperscript{76}

One should always strive to be on the best of terms with his brethren and with his relatives, and with all men, and even the heathen in the streets, in order that he may be beloved above and well-liked below and be acceptable to his fellow creatures.\textsuperscript{77}

Love shown to others is love shown to God. This the rabbis find suggested in the proverb: "He who has pity on the poor lends unto the Lord, and He will repay him for his good deed (Prov 19:17)."

Thus Rabbi Johanan can say: "Were it not written in the Scripture, one would not dare say it: The borrower is a servant to the lender.\textsuperscript{78}

However little time, effort, or money a man expends in the service of others, he will be repaid abundantly by God Himself. So deeply does the Father involve Himself in the fate of His wayward sons, that even when a man is condemned for blasphemy and suffers the death penalty, He is made to say: "My head is too heavy for me! my arm is too heavy for me!" To this the Talmud adds: "If God is so grieved over the blood of the wicked that is shed, how much more so over the blood of the just!\textsuperscript{79}

Rabbi Hânina goes still further and states that one who smites a man, attacks the Holy One.\textsuperscript{80}

God's solicitude, both for His people and its individual members,

\textsuperscript{76. Ab. 3:12; cf. B. Talmud, Aboth, p. 35.}
\textsuperscript{77. Ber. 17a; cf. B. Talmud, Berakoth, p. 102. Other instances of the same outlook are: "It was related of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai that no one ever gave him a greeting first, not even a heathen in the street" (\textit{ibid.}). "Anyone from whom the spirit of his fellow-creatures derives satisfaction, from him the spirit of the All-present too derives no satisfaction." (Ab. 3:10; cf. B. Talmud, Aboth, p. 33.) Such a viewpoint risks degenerating into a pursuit of popular approval and acclaim; it easily creates, as Father Spicq notes, an atmosphere of flattery, hypocrisy, and compromise. (See \textit{op. cit.}, p. 115.) Against abuses like these Jesus hurled some of His most severe condemnations. (See Mt 23:5-7; Mk 12:38-39; Lk 11:43-44.) But His warnings were, we must not forget, directed at abuses, not at the principle of seeking peace and harmony.

\textsuperscript{78. B.B. 10a; cf. B. Talmud, Bebra Bathra, pp. 47-48: "If a man gives but a farthing to a beggar, he is deemed worthy to receive the divine Presence, as it is written: 'I shall behold thy face in righteousness, zedakah' (Prov 10:12)."

\textsuperscript{79. Sanh. 46a, b; cf. B. Talmud, Sanhedrin, pp. 304, 306. This text continues with an illustrative parable: Two brothers, twins, lived in the same city. One was made king, while the other took to highway robbery. When, at the king's command, the bandit was hanged, all who saw him exclaimed: 'The king is hanged!' Where-upon the king commanded that the body be taken down. As the robber of the parable bore the likeness of his royal brother, so the executed criminal bears the indelible image of God; to leave him on the gibbet overnight would be irreverence.

\textsuperscript{80. See Sanh. 58b; cf. B. Talmud, Sanhedrin, p. 398.}

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manifest in history and in personal experience, invites man to be tireless in his love for others. Whoever is in a position to pray for his fellows and does not do so, is a sinner; for a scholar, he must pray even to the point of sickness. If he hopes to have his prayers answered, he must be forbearing in his dealings with his fellows. If he expects to have his transgressions passed over at the divine tribunal, he must pass over the transgressions of others against himself, make no retaliation, seek no revenge, bear no grudge, and do his utmost to effect a reconciliation.

The interior life cannot be nourished by worship or by study of Torah alone, for "he who performs charity is greater than he who offers all the sacrifices, and he who occupies himself only with the study of the Torah is as if he had no God." A community under heaven’s sentence will find no expiation merely through sacrifice and Torah but only by Torah united to charitable deeds. This explains the familiar teaching that the Day of Atonement remits transgressions between man and the All-present, but for transgressions of a man against his fellow, the Day of Atonement offers no remission until the offender has made peace with the offended. It is not enough to ask God’s pardon, one must also ask it of the brother who has been hurt. And the merit of a fast lies in the food saved for the poor, in the charity dispensed.

81. See Ber. 12b; cf. B. Talmud, Berakoth, p. 70.
82. See Ta’an. 25b; cf. B. Talmud, Ta’anith, p. 132. Forbearance or the lack of it are the reasons why, according to the Talmud, the lengthy prayers of Rabbi Eliezer for rain remain unanswered, while the response to Rabbi Akiba’s brief supplication is immediate.
83. See Yom. 23a; d. B. Talmud, Yoma, p. 104.
84. Suk. 49b; cf. B. Talmud, Sukkah, p. 233. An exchange between two imprisoned rabbis sheds light on the power of charity. "When Rabbi Eleazar ben Peraḥa and Rabbi Hanina ben Teradion were arrested, the first said to the second: ‘Happy art thou that thou hast been arrested on one charge; woe is me, for I am arrested on five charges.’ Rabbi Hanina replied: ‘Happy art thou, who hast been arrested on five charges, but will be rescued; woe is me, though having been arrested on one charge, will not be rescued, for thou hast occupied thyself with the study of the Torah as well as with acts of benevolence, whereas I occupied myself with Torah alone.’” (A.Z. 17b; cf. B. Talmud, ‘Abodah Zarah, pp. 88–89.)
85. See R.H. 18a; cf. B. Talmud, Roḥ Hašanah, p. 71. Rabbah, who upheld the expiatory value of the study of Torah without charitable deeds, lived for forty years, while Abaye, for whom charitable deeds were the complement of the study of Torah, lived for sixty years. Abaye’s long life is seen by the Talmud as the divine approval of his opinion.
86. See Yom. 85b; cf. B. Talmud, Yoma, p. 423. This opinion of Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, of the end of the first century, parallels Jesus’ admonition: “If thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother has anything against thee, leave thy gift before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” (Mt 5:23–24; see also Mk 11:25.)
87. See Sanh. 35a; cf. B. Talmud, Sanhedrin, p. 222, especially n. 1.
LIKE God's loving-kindness, man's charity must strive to ennoble its recipient by helping him remove, whenever possible, the cause of the evil that besets him. Thus the rabbis hold in high esteem the peace-makers, men who "cling to the making of peace," who "seek peace and pursue it (Ps 33[34]:15)," who by tact and gentle persuasion induce others to compose their differences. 88 For he who causes others to do good is greater than the doer. 89 This thought the rabbis also apply to financial matters. Collectors, who lead many others on the road to charity, will shine like the stars forever and ever. 90 Thus must one interpret paradoxical statements such as these: "He who lends is greater than he who performs charity," for he allows the borrower to maintain his dignity by repaying in the end whatever he receives. But "he who forms a partnership is greater than all," for by assuming part of the responsibility for a joint enterprise he makes it his own concern that the funds are well administered. 91

True charity must be as anonymous as possible and avoid humiliating the recipient. In the Temple, the rabbis tell, two chambers were set aside, one for contributions to the Temple, the other for the support of the poor. The pious Israelite would secretly deposit his alms in this second room, and the needy could enter with equal secrecy to receive financial aid; onlookers could not be certain whether one entered to give or to receive. 92 It is said of Rabbi Jannai that when he saw a man give a coin in public to a poor person, he turned to the giver: "It would have been better to have given him nothing than to have given to him publicly and thus to have put him to shame." 93

Far from following an absolute norm, charity must be discreetly proportioned to a person's accustomed needs and his station in life.

88. See Kid. 40a; cf. B. Talmud, Kiddushin, p. 197 and Yeb. 109a-b; cf. B. Talmud, Yehezmoth, p. 761. Jesters too are considered pleasing to God. They gladden the depressed and by their good cheer ease tension and end strife. (See Ta'an. 22a; cf. B. Talmud, Ta'anith, p. 110.)
89. See B.B. 9a; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Batra, p. 41.
90. See B.B. 8b; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Batra, p. 38.
91. See Shab. 63a; cf. B. Talmud, Shabbath, p. 298.
93. Hag. 52; cf. B. Talmud, Hagigah, pp. 19-20; see also Ket. 67b; cf. B. Talmud, Ketuboth, pp. 412-413. "A man who gives charity in secret is greater than Moses our teacher," was a saying of Rabbi Eleazar. (B.B. 9b; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Batra, p. 43.)

This does not mean, however, that the lengths to which precept are often taken are either extravagant. The horse and a slave were not to be given to one another, but on one occasion, the tractate says, Hillel ran three miles to meet his creditor. The story illustrates the rabbinic principle that the devoted souls of the righteous are revealed even in the little things of life. Had Hillel not been "the right to share in the world to come," the collector could not have taken advantage of the牧民's generosity. (See B.B. 9a; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Batra, p. 43.)

Again, love of learning is always an aspect of charity. Collectors used to quote such a saying: On one occasion, it was said to them: "I bought some old wine," was a saying of Rabbi Eleazar ben Birta. The collectors used to say: "What do you mean by 'old wine'?" But he bought some old wine and looked in the glass. He said: "There is a miracle. But the right to share in the world to come," the collector asked: "What is the right of the poor of old wine?" He said: "Old wine is fitting to profit from it; new wine is fitting to profit from the service of the Torah. Disinterestedness is the thing for spiritual things. 94. See Ket. 67b; 95. See Ket. 67b; 96. See Ta'an. 24a; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Batra, p. 38a; cf. B. Talmud, Ketuboth, p. 286; cf. B. Talmud, Ta'an. 24a. 97. This is "should not spend one's days in seeking to please himself and to please others, but to study." (See Ket. 67b; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Batra, p. 38a.)
This does not mean that the poor man is to be made rich, yet the lengths to which the rabbis are said to have gone in fulfilling this precept are often quite startling. Hillel the elder, we are told, bought a horse and a slave for a certain poor man of good family. When, on one occasion, the slave was not at hand to run before his master, Hillel ran three miles himself. Another of the many anecdotes that illustrates the rule that charity must take into account even the supposed needs of the recipient, tells that every year Rabbi 'Ukba sent a large amount of money to a poor neighbor on the eve of the Day of Atonement. Once he sent the gift through his son, who returned shortly with the report that the man had no need of his father's help. "Why?" asked the father, "what have you seen?" "I saw them spraying old wine before him!" "Is he so delicate then?" the father wondered and, doubling the amount, sent his son back.

Again, love for one's fellows must be disinterested. Of Rabbi Eleazar ben Birah it is said that he was so generous that the charity collectors used to hide from him, lest he give them everything he had. On one occasion, he pursued them and begged to know what was their mission: It was to provide for the marriage of an orphaned pair. He said to them: "I swear, the orphans must take precedence over my own daughter" and gave them all he had, except one small coin with which he bought some grain to take home. When his wife and daughter looked in the granary, they found it overflowing as the result of a miracle. But the rabbi would have none of it: "You have no more right to share in it than has any poor person in Israel." It is no more fitting to profit from one's good deeds, he held, than from the study of Torah. Disinterestedness, in this and similar texts, means doing something for spiritual motives in preference to worldly ones, but it does not

94. See Ket. 67b; cf. B. Talmud, Ketuboth, p. 410.
95. See Ket. 67b; cf. B. Talmud, Ketuboth, p. 413.
96. See Ta'an. 24a; cf. B. Talmud, Ta'anith, p. 123. However admirable, Rabbi Eleazar's altruism is not to be imitated, the Talmud holds. Charity must not be extravagant. The second-century Synod of Usha, in Galilee, ordained that a man "should not spend more than a fifth of his wealth . . . since by spending more, he might himself come to be in need of the help of people." (Ket. 50a; cf. B. Talmud, Ketuboth, p. 286; see also Ket. 67b; cf. B. Talmud, Ketuboth, pp. 413-414; 'Ar. 28a; cf. B. Talmud, 'Arachin, p. 167.) The importance of self-reliance and self-sufficiency is tersely expressed in the famous axiom of Hillel: "If I am not for myself, who is for me? But if I am for my own self only, what am I? And if not now, when?" (Ab. 1:14; cf. B. Talmud, Abodah, p. 8; see also B.M. 628; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Meballah, p. 569.)
97. Ta'an. 24a; cf. B. Talmud, Ta'anith, p. 123.
imply absence of hope for reward in the world-to-come, nor does it preclude the joy of doing something for the love of God.98

Charity is a religious duty, a sharing in the common burden, indeed a participation in the divine attributes, thus almsgiving and, a fortiori, acts of kindness are, according to the rabbis, not only incumbent upon the self-supporting but even upon those who themselves depend on the charity fund:

Even a poor man who himself subsists on charity should give charity. If he does that, heaven will not again inflict poverty upon him. Whoever shears off part of his possessions and dispenses it in charity, is delivered from the punishment of Gehenna. Picture two sheep crossing a river, one shorn and the other not shorn; the shorn one gets across, the unshorn one does not.99

If a man is anxious to give charity, the Holy One, blessed be He, furnishes him money with which to give it.100

Finally, almsgiving is marked by urgency which varies, of course, with circumstances. In the East the need for food or drink could be so urgent that the slightest delay might lead to death. We read of Nahum of Gamzu that on a journey he was accosted by a poor man begging food. During the interval between his dismounting and unloading the pack animals, the beggar died. At this, the remorseful Nahum stretched himself out on the corpse and cried out: "May my hands which had no pity on your hands be cut off; may my legs which had no pity on your legs be amputated, if it was not by the command of heaven; if it was not for the command of heaven, did you die?"

Abiding in the land the legend of a huppah, described in the Babylonian Talmud, is often observed. 102

With the exception of the Hanilai that the minister usually sits on the side for all the Seder, it would not be observed. 103

During learning there is often strictness so that the command was observed. 104

98. When the proselyte King Monobaz of Adiabene was reproached by his relatives and family for squandering upon the poor all the treasures that had been so laboriously hoarded up by his predecessors, he said, among other things: "My fathers stored up below, and I am storing above. My fathers stored in a place which can be tampered with, but I have stored in a place which cannot be tampered with. My fathers stored something which produces no fruit, but I have stored something which produce fruit. My fathers gathered treasures of money, but I have gathered treasures of souls. My fathers gathered for others, but I have gathered for myself. My fathers gathered for this world, but I have gathered for the future world, as it says: 'Thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward' (Is 58:8)." (B.B. 11a; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Bathra, pp. 52–53.) The anticipation of recompense for the struggles of this life, especially those involving some degree of self-sacrifice, is approved and encouraged by Jesus in words quite similar: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where rust and moth consume, and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither rust nor moth consumes, nor thieves break in and steal" (Mt 6:19–20). Again: "Go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (Mt 19:21).


100. B.B. 9b; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Bathra, p. 44.
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legs be amputated; may my eyes which had no pity on your eyes become blind and may my whole body be covered with boils." When, the legend continues, all these calamities befall him and he lay in a state too pitiable to be described, his disciples lamented: "Alas that we see you in such a sore plight." He replied, however: "Woe would it be to me, did you not see me in such a sore plight." 101

Abiding concern for the welfare of others, symbolized by the kappah, the charity box, is one of the glories of Judaism. From the kappah, alms were distributed to the poor on the day before the Sabbath. A scholar, the Talmud says, should not reside in a city where there are not found, among other things, a court of justice, a charity fund, a synagogue, and public baths. 102 There is nothing haphazard about charity, as taught by the rabbis; nothing is left to chance. To be effective, it must be practical, levelheaded, organized. When it is performed grudgingly or for unworthy motives, this is unfortunate; still, charity must be done, and God will be pleased with at least this minimum. 103 Concern for the poor has never been allowed to abate. With the exaggeration native to legend, it is told of Rabbi Hana ben Hanilai that he employed sixty cooks by day and sixty by night to minister unto the needy, and that his house had open doors on every side for all comers. His hand was always on his purse so that the beggar would not be embarrassed while the master went looking for change. During lean years his servants used to throw grain out of the windows so that the bashful poor could come by night and take without being observed. 104

101. See Ta'an. 21a; cf. B. Talmud, Ta'anith, pp. 104–105. The principle of urgency is also brought out in this strong saying: "If on a fast day, the distribution of alms is postponed overnight, it is just as though blood were shed." (Sanh. 35a; cf. B. Talmud, Sanhedrin, p. 222.) The postponement is culpable only in the case of food that can be eaten right away, for lack of which the needy might die during the night. For the same reason, the superiority of direct charity, of food or clothing, is often stressed in opposition to gifts of money, which must be exchanged for the needed commodities, thus involving a lapse of time that might be fatal. 102. See Sanh. 17b; cf. B. Talmud, Sanhedrin, pp. 89–90.
103. See B.B. 9a; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Bathra, pp. 41–42.
104. See Ber. 58b; cf. B. Talmud, Berakoth, pp. 363–364. This same concern was exemplified in the way the alphabet was taught to small children; early in life it was impressed on them that every Jew is his brother's keeper. Each of the letters was given a meaning based on the similarity in sound between the name of the letter and some Hebrew word: alef and bet became alef binoth, "learn wisdom"; gimmel dalet became gimmel dallim, "show kindness to the poor." The foot of the gimmel is stretched towards the dalet to indicate how fitting it is for the benevolent to seek out the poor. The face of the dalet is secret, to avoid shaming the poor man, and so on. (See Shab. 104a; cf. B. Talmud, Shabbath, pp. 500–502.)
A word or two should be said about the exclusiveness of Jewish charity, as found in the Talmud. The pious Jew felt bound to those whom God loved, but under the circumstances that prevailed during the time that much of the Talmud was composed, this bond seemed to exclude his persecutors, particularly the Romans, and to a lesser degree the Persians. The question was not so much whether it was possible for an individual pagan to be saved—the Bible speaks of Enoch, Naaman, and Job, all worshippers of the true God—but whether, in view of the general immorality and idolatry of pagans the God-fearing man had an obligation, in fact, a right to help and thus encourage those who were looked upon as God's avowed enemies. Many of the harsh sayings of the Talmud against non-Jews must be interpreted in their historical context; they were uttered by the leaders of an embattled, persecuted people, of a people surrounded by men not at all sympathetic to monotheism and a divinely revealed moral code. Theirs was an age when even a greeting given to a pagan on the street could be construed as homage to the god whose festival was celebrated that day. On the other hand, a Gentile who formally renounced his idolatry was entitled to receive support from the Jewish community, even though he had not become a proselyte. As I understand it, the evil use to which alms money might have been put was what impeded charity to pagans. When this danger was eliminated, the prohibition presumably ceased.

Without entering into a complete discussion of this delicate problem, it seems possible to establish at least the elements of a solution. According to rabbinical theology, there are outside Israel two classes of men, the heathen and the Noachids. The latter are descendents of Noah, faithful to the seven precepts given the patriarch after the deluge. By avoiding idol worship, blasphemy, bloodshed, adultery, robbery, by establishing courts of justice, and by not eating flesh cut from a living animal, they observe what Catholic theologians call the natural law, and, in so doing, glorify the divine Name according to their lights. Hence: "I will seek the precious stones, I will redeem the value of kind deeds, I will redeem the precious stones of talmudic days, I will not only to glorify the Name of God for me, but to display their hands with those of others, however, who my delight is the work of the Gentile who worships his god in the path of righteousness, I will cherish them and work the atonement of their souls."

Whenever the rabbi's love and to be excluded from the assumption that the Gentile offered them the Noachian laws as a protection, they would not accept, for to occupy himself seriously that is equal to the High Priest. "You must keep my law, or die out of the Children of Israel and not ever shall I forgive their transgressions, or to display their hands to the Gentile who worships his god in the path of righteousness, I will cherish them and work the atonement of their souls."

To avoid ill-feeling, the rabbis were to gather and discuss the Noachian laws. They are to be supported.

their lights.\textsuperscript{107} Hence the rabbis have God say on the Day of Judgment: "I will seek the nations' records, and if they have any meritorious deeds, I will redeem them, but if not, I will destroy them."\textsuperscript{108} On the value of kind deeds performed by Gentiles, several rabbis of the talmudic days presume that their charity is sinful because they do it only to glorify themselves or to ensure the continuation of their power or to display their haughtiness or even to reproach the Jews. There are others, however, who hold that deeds of charity are a "sin-offering" as much for the Gentiles as for the people of Israel, that benevolence works the atonement of both.\textsuperscript{109}

Whenever the rabbis consider the Gentiles excluded from God's love and to be excluded from their own, they do so ultimately on the assumption that the Gentiles failed to respond to divine overtures. God offered them the Noachian laws, but they do not keep them.\textsuperscript{110} According to rabbinic speculation, He offered them even the Torah, but they would not accept it; only Israel did.\textsuperscript{111} Should a heathen, however, occupy himself seriously with the study of the Torah, he would be equal to the High Priest. This the Talmud sees confirmed by the verse: "You must keep my statutes and ordinances, which if a man do, he shall live by them (Lev 18:5)," for "it does not say 'priests, levites, and Israelites,' but 'a man,' which shows that if even a Gentile occupies himself with the study of the Torah, he equals in status the High Priest."\textsuperscript{112} How often this situation was realized, or how often the Noachian laws were faithfully fulfilled, is another question. In practice many a hard rabbinical saying was softened in the interests of peace.

To avoid ill-feeling, the poor of the heathen are not to be prevented from gathering gleanings, forgotten sheaves, and the corner of the field. They are to be supported along with the poor of Israel, their sick are to

\textsuperscript{107} See Sanh. 74b; cf. B. Talmud, Sanhedrin, p. 505. For the enumeration of the Noachian precepts, see Sanh. 56a; cf. B. Talmud, Sanhedrin, pp. 381-382; see also "Laws, Noachian," Jewish Encyclopedia, VII, 648-650.


\textsuperscript{109} See B.B. 10b; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Batra, pp. 50-51.

\textsuperscript{110} See 'A.Z. 2b; cf. B. Talmud, 'Abodah Zarah, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{111} See 'A.Z. 2a-b; cf. B. Talmud, 'Abodah Zarah, pp. 2-5. The heathen in Palestine, because of their contact with Judaism, were more harshly judged for their failure to abandon idolatry than were those who dwelled in distant lands.

\textsuperscript{112} B.K. 38a; cf. B. Talmud, Baba Kamma, pp. 214-215; see also Sanh. 59a; cf. B. Talmud, Sanhedrin, p. 400, and 'A.Z. 3a; cf. B. Talmud, 'Abodah Zarah, p. 5.
be visited along with the sick of Israel, and their poor are to be buried with the poor of Israel, in the interests of peace.\textsuperscript{118}

If some of the teachers of old maintained that the Gentiles did not enjoy God's love, there was, among others, Rab Judah to compensate for their exclusiveness: "If one walks about in the days of Nisan, that is in spring time, and sees the trees sprouting, he should say: 'Blessed be He who has not left His world lacking in anything and has created in it goodly creatures and goodly trees for the enjoyment of mankind.'"\textsuperscript{114} God is praised here because He has made the wonders of His creation the delight, not only of Israelites, but of all the sons of man.

\section*{VI}

Such then are the main teachings of the Talmud on the love of neighbor for the sake of God. If the texts seem at times imbued with a forbidding legalism which has none of the surging spontaneity and abandon we associate with love—many manuals of moral theology, conscious of the human condition, labor under a similar burden of casuistry—this is the natural consequence of Judaism's profound attachment to Torah as a principle of life. The true Christian, the one who lives fully the life of the Spirit and thus experiences the inner freedom of the adopted sons of God, will the more easily perceive the dignity of the Law given to Israel on Mount Sinai. Because the law of the Spirit is engraved in his own heart, he will recognize in three thousand years of passionate determination the fruit of a law and a love written in their hearts:

\begin{quote}
Had not your law been my delight, \\
I should have perished in my affliction. \\
Never will I forget your precepts, \\
for through them you give me life. \\
(Ps 118[119]:92–93)
\end{quote}

113. Git. 61a; cf. B. Talmud, Gittin, pp. 286–287; see also Git. 59b; cf. B. Talmud, Gittin, p. 278.

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