

(ca. 11th century)

מדרש אלה אברהם:

כשברא הקב"ה ית' את האילנות היו סתנאים כקטחן
ומנביהין עצמן למעלה למעלה. וכיון שברא הקב"ה ית' את הברזל
היו משפילין עצמן ואמרו אי לנו שכר ברא הקב"ה אותנו דבר
שיכרות אותנו. ¹ כך אחר חורבן הבית היו פריצי הרור סתנאים
5 ואמרו מה הפסדנו כזה שנחרכ הבית הרי יש כינינו חלמירי חכמים
שמדריכין את העולם כחורחן וכמציחן. ² מיד נתן הקב"ה בלכ הקיסר
של רום ללמוד חורח משה מפי חכמים וקנים. והתחיל בספר
בראשית והיה לומד עד שהגיע לאלה המשפטים. וכיון שהגיע
לפסוק, ויגונב איש וסקרו וגו' מיד צוה למלאך פלשירו מנעלים ³
10 ושלח לקרוא לעשרה חכמי ישראל וכאן לשני והושבין כקדראות
של זהב. אמר להן עסוק הדין יש לי לשאול מכם ואל תאמרו לי
כי אם הדין ואת האמת והמשפט. אמרו לו: אומר. אמר להם יומי
שננב איש מאהו של בני ישראל והתעמר בו ומכרו פה דינו?
15 אמרו לו התורה אמרה מורה יוסח. ענה ואמר להם איך אחר
חייבים סיחה. אמרו לו אמור לכה. אמר להם על מכירת יוסף
שמכרוהו אחיו. ואם הם היו בחיים הייתי דן אותם וענה שאינם
חיים אחר השוא עון אבותיכם. אמרו לו חן לנו וסן נ' ימים אם
נמצא וזהו על עצמנו מוטב ואם לא עשה מה שחפץ. ונתרצה
להם לדבר זה. ⁴ יצאו מלפניו וחילו את פני ר' ישמעאל כל שויכר
20 השם הגדול ויעלה לרקיע ויחקור אם נגדה נזירה מאת השי
וסייר ר' ישמעאל את עצמו בטבילה ונקדושין ונתעטף בטלית
ובתפילין והוכיר השם המפורש בפירשו. מיד נשאו הרוח והכינו
למעלה עד ברקיע השישי ופגע בו נבריא המלאך. ואמר לו אחה
הוא ישמעאל שקונך משחכך כך ככל יום שיש לו ענב כארץ
25 שרופה לקלסתר פניו? אמר לו אני הוא. אמר לו למה עליה לכאן.

... וימנא אה 137 - מנא יומא.

When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the trees, they grew haughty because they were so tall, and they raised themselves ever higher and higher. But once the Holy One, blessed be He, created iron, the trees humbled themselves, saying, "Alas! The Holy One, blessed be He, has created the instrument that will fell us."

Likewise, after the destruction of the Temple, the arrogant members of that generation boasted, "So what if the Temple has been destroyed! There are still sages among us, and they can instruct the world in the study of the law and the observance of the commandments."

Thereupon, the Holy One, blessed be He, set it in the mind of the Roman emperor to study the Torah of Moses directly from the sages and the elders. The emperor began with the Book of Genesis, and he studied until he reached the chapter in Exodus that begins, "And these are the rules" (Ex. 21:1). When he came to the verse, "He who kidnaps a man — whether he has sold him or is still holding him — shall be put to death" (Ex. 21:16), he immediately ordered his palace to be filled with shoes, and summoned the ten foremost sages of Israel. They came before him, and he seated them upon thrones of gold, and said, "There is a grave matter of law about which I

must question you. Tell me the law, only the law, and the truth."

"Speak," the sages said.

"If a man has kidnapped one of his brothers from the children of Israel, and treated him cruelly and sold him," the emperor asked, "what is the law concerning that man?"

"According to the Torah," the sages answered, "that man must surely die."

"If so," the emperor said, "you are guilty of death."

"Tell us why," they asked.

"Because of Joseph," the emperor answered, "whom his brothers kidnapped and sold. If his brothers were still alive, I would judge them. Since they are not, you will bear the sin of your forefathers."

The sages beseeched the emperor, "Grant us three days' reprieve. If we can find a merit by which to acquit ourselves, then good. And if we can't, do as you wish."

They agreed upon this. The sages departed, and persuaded Rabbi Ishmael, the High Priest, to pronounce the Ineffable Name and thereby to ascend to heaven in order to learn whether the decree against them had been issued by the Holy One. ✓

Rabbi Ishmael purified himself through ritual immersion. He wrapped himself in his prayer-shawl and in his phylacteries, and distinctly pronounced the Ineffable Name of the Lord. Immediately,

a wind bore him to the sixth heaven. There he met the angel Gabriel who said to him, "Are you Ishmael in whom your God prides Himself every day? Because He has a servant on earth who so resembles His own brilliant countenance!"

Ishmael replied, "I am that man."

Gabriel questioned him, "Why have you ascended here?"

He answered, "Because the wicked kingdom has decreed that ten sages of Israel must die. I have therefore ascended to learn whether that decree has gone forth from the Holy One, blessed be He."

Gabriel asked, "If the decree has not been signed, can you nullify it?"

"Yes," Ishmael answered.

"How?" Gabriel asked.

"[By pronouncing] the Ineffable Name."

"Blessed art thou, children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacobi!"

Gabriel immediately exclaimed. "For to you the Holy One, blessed

be He, has revealed matters He has not disclosed even to the angelic host."

It was said about Rabbi Ishmael, the High Priest, that he was one of the seven most handsome men in the world, and that his face resembled an angel's. When Rabbi Yossi, Rabbi Ishmael's father, reached the last days of his life, his wife said to him, "My dear husband and master, why do I see that many people manage to have children, while we have not? For we have no heir, neither a son nor a daughter."

Rabbi Yossi replied, "The reason is this: When other men's wives leave the ritual bathhouse, they watch themselves very closely. If anything unseemly happens to them, they return to the bathhouse and immerse a second time, and so they succeed in having children."

His wife said, "If this is what has prevented me, then I promise to be very scrupulous in these matters."

The next time she went to immerse herself, after she left the ritual bathhouse, a certain dog crossed her path. So she returned to the bathhouse, and reimmersed herself. [But when she left] the dog crossed her path again: she returned once more and reimmersed herself. Eight times this happened, until the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel, "How much trouble this righteous woman takes upon herself! Go and appear to her in the form of her husband."

Gabriel immediately went and sat at the door of the ritual bathhouse, where he appeared to the woman in the form of her husband, Rabbi Yossi. He took her [by the hand] and led her home.

חכמי ישראל ועליו לידע הגזירה אם היא סמך הקב"ה. אמר לו נבריאליאם גזירה היא לא חסומה חוכל לכנילה? אמר לו הן. אמר לו בקה. אל כשם י"ח. מיד ענה נבריאליאם ואמר: אמריתם 30 בני אברהם יצחק ויעקב שגילה הקב"ה לכם מה שלא גילה למלאכי השרת:

אמרן עליו על ר' ישמעאל כהן גדול שה' משבעה יסוד שהיו כעולם וה' פניו דומה למלאך ה' צבאות. כיון שכלו רוב יסודי של ר' יוסי אביו אמרה לו אשתו: אדוני אישי, מה זה שאני רואה הרכה בני אדם ששעליהן כורעם ואנו לא הצלחנו בכנים כי אין לנו יורש בן או בת. אמר ר' יוסי דבר זה גורם להם לפי שמשמרין עצמן (ע"ל נשיהן) כשיצאין ספית הטכילה אם פגע בהן דבר שאינו הגון הן חוזרות לטכילה וטובלות פעם שנית ולפיכך הם מעליחים כורעם. אמרה לו אם הרבר הזה מעבך דרי אני מקבלה עלי להיות נורה באותן הדברים. וכיון שהלכה לטכילה ויצאה מביח הטכילה פגע בה כלב אחר חזרה וטבלה פעם שני' פגע בה (נמל) חזרה וטבלה עד שסונו' פעמים. אמר הקב"ה לנבריאליאם: והרכה נעטערה העדקה לך והראה לה כרסוה כעלה. מיד יצא נבריאליאם והלך וישב בפחח בית הטכילה והיה נרמה לה כרסוה ר' יוסי כעלה וחופסה והולכה לביתה. ואותו הלילה נתעברה מר' ישמעאל ונעשה יפדו חומר ויפה מראה כרסוה נבריאליאם ולכן נחזוהו לו נבריאליאם כשעלה ברקיע. אמר לו נבריאליאם: ישמעאל! כני' וחי נפשך שכן שמעתי (מאחורי הפרגוד) שעשרה חכמי ישראל נמסרו להריגה ביד מלכות הרשעה. אמר לו ר' ישמעאל: למה? אל על מכירת יוסף 30 שסכרוהו אחיו. (שם הרין) מקשרת בכל יום לפני כסא הכבוד ואומר: כלום כתבת בתוךך אות אחת לכנילה? הרי השבטים שסכרוהו את יוסף ולא פרעת עדיין סרם או מורעם! לפיכך נגזרה גזירה על עשרה חכמי ישראל למסור להריגה ביד מלכות הרשעה. אמר לו ר' ישמעאל עד עתה לא מצא הקב"ה פריעה כסכרוהו 35 אלא בנות? אמר לו נבריאליאם: נפשך ישמעאל בני שסיוס שסכרוהו השבטים את יוסף לא מצא הקב"ה כדור אחר עשרה עדיקים וחסידים כמו השבטים לפיכך הקב"ה פורע מכם מכל לך האמת.

That same night she conceived Rabbi Ishmael, and he was as handsome as Gabriel himself.

For this reason, Gabriel encountered Rabbi Ishmael when he ascended to heaven. The angel said to him, "Ishmael, my son, I swear to you that I overheard from behind the heavenly partition: Ten sages are to be handed over to the wicked kingdom to be executed."

"For what cause?" Ishmael asked.

"[As atonement] for the transgression Joseph's brothers committed when they sold him. Every day Justice argues in accusation before the Throne of Glory, saying, 'Hast Thou written in Thy Torah a single superfluous letter? And yet, the fathers of the tribes sold Joseph, and Thou still hast not punished them or their descendants!' It has therefore been decreed that ten sages must be

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הוא אמר לו

celestial mini-
drama

כיון שראה סמאל הרשע שביקש הקב"ה לחיות את החיים למסור
עשרה צדיקים כיד מלכות הרשעה שחט שמחה גדולה וה' סחפאר
לומר נעתי את מיכאל השר. מיד חרה אפו של הקב"ה על
סמאל הרשע ואמר לו אי סמאל אם רצונך לפטור עשרה חכמי
ישראל מהריגה או חקל עליך צרעת לעולם הבא. אחד משנים
חקל. אל סמאל הרשע: לא אפטר עשרה צדיקים מהריגה אקבל
עלי נזירך כאשר דברת. מיד חרה אפו של הקב"ה על סמאל
ולא הספיק את דבריו עד שקרא הקב"ה מטטרון הסופר הגדול
השר ואמר לו: כתוב וחתום ששה חרשים שלמים נגע צרעת שחם =
וספחם ונבדח וירקע ושחין רע על אדום הרשעה הנפירה ואש
על האדם ועל הבהמה ועל הכסף ועל הזהב ועל כל אשר להם
עד שיאמר איש לחבירו: הלא לך רומי וכל אשר בה בפשוט! וחבירו
70 משיב אין לי חפץ בהם כי אין לי הנאה מהם. וכששטע ר'
ישמעאל כך מיד נזקרה דעתו וה' מהלך ברקיע אנה ואנה וה'
רואה מוכח ססוך לכסא הכבוד. אמר לנביא אל סה ור'.
אמר מוכח הוא. אמר לו ומה אחס מקריבים עליו בכל יום.
וכי פרים ואשים למעלה? אמר לו: נפשות של צדיקים אנו
75 מקריבים עליו בכל יום. אמר לו מי מקריב אותם? אמר לו
מיכאל השר הגדול. מיד ירד ר' ישמעאל והגיע לארץ והגיד
לחביריו שכבר נגזרה נזירה ונכתב ונחתם והיו מחאוננים כיסין
על שגורה נזירה עליהם קשה כואח ושחחים כשמאל על ששקלן
הקב"ה בצדקתו ובחסידותו נגד השכטים. והיו יושבין וזונות וזנות
ר' ישמעאל ור' שמעון ב"ג: ר' עקיבא ור' חנינא
בן חרדיון: ר' אליעזר בן שמוע ור' ישיבב הסופר:
ר' חנינא בן חכינאי ור' יודא בן בכא: רבי
חוצפית המהורגמן ור' יודא בן דמא:

skin disease, jaundice

handed over to the wicked kingdom to be executed."

"And till now," Rabbi Ishmael asked, "The Holy One, blessed be He, could find no way to exact punishment except through our lives?"

Gabriel answered, "I swear to you by your own life, Ishmael, my son! From the day his brothers sold Joseph [until now] the Holy One, blessed be He, has not found ten men in a single generation so righteous and pious as the fathers of the ten tribes. Because of this, the Holy One, blessed be He, will exact payment through your lives. But the truth is with you."

When Samael, the wicked angel, realized that the Holy One, blessed be He, was about to seal His signature upon the decree to hand over the ten sages to the wicked kingdom, he rejoiced and boasted, "I have triumphed over the archangel, Michael."

The Holy One, blessed be He, thereupon burned with anger against Samael, and said, "Samael! If you wish, you may release the ten sages from death, or you must agree to suffer leprosy for all time to come. But one of these [decrees] you must accept."

Samael the wicked replied, "I refuse to release those ten sages from death. Let me accept the other decree just as you have spoken."

The Holy One, blessed be He, immediately raged in fury, and even before Samael had finished speaking, He summoned Metatron, the master scribe and archangel, and commanded him, "Write this and seal it: For six whole months, plague and leprosy, tumors, sores, burning inflammations, jaundice, every sort of evil boil, shall afflict Edom the wicked. Brimstone and fire shall fall upon man and beast alike, on their gold, their silver, and all they own, until a man shall say to his neighbor, 'I will give you Rome and everything in it for free!' and the other will answer him, 'What do I need these things for? There is no profit in them for me.'"

When Rabbi Ishmael heard this decree, his mind was finally set at rest. He began to stroll to and fro in heaven when he saw an altar next to the Throne of Glory. "What is this?" he asked Gabriel.

"An altar for sacrifice," the angel told him.

"What sort of sacrifice do you offer upon it each day?" Ishmael asked. "Are there bullocks and sacrificial animals here?"

"Every day we sacrifice the souls of the righteous on this altar," Gabriel answered.

"Who offers the sacrifices?" Ishmael asked.

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"The archangel Michael," Gabriel responded.

Rabbi Ishmael thereupon descended to earth, and told his fellow sages that the decree against them had already been issued, written down, and sealed. On the one hand, his colleagues felt that they had been wronged to have such a grievous decree issued against their lives. On the other hand, they rejoiced that the Holy One, blessed be He, had judged them to be equal to the fathers of the tribes in righteousness and piety.

This was the order in which the sages sat in pairs: RABBI ISHMAEL and RABBI SHIMEON BEN GAMLIEL; RABBI AKIBAH and RABBI HANINA BEN TERADION; RABBI ELIEZER BEN SHAMUA' and RABBI YESHIVAV THE SCRIBE; RABBI HANINA BEN HAKHINAI and

נכנס הקיסר וכל גדולי רומי אחריו. אמר להם מי יהרג
 85 חלה. ענה ר' שמעון ב"ר יוחנן אני נשיא בן נשיא מורעו של דוד
 סלך ישראל ע"ה אני איהרג חחילה. ענה ר' ישמעאל כל ואמר
 אני בן בן מורעו של אהרן הכהן אני איהרג חחילה ואל
 אראה כמיתח חכירי. אמר הקיסר זה אמר אני איהרג חחילה זה
 אמר אני איהרג חחילה א"כ הפילו גורלות ביניהם. ויפול הגורל על
 90 רשב"ג ויהי הקיסר לחתוך את ראשו חחילה והחכוהו. ונטלו את

קד את ר' ישמעאל ב"ר בון יריכו וצוח עליו כמר נפש ואמר
 95 אי חורה ואי שכרה הלשון שה' סכארת החורה כשבעים לשונות
 איך עתה לוחמת את העפר. והי' מתאונן וכוכה על רשב"ג. אמר
 לו הקיסר מה זה ומה זה אתה וכן שאחיה כוכה על חכירך היה
 100 לך לבכות על עצמך. אל ר' ישמעאל אני כוכה על עצמי שחכירי
 גדול ממני בחורה ובחכמה ועל שקדמני כישיבת של מעלה
 אני כוכה:

עוד שהוא מדבר ומתאונן וכוכה ומקונן נשקפה בוצ של הקיסר
 בעד החלון וראתה יפיו של ר' ישמעאל ב"ר יוחנן ונכסרו רחמיו עליו
 105 ושלחה לאביה ליתן שאלה ובקשה אחת. ושלח לה הקיסר: בתי כל
 אשר תאמר אעשה חוץ מר' ישמעאל וחכיריו. שלחה לו: אבקש
 סמך. להחיות את נפשו. שלח לה: ככר נשבעתי. שלחה לו: אבקש
 לך א"כ שחצוה להפשיט את עור פניו כדי להסתכל כמקום מראה.
 110 סיד צוה להפשיט את עור פניו. וכיון שהגיע למקום חסילין צעק
 115 צעקה גדולה ומרה וגורעוה שמים וארץ. צעק פעם שני וגורעוה
 כסא כבוד. אמרו מלאכי חשמת לפני הקב"ה: צדיק כזה שראית
 לו כל גנוי העולם עליונים ורזי החתונים ידרג כמיתח משונה מזה
 הרשע. לו חורה זו שכרה. אמר להם להחיותו לו שחשסוד וכוהו לחרות
 שלאחריו. אמר הקב"ה מה אעשה לבני גוירה היא ואין מי שיפיר.
 120 סו יצאה בת קול ואמרה אם אשמע קול אחר אהפוך את כל העולם
 לחורו וכוהו. וכששמע ר' ישמעאל כך שחק. אל הקיסר: עור עתה

The emperor immediately ordered his servants to strip the skin
 off Rabbi Ishmael's face. When they reached the spot on his fore-
 head where he used to place his phylacteries, Rabbi Ishmael groaned
 with such terrible bitterness that the heavens and the earth trem-
 bled. He groaned a second time, and the Throne of Glory trembled.
 The host of angels spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He, "A
 righteous man like this, to whom Thou hast revealed all the myster-
 lies of the upper world and the secrets of the lower one—shall this
 man be murdered cruelly by so wicked a man? This is Torah? This is
 its reward?"

The Holy One, blessed be He, answered, "Leave him to his
 fate. The merits of his deeds shall stand for the generations following
 him." Then He added, "What can I do to help my children? The
 decree has gone forth, and there is no one to annul it."

An oracular voice declared from heaven, "If I hear one more
 word in protest, I shall destroy the entire universe and return it to
 chaos and void!"

RABBI YUDA BEN BABA; RABBI HUTZAPIT THE TRANSLATOR and
 RABBI YUDA BEN DAMA.

The Roman emperor now entered, with all the noblemen of
 Rome following him. He addressed the sages, "Who shall be exe-
 cuted first?"

Rabbi Shimeon Ben Gamliel spoke, "I am patriarch, son of a
 patriarch, descendant of David, the king of Israel, may he rest in
 peace. I shall be executed first."

Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest spoke, "I am High Priest, son of
 a High Priest, descendant of Aaron the Priest. I shall be executed
 first—and not see my colleague die."

Said the emperor, "This one has said, I shall be executed first,
 and this one has said, I shall be executed first. If so, cast lots be-
 tween them."

The lot fell upon Rabbi Shimeon Ben Gamliel. The emperor
 ordered his head cut off, and his servants decapitated Rabbi
 Shimeon Ben Gamliel. Then, Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest took the
 head and, placing it between his thighs, he lamented with a bitter
 heart, "Where is Torah? Where is its reward? Here lies the tongue
 that once explained the Torah in seventy languages! And now it licks
 the dust!"

So Rabbi Ishmael mourned and wept over the body of Rabbi
 Shimeon Ben Gamliel. The emperor said to him, "What is this? You,
 an old man, weeping over your fellow sage! You should be weeping
 over yourself!"

Rabbi Ishmael replied, "I am weeping over myself! For my
 fellow sage was greater than me in knowledge of Torah and wisdom.
 And now he has joined the heavenly academy before me. This is
 why I am weeping."

While Rabbi Ishmael was still giving voice to his grief, weeping
 as he lamented, the daughter of the emperor looked out her window
 and saw how handsome Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest was. Com-
 passion for him seized her, and she sent to her father asking him to
 grant her one request. He sent back to her, "My daughter, whatever
 you ask I shall do—so long as it does not concern Rabbi Ishmael and
 his colleagues." She sent back, "I request you to allow him to live."
 The emperor replied, "I have already taken an oath." She respond-
 ed, "Let me then request that you order to have the skin stripped off
 his face that I may have it to use instead of a mirror to look upon
 myself."

לא ככה ולא צעקה וענה אחת צעקה! א"ל לא על נשמתו אני צועק אלא על מצות חפלין שהולכין ממנו. א"ל הקיסר עדיין אחת בוסח כאלקיד. א"ל הן נקטלני ולו יצא. "סיד יצתה נשמתו שר"ן ר' ישמעאל:

15: ג' א"ל

3

ואחריו הוציאו ר' עקיבא בן יוסף דורש סגרי אותיות ומנלה פנים בחורה כמו שנמסרו למשה מסיני וכשהוציאו לדריגה בא סכתא לקיסר שמלך ערביא מחפשט בארצו. נחץ ללכת וצוה לחבוש את ר' עקיבא בבית האסירין עד שישוב מן המלחמה. 120 וכשכא מן המלחמה צוה להוציאו. וסורקין את כשרו כמסרקות כחל וכל סריקה וסריקה שהיו סורקין ה' אומר ר' עקיבא צדיק הוא ה' הצור חסים פעלו, כי כל דרכיו משפט, אל. אמונה ואין עול, צדיק וישר הוא. 13 יצתה ב"ת קול ואמר אשריד ר' עקיבא שהיה צדיק וישר ויצתה נשמתו כצדיק וישר. וכשנפטר בא א"ל הנביא וסר 125 לטוב ונטלו על כתיפו ונשאו חסשה פרסאות ופגע בו ר' יהושע הגרסי א"ל וכי אינך כהן. א"ל גופן של צדיקים אינו מטמא. והלך עמו יהושע הגרסי עד שהגיע למערה אחת מאוד יפה וכיון שנכנסו שם מצאו שם מטה יפה וער דולק. נטלו א"ל ו"ל דרך מראשותיו ור' יהושע דרך מרגלותיו והשכיבוהו על אוהו מטה וה' 130 מלאכי השרת בוכים עליו שלשה ימים ושלשה לילות ואחר כך קברוהו באוהה מערה וכיום של סחרו נטלו א"ל ו"ל והביאו בישיבה של מעלה לדרוש ככתרי אוהיות כישיבה של מעלה והיו מתקצצות כל הנשמות של צדיקים וחסידים לשמוע מדרשות:

new version of his miraculous burial

4

ואחריו הוציאו ר' חנינא בן חרדיון 135 ר' חנינא בן חרדיון שה' נעים בפני הקב"ה ואדם ומעולם לא עלה קללח חכירו על מטחו (ע"ל שפחו). וכשצוה הקיסר ברוסי שלא ללמוד תורה מה עשה ר' חנינא בן חרדיון עמד והקהיל קהילות ברכים וישב לו כשוקי של רוסי וה' לומר ועוסק דורש בחורה. וצוה הקיסר לכתוב בספר תורה ולשרפו. נטלו הקוסטנר וברט

executioner

After Rabbi Akibah, Rabbi Hanina Ben Teradion was brought forth. 14 It was said about Rabbi Hanina Ben Teradion that his behavior was equally becoming to the Holy One, blessed be He, and to his fellow men. Never did a curse against his neighbor rise upon his lips. When the Roman emperor forbade the study of Torah, what did Rabbi Hanina Ben Teradion do? He arose, convoked public assemblies, and sat in the marketplace of Rome where he taught and occupied himself with interpreting Torah. The emperor commanded that Rabbi Hanina be wrapped in the scroll of the Torah and burned. The executioner seized Rabbi Hanina. He wrapped him in the Torah scroll, kindled the fire, and took tufts of sheep's wool which he soaked in water and placed upon Rabbi Hanina's heart so that he would not die too quickly. 17 Rabbi Hanina's daughter was standing nearby, and cried to her father, "Oh, oh, father! Must I watch you [die] this way?" He answered her, "It pleases me, my daughter, to have you see

13

peror said to him, "Until now you never wept or cried out. Yet now you do!" 10

Rabbi Ishmael replied, "Not for my own soul am I crying out—but for [the privilege of observing] the precept of laying phylacteries [upon my forehead], which now is lost to me."

"Yet you still trust in your God!" said the emperor.

"Let Him kill me if He will," said Rabbi Ishmael. "I shall still hope in Him." 11 Thereupon, his soul departed from Rabbi Ishmael.

Next they brought forth Rabbi Akibah, the son of Joseph. Rabbi Akibah was able to offer interpretations for the crownlets upon the letters of the Torah, and he revealed meanings in the Torah just as they had been transmitted to Moses at Sinai. 12 When they brought him forth to be executed, a letter to the emperor arrived informing him that the king of Arabia had invaded his territory. The emperor hastened to depart, and ordered that Rabbi Akibah be imprisoned until his return from war. After he returned, he ordered Rabbi Akibah to be brought forth, and they carded his flesh with steel combs. Each time the steel comb entered his flesh, Rabbi Akibah proclaimed, "Righteous is the Lord. The Rock!—His deeds are perfect; yea, all His Ways are just; a faithful God, never false; true and upright is He." 13

An oracular voice came forth and declared, "Blessed art thou, Rabbi Akibah. For you were righteous and just, and now your soul has departed you, righteous and just."

After he died, Elijah the prophet, of blessed memory, took Rabbi Akibah's corpse on his shoulders and carried him a distance of five parasangs. On the way, Elijah met Rabbi Joshua the Grits-Dealer. 14 He asked Elijah, "Are you not a priest?" Elijah answered, "The corpse of a righteous man does not impart impurity." 15 Rabbi Joshua the Grits-Dealer accompanied Elijah until they came to a certain cave of extraordinary beauty. They entered the cave and found inside it a handsome bed and a burning candle. Elijah, of blessed memory, lifted Akibah by his head, and Rabbi Joshua the Grits-Dealer took him by his feet, and they laid the body upon the bed. For three days and for three nights the angelic host wept over Rabbi Akibah. Afterward, they buried him in that cave, and the following day Elijah, of blessed memory, took Rabbi Akibah and brought him to the heavenly academy where he interpreted the meaning of the crownlets upon the letters of the Torah. And all the righteous and pious souls gathered to hear Rabbi Akibah's interpretations.

170 בספר תורה והצית את האור ונטל ספונגין של צמר ושריין כסם
ונתן על לבו כרי שלא חצא נשמתו כמדרה. ¹⁷ ויהי בחור עוסד
ואומר אוי לי אבא שראיתך בכך ¹⁸ והוא משיב ואמר לה טוב
לי כתי שראיתני בכך. וחלמידיו היו עוסדין עליו ואומרים רבינו מה
אתה רואה. אמר להם אני רואה גילין נשרפין ואוחיות פורצות
171 והתחיל לבכות. אמרו לו חלמידיו מפני מה אתה בוכה. אמר להם
אם אני לבדי נשרף לא הי' הדבר קשה לי ועכשיו אני נשרף
וספר תורה עמי. אמר לו הקוסטיר ר' אם אני מסתלק את
הספונגין של צמר מעל לך כרי שחצא נשמתך מדרה מביאני אחת
לחיי עולם הבא? א"ל הן. אמר לו השכעה לי. נשבע לו. מיד
172 כשנשבע לו הרבה הקוסטיר את השלהבת ונטל הספונגין ויצחה
נשמתו. ואף הקוסטיר השליך עצמו כאש ונשרף. יצחה בת קול
ואומרת ר' חנינא בן חרדיון והקוסטיר מווסנים לחיי עולם הבא.
על זה בוכה ר' ואמר יש קונה עולמו בשעה אחת כגון זה הקוסטיר
ויש אדם שעובד כל ימי חייו ומפסיד את שכרו בשעה אחת כגון
173 יש יוחנן כהן גדול ששמש שמונים שנה ככהונה גדולה ולבסוף נעשה
צדוק: ¹⁸

ואחריו הוציאו ר' יודא בן בכא שלא טעם שינה אלא
כשינת סוס מחי שנה עד פ' שנים. ואותו היום שהוציאוהו לירג
ערכ שבת הי' והוציאוהו לירג מט' שעות ולמעלה והתחיל סבב
174 מהם כחייבים המתינו לי מעט עד שאקיים מצוה אחת שצוה הקב"ה
עלי. א"ל עדיין אחת כוונת כאלקיד. א"ל הן. א"ל וכי עדיין יש
בה כאלקים שאחרי כוונת עליו. א"ל גדול אדוני ומהלל מאד
ולגדלו אין חק. ¹⁹ א"ל אם יש בו כח למה לא העיל אוהך ואח
חכירך מיד מלכות. א"ל את חייבים מיתה למלך גדול ונורא והוא
175 מסר אותנו ביד מלך כדי לחבוע את דמינו מידו. כאו והגירו למלך

מהלל תמ: 3

"Does this God in whom you trust," they asked Rabbi Yuda,
"still have any strength left him?"
"Great indeed is the Lord," he replied, "and very exalted, and
to His greatness there is no end of searching."
"If your God still has strength," they asked, "then why has He
not saved you and your colleagues from this kingdom?"
Rabbi Yuda answered, "A great and awesome king requires our
deaths. He has merely handed us over to your ruler so as later to
requite our blood from his hands."
Those men went and told the emperor what Rabbi Yuda had
said. The emperor summoned him and asked, "Is it true or not what
my men have told me you said?"
Rabbi Yuda replied, "It is true."

His students stood next to him, and asked, "Our teacher, what
do you see?"

He replied, "I see scrolls of parchment aflame and letters flying
up [through the air]." Then he began to weep, and his students
asked him, "Why are you weeping?"

He answered, "If I alone were being burned, it would not
grieve me. But the scroll of the Torah is now being burned with
me."

The executioner addressed Rabbi Hanina, "Rabbi! If I were to
remove the tufts of wool from above your heart and let you die
quickly, would you promise to bring me to eternal life in the world-
to-come?"

Rabbi Hanina answered, "Yes."

The executioner said, "Swear to me." Rabbi Hanina took an
oath, and as soon as he had, the executioner fanned the flames,
removed the tufts of wool, and Rabbi Hanina's soul departed him.
Likewise, the executioner threw himself upon the flames and was
consumed by the fire.

An oracular voice thereupon declared, "Rabbi Hanina and his
executioner have both gained entrance to eternal life in the world-to-
come."

About this incident, Rabbi Judah lamented, "Some men gain
eternal life for themselves in a single moment, like that executioner,
while others work all their lives to win this reward and then lose it
in a single moment, like Yohanan the High Priest who served in the
High Priesthood for eighty years and became a Sadducee at the very
end of his life."²⁰

Next they brought forth Rabbi Yuda ben Baba. ²¹ From the time
he was eighteen years old until he was eighty, Rabbi Yuda never
tasted the pleasure of sleep for longer than a nap. ²² The day he was
brought forth for execution was a Friday, late in the afternoon, and
Rabbi Yuda beseeched his captors, "Wait for me just a little until I
fulfill one precept the Holy One, blessed be He, has commanded
me."

They said to him, "You still trust in your God!"
He answered, "Yes."

The emperor said, "How insolent you people are! You stand upon the threshold of death, and you still keep up your insolence!" Rabbi Yuda responded, "O Caesar! Wicked man! Son of a wicked man! Did the Lord not see His temple destroyed, His righteous and pious servants murdered? And yet He did not make haste to avenge them at once."

Rabbi Yuda's students said, "Our teacher, you should have flattered the emperor with words of cajolery."

He answered, "Have you not learned that any one who flatters a wicked man is destined to fall into his hands." Then he said to the emperor, "By your life, Caesar, permit me to fulfill one commandment. Its name is the Sabbath, and it is [like] the world-to-come."

The emperor replied, "Was it to fulfill *this* request I agreed to listen to you!"

Rabbi Yuda at once began to sanctify the Sabbath with the verses, "The heaven and the earth were completed," and so forth (Gen. 2:1 ff.). He uttered them in a pleasing and loud voice, and all who stood around him were amazed. But when he reached the end of the last verse, "Which in creating God had done," they did not let him complete it. The emperor ordered that Rabbi Yuda be executed, and his servants executed him. Rabbi Yuda's soul departed him just as the sage pronounced "God."

An oracular voice came forth and declared, "Blessed art thou, Rabbi Yuda! You resembled an angel, and your soul departed you with the name of God."

The emperor gave his servants commands. They cut Rabbi Yuda's limbs apart and threw them to the dogs, and Rabbi Yuda was never brought to funeral or given burial.

After him, Rabbi Yuda Ben Dema was brought forth. That day was the eve before the holiday of Shabuot, and Rabbi Yuda said to the emperor, "Upon your life! Grant me a short reprieve until I can fulfill the commandments of Shabuot. Allow me to sanctify the day in order to praise the Holy One, blessed be He, who gave us the Torah."

The emperor said to him, "Do you still hold trust in the Torah and in the God who gave it?"

"Yes," Rabbi Yuda replied.

"What reward will you receive for this Torah of yours?" the emperor asked.

אמר דבריו. שלח המלך אליו ואמר לו אמת שהגידו לי ספק א
לא. א"ל אמת הוא. א"ל הקיסר כמה עני פנים אחס שעל פתח
מיתה אחס עומדים ועדיין עוים אחס. א"ל ר' יודא אוי לך קיסר
רשע בן רשע הלוא ראה/קרבן כיתו והריגת חסידיו וצדיקיו ולא
עשה קנאה להנקם מיד. אמרו לי חלמידיו רבינו הי לך להחניף
אותו. אמר להם וכי לא למדתם שכל המחניף לרשע שופו נפל
לירו. א"ל בחיך קיסר המתיח לי עד שאקיים מצוה אחת ושבת
שבת והוא עולם הבא. א"ל לזה שמעתי לעשות שאלתך! מיד
התחיל בקידוש היום ויכלו השמים והארץ והי' אומר בנעימות ובקול
גורם והי' חסידים כל העומדים עליו. וכיון שהגיע עד ברא אלפים
לעשות לה הניחוהו לנסור וצורה הקיסר לדרגו והרגוהו ויצתה
נשמתו באלפים. יצתה בן קול ואוס' אשריך ר' יודא שהיית דומה
למלאך ויצתה נשמתך באלפים. וצורה ותחברו איברים
והשליכוהו לכלבים ולא הוספר ולא הוקבר:

ואחריו הוציאו ר' יודא בן דמא אותו היום ערב שכעו
הי' א"ל ר' יודא לקיסר חייך המתיח לי מעט עד שאקיים מצוה
עצת ואקדשו כדי לשבת הקב"ה שנתן לנו החורה. א"ל הקיסר
עדיין אזה כוונת כחורה ובאלפים שנחנה. א"ל הן. א"ל קיסר מה
שכרה של חורחך. א"ל עלי אמר דוד ע"ה ומה רב טובך אשר
עשית לי א"ל הקיסר אין שוטים בעולם כמו אחס סוכרים
שיש עולם אחר. א"ל אין שוטים בעולם כמו אחס סוכרים באלפים
חיים ואוי לך אוי לבושהך ואוי לחרפתך כשתראה מוחנו עם השם
באור החיים ואחא חשוכ כשאל חחיות כסדרנה התחנה. מיד
הרה אפי של הקיסר עליו צוה לקשרו כשערו ראו כונן הסוס
19 וצוה לשטן ככל רוח של רומי ואחר כך צוה ותחברו איברים.

"It is what David, may he rest in peace, said," the sage answered. "How great is Your goodness, reserved for those who fear You."

The emperor exclaimed, "No fools in this world are like you people—if you believe in a world-to-come!"

"And no fools in the world are there like you," Rabbi Yuda responded, "who deny the Eternal Lord. Oh, oh! The shame, the disgrace you will feel when you see us united with the Holy Name in light eternal, while you reside in the lowest, deepest depths of hell!"

The emperor burned with anger against Rabbi Yuda, and ordered that he be tied by the hair upon his head to the tail of a horse and dragged through Rome in all its expanse. After this was done, he gave orders for the sage to be cut up limb by limb.

Elijah, of blessed memory, then came, gathered Rabbi Yuda's limbs, and buried him in a certain cave near the river that descends to Rome. For thirty days, the Romans all heard the sound of lament and weeping from inside that cave, and they went and informed the emperor.

וְכַאֲשֶׁר אֵלֵינוּ לֵאמֹר וְלִקַּח הָאֵלִים וְקָבְּנוּ כַּמֶּעֱרָה אֶחָד הַסְּמוּכָה לְנֹרָה
הַיּוֹדֵד לִפְנֵי רֹמִי וּשְׁמָעוּ כָּל רוֹמִיִּים קוֹל נְהִי וְכִי כָּל שְׁלִשִׁים יוֹם
בְּחֹךְ אוֹתָהּ מַעֲרָה וּכְאֹו וְהִגִּידוּ לְקִיסָר. אָמַר לָהֶם אֵם הִיא הָעוֹלָם
נִהַפֵּךְ לַחֲוֹה וְכוּ' לֹא אֶשְׁקֹט עַד שְׁאֶסְלַח רְצוֹנִי כְּאוֹתוֹן עֶשְׂרֵה
195 וְקִנִּים כְּאִשֶּׁר נִשְׁכַּעְתִּי. וְהִיא שֵׁם אֶחָד מִכֻּמְבֵּי רוֹמִי וְאָמַר לְקִיסָר
אֲרוֹנִי קִיסָר דַּע כִּי הִסְכַּלְתָּ כּוֹה וּשְׁנֵי הִרְכָּה מֵאֵד שְׁשִׁלְתָּ יָד
כַּעֵם הִיא בְּלִי חֲנִינָה. דַּע כִּי חָתִי לָךְ מֵרָחֵק בְּאֶחָד מֵהָרִי כְּתִיב
בְּחֹרֶר הַיְּהוּדִים אֶל רְחוֹם וְחֶנֶן אֶרֶץ אֲפִים. וְעוֹד כְּתִיב בְּחֹרֶם
וּמִשְׁלֵם לְשׁוֹנָאֵיו אֶל פְּנֵיו לְהַאֲכִידָהּ כְּשֶׁשָּׁמַע הַקִּיסָר כִּי חָתָה אִפּוֹ
200 עַל אוֹתוֹ וְקָן וְצוּה לְחַנּוּק. כְּשֶׁשָּׁמַע הָוֶן כִּי מִיָּד וּמִלֵּא אֵם עֲצָמוֹ
מִיד. כְּשֶׁנִּחַן לֹא נִמְצָא וְלֹא נִדְרַע אָנָּה. וַיִּרְדֵּךְ הַקִּיסָר חֲרָה גְּדוֹלָה 26
וְלֹא שָׁב אִפּוֹ כָּל וְאֵם וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נִטְוִיהָ: 27

וְאַחֲרָיו הוֹצִיאוּ אֶת ר' חוֹצְפִית הַמַּחְזִירָנָם 28
עָלָיו עַל ר' חוֹצְפִית הַמַּחְזִירָנָם שֶׁהָיָה בֶן מֵאָה וּשְׁלִשִׁים שָׁנָה כְּשֶׁהִתְיַאֵוְהוּ
285 לִירֵד וְהָיָה יָפֵה חֹזֵר וְיָפֵה מֵרָאָה וְהָיָה רֹמִי לְמַלְאֵךְ הָ צְבָאוֹת.
כָּאֹו וְהִגִּידוּ לְאֵלֶיךָ אֵם יָפִיו וְאֵם שִׁיכְחוּ וְאִסְרוּ לוֹ כְּחִיךְ אֲרוֹנִי חֲרָם
עַל הָוֶן הַזֶּה. אָמַר הַקִּיסָר לְר' חוֹצְפִית כְּמָה שְׁנֵים אֶחָד אֵל מֵאָה
וּשְׁלִשִׁים שָׁנָה לְכָד מִיּוֹם אֶחָד וּכְשֶׁחֲשִׂי מִסָּךְ שְׁחַמְחִין לִי עַד שְׁחַמְלָא
יּוֹסִי. אָמַר לִי הַקִּיסָר מָה לָּךְ שְׁחַמְחִין הַיּוֹם אוֹ לְמָחָר. אָמַר לִי
290 כְּדִי שְׁאִקִּים עוֹד שְׁחִי מִצּוֹת. אָמַר לִי מָה מִצְוָה עָתָה רְצוּהָ לַעֲשׂוֹת.
אָמַר לִי לְקַרָּא קְרִיאָת שְׁמַע עֲרִכִית וְשִׁחִיתָ לְהַמְלִיךְ עָלַי אֵם שֵׁם
הַגְּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא הַמִּיּוֹחָר. אָמַר לִי הַקִּיסָר עוֹי פְּנִים וְעוֹי נֶפֶשׁ עַד מָתִי
אֶחָד כּוֹסְחִים כְּאֶלְכֶם שְׁאִין כּוֹ כֹּחַ לְהַעֲלִי אֶחָד מִיָּד שְׁרָרִי
אֶחָד חֲרָבִי אֵם כִּיחֹו וְאֵם נִכְלָח עֲכָרִיו נָחַם סְכִיכוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וְאִין
305 קִיבֵר וְעָתָה אֶלְכֶךָ וְקָן הוּא וְאִין לוֹ כֹּחַ לְהַעֲלִי עוֹר. שְׁאֵלָה הִיא כּוֹ
כֹּחַ הִיא נֶקֶם נֶקְמָתוֹ וְנֶקֶם עָמוֹ וְנֶקֶם כִּיחֹו כְּמֹו שְׁעִישָׁה מִפְּרַעְרָה
וּמִסִּירָא וּמִכָּל מַלְכֵי כְּנַעַן. וְכְּשֶׁשָּׁמַע ר' חוֹצְפִית כִּי כֹּחַ בְּכִי גְּדוֹל
וְאֶחָד כְּבִגְרִיו וַיִּקְרַע עַל גִּרְףָּהּ הַשֵּׁם יִחִי וְעַל חֲרָפָתוֹ וְאָמַר לְקִיסָר
אֵם לָךְ קִיסָר מָה חָעֵשָׂה לְיוֹם אֶחָדוֹן כְּשֶׁפִּקֵּד הַשֵּׁי עַל רוֹמִי וְעַל
310 אֶלְכֶם. אָמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ עַד מָתִי אֶחָדוֹךְ עִם זֶה וְצוּה לְהִרְגוֹ וּלְסַלְלוֹ
וְחִלּוֹהוּ. וְאֹו כָּאֹו שְׁרִיו וְחִמְסִיו וְחָלוּ פְּנֵיו לְקַבְּרוֹ כִּי חָסְלוֹ עַל שִׁיכְחוּ.
וַיִּמְאֵר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְקַבְּרוֹ אוֹתוֹ. וַיְכַאֵף חֲלָסִידָיו וַיִּקְבְּרוּהוּ וַיִּסְפְּדוּהוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ
גְּדוֹל וְכָבֵד מֵאֵד:

back to chaos and void I will not rest, not until I have satisfied myself with those ten sages just as I have sworn to do."
One of the wise men of Rome happened to be present, and he said to the emperor, "My lord, O Caesar! Recognize the folly of your acts, how completely you have erred in sin by sending forth your hand against the people of God without compassion. Know that a bitter end awaits you, for it is written in the Jewish Scriptures, *God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger; yet it is also written there, But He instantly requites with destruction those who reject him.*"

When the emperor heard this, his anger burned against that elder and he ordered him to be strangled to death. When the elder heard this, he immediately rushed to circumcise himself, and once he had been strangled, his corpse vanished and could not be discovered anywhere.
The emperor was seized with violent trembling. Nonetheless, he did not relent in his anger, and his hand was still stretched forth.

Rabbi Hutzapit the translator was brought out next. About Rabbi Hutzapit, it was said that he was a hundred and thirty years old the day he was brought to be executed, yet he was so handsome in appearance he resembled an angel of the Lord of Hosts. [The emperor's] men went and told him about Rabbi Hutzapit's beauty and old age, and said, "We beseech you, our lord, pity this old man."

The emperor asked Rabbi Hutzapit, "How old are you?"
The sage answered, "Tomorrow I will be a hundred and thirty years old. Allow me, I beseech you, to complete my days."
The emperor asked, "What difference does it make if you die today or tomorrow?"

Rabbi Hutzapit responded, "The chance to observe two more precepts."
"And which commandment do you wish to observe now?" the emperor asked.

"The recitation of the *shema* in the evening and in the morning," Rabbi Hutzapit replied, "whereby I will crown as king over me the name of the great, awesome, and sole Lord."

The emperor exclaimed, "Shameless and greedy people! How long will you trust in your God? He has no power to rescue you from my hands. My ancestors destroyed His temple. They strewed the corpses of His servants around Jerusalem. No one was there to bury them. And now your God Himself is old, He has no more

strength to save you. For if He had any strength, would He not already be avenging Himself, His people, His temple, as He once did to Pharaoh, Siserah, and all the kings of Canaan?"
When Rabbi Hutzapit heard this, he let out a terrible cry of lament, seized his clothes, and rent them in mourning over the blaspheming of blessed name and its shame. "Woe unto you, Caesar," he said. "What will you do on the final day when the Blessed One judges Rome and your gods?"

מאת 6:35
225 ימים 5:5

30 ימים 15:5
old

fasted from 22-95

ואחריו הוציאו את ר' חנינא בן חכנאי ואחריו
היום ערב שבת ה' וכל ימיו היה יושב בתענית מן שנים עשר
שנים עד חשעים שנים וחמש. אמרו לו חלשיו רבי רענן
שחטעום כלום קודם שחיהרג. אמר להם עד עתה התענית ולא
אכלתי ולא שתיתי ועתה איני יודע איזה דרך אלך ואחם אומרים
לי לאכול ולשתות. החליל בקדוש היום וכלו השמים עד ויקדש
230 אותו ולא הניחורו לנסור עד שהרגוהו. ויצאה בת קול ואמרה
אשרך ר' חנינא בן חכנאי שהיית קדוש ויצתה נשמתך בקדושה
בחיבת ויקדש:
ואחריו הוציאו ר' ישיבב הסופר. אמרו עליו על ר'
ישיבב הסופר שה' בן חשעים שנה אותו היום שהוציאוהו ליהרג.
235 כיון שהוציאו אותו באו הלמידיו ואמרו לו רבינו חזרה מה חזא
עלינו? אמר להם בני עתירה חזרה להשקח מן ישראל לפי שאוסה
הרשעה העיוה פניו והעריכה סוד לאבר מרגלותיו מטמ והלואי
שהייתי כפרה על הדור. אבל אני חזא שאין לך רחוב ורחוב
שכרמי שאין בה חלל חרב שעתידיה אוסה הרשעה לשפך דם נקי
240 מן ישראל. אמר לו רבינו ומה חזא עלינו. אמר להם החויק איש
כרעהו ואהבו שלום ומשפט אולי יש חקוה. אמר לי קיסר וקן בן
כסה שנים אחה. אמר לי היום בן חשעים שנה אנכי ועד לא
יצאתי ממעי אמי ה' גוירה סאח הקב"ה לספור אחי ואח חכירי
* בדרך כדי לחכות דמינו מידך. אמר לי וכי יש עולם שני. אמר
245 לי הן. ואחה אזי ואוי לכושחך כשיפרע דם חסידיו מידך. אמר
הקיסר סהרו להרגו גם זה ואראה כח וגבורתו של אלקי זה ומה
יעשה לי בעולם שני. צוה עליו ושרפוהו;

8

9

Rabbi Yeshivav replied, "This day I am ninety years old, and even before I came forth from my mother's womb, it was decreed by the Holy One, blessed be He, that my colleagues and I would be handed over into your hands so as to avenge our blood from them."
"And does there exist another world [when this act of vengeance against me will take place]?" the emperor asked.
"Yes," the sage answered. "And woe to you! Woe to your shame when He will requite the blood of His righteous creatures from your hands."
The emperor commanded, "Quickly kill this one, too. And let me behold the power and strength of this God. Let me see what He will do to me in another world." So he commanded, and they burned Rabbi Yeshivav to death.

17

The emperor said, "Am I to haggle with this man forever?" He commanded that Rabbi Hutzapit be executed, and his servants stoned him to death and hung him. Later, the emperor's officers and counselors came and beseeched him to permit Rabbi Hutzapit to be buried because they had taken pity upon the sage's elderly age. The emperor allowed the sage to be buried, and Rabbi Hutzapit's students came and buried him, making a great and solemn lament over their teacher.

Next they brought forth Rabbi Hanina ben Hakhinai.²⁹ That day was Friday, the Sabbath eve, on which Rabbi Hanina used to sit in fasting from the time he was twelve until now when he was ninety-five. His students asked him, "Our teacher, do you wish to taste something before your execution?"

He said, "All my life until now I have fasted [on this day], never eating or drinking. And now that I do not know where I am going, you tell me to eat and drink!" He began to recite the blessing that sanctifies the Sabbath day, "The heaven and the earth were completed,"³⁰ until he reached "and He made it holy," but even before the sage was able to complete that verse, he was executed.

An oracular voice came forth and proclaimed, "Blessed art thou, Rabbi Hanina ben Hakhinai! For you were holy, and now your soul has departed you in holiness just as you pronounced the word 'And He made it holy.'"

After Rabbi Hanina, they brought out Rabbi Yeshivav the Scribe.³¹ It was said that Rabbi Yeshivav was ninety years old on the day he was brought forth to be executed. His students came and asked him, "Our teacher, what will be the fate of the Torah?"³²

Rabbi Yeshivav replied, "It is destined that the Torah will be forgotten from Israel because this wicked nation has shamelessly plotted to destroy our most precious jewels [the sages] among us. If my death could only serve as atonement for our generation! Yet I behold [this vision]: No street in Rome will be without a corpse slain by the sword. For this wicked nation is fated to shed the innocent blood of Israel."

His students asked, "And what will be our fate, our teacher?"

He answered, "Hold fast to each other. Love peace and justice, perhaps there will be hope."

The emperor asked Rabbi Yeshivav, "Old man, what is your age?"

ואחריו הוציאו ר' אלעזר בן שמוע. ¹⁰ ואחריו יום אמר
עליו על ר' אלעזר בן שמוע שהי' סאה וחמשה שנים וסקטנו
250 עד סוף ימיו לא שמע אדם שהוציא תפלות מפיו ולא נחקט עם
חביריו בין בדבור בין במעשה והי' עניו ושפל רוח וישב כחענית
שמונים שנה. ואחריו היום שנדרג יום כפורים הי' אכאו תלמידיו
לפניו ואמרו לו רבינו מה אהה רואה. אמר להם אני רואה ר'
יודא בן בכא ששמיא'ם את סטחו ואח' סטח ר' עקיבא בן יוסף
260 נגמסוהו אצלו והם מחווכחים בדבר הלכה יחד זה עם זה. אמרו לו
ומי מכריע ביניהם. אמר להם ר' ישמעל כג'. אמרו לו מי מנעח.
אמר להם ר' עקיבא על שטרך ככל כחו בחורה. אמר להם בני

רואה אני עוד שנשמח כל צדיק וצדיק מטררח את עצמה במי
השילוח כדי ליכנס היום כטהרה כישיבה של מעלה לשמוע את
דרשוהו ר' עקיבא בן יוסף שירש להם מענייני של יום וכל מלאך
ומלאך מביא קדראורו של והכ לכל צדיק וצדיק לישב עליו
בטרה. צוה הקיסר להרגו. ויצאה כח קול ואמרת אשריך ר'
אלעזר בן שמוע שהיית טהור ויצאה נשמחך כטהרה: 27

סליק מדרש אלה אזכרה:

Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamu'a was brought forth next.³³ On that day, it was said, Rabbi Eleazar was a hundred and five years old, and from his infancy until the end of his life no one had ever heard him utter a frivolous word, nor had he once quarreled with his neighbor, not in word or in deed. He was a humble and modest man, and he had fasted for eighty years of his life.

The day of Rabbi Eleazar's execution was Yom Kippur. His students came to him and asked, "Our teacher, what is it you behold?"

He answered, "I behold Rabbi Yuda ben Baba whose bier is raised aloft, and the bier of Rabbi Akibah ben Joseph is next to it. The two are disputing with each other over a point of law."

"And who is there to decide the law between them?" Rabbi Eleazar's students asked.

"Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest," he replied.

"And who wins the dispute?" they asked.

"Rabbi Akibah," the sage said. "Because he has toiled with all his strength over the Torah." Then he said to them, "My children, I also behold the soul of each and every righteous creature purifying itself in the waters of Shiloah in order to enter the heavenly academy in purity this day and to hear the sermons that Rabbi Akibah ben Joseph will preach on the matters of the day. Each and every angel will bring golden thrones upon which the righteous souls will all sit in purity."

The emperor ordered the sage to be executed. Then an oracular voice came forth and proclaimed, "Blessed art thou, Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamu'al You were pure and your soul has departed you in purity."³⁴

Translated from the Hebrew and annotated
by David Stern

NOTES

1. This seemingly bizarre act on the emperor's part makes more sense in light of the gloss in the Legend of the Ten Martyrs, Version II (Jellinek, VI, pp. 19-20). After he studies Ex. 21:16, this text tells us, "The emperor went and plastered the walls of his house with shoes. He then sent for Rabbi Shimeon ben Gamliel and his colleagues and said to them, 'If a man kidnaps another man from among the children of Israel and sells him, what is the law concerning that man?' They replied, 'He is guilty of death.' The emperor said, 'If so, you are guilty of death. Prepare yourselves to accept the judgement of heaven.' They asked him, 'On account of what?' The emperor answered, 'Because of Joseph's brothers who sold him, as it is written, "And they sold Joseph" (Gen. 37:28), and it is also written, "... because they have sold the virtuous man for silver and the poor man for a pair of shoes." ' (Amos 2:6). It was for this reason that wicked man plastered the walls of his house with shoes: in order to make the sages recognize what his brothers had sold Joseph for, as it is said, 'for a pair of shoes,' that is, for the money a pair of shoes costs." While Gen. 37:28 states merely that Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver, the legend that the money was used to buy shoes is an ancient one, attested to both in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, the Palestinian Aramaic translation of the Bible, *ad* Gen. 37:28 and in The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Zebulun, Chap. 4, in both apparently on the basis of a traditional association of Amos 2:6, and possibly Amos 8:6, with the Joseph story.

2. Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha is among the most prominent members of the second generation of Tannaim, and lived in the first half of the second century in the common era. He is traditionally believed to have been the founder of one of the two important exegetical schools of his age, his sole rival being his contemporary Rabbi Akibah. Rabbi Ishmael is also an eponymous hero of the early mystical Heikhalot literature which, as noted already in the Introduction, is one of our earliest sources for the legend of the ten martyrs. The Ineffable Name of God he is said to have pronounced here is presumably the Tetragrammaton which, in mystical literature, is attributed with extraordinary, supernatural powers; according to Rabbinic sources, the knowledge of the correct pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton was possessed only by the High Priest, who was permitted to pronounce it solely on such rare occasions as Yom Kippur during the special ritual sacrifice ordained for that day. The second century Rabbi Ishmael ben Elishah was not, however, High Priest (since that position had ceased to exist with the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.), and it is likely that the later Rabbinic tradition confused him with another, earlier Ishmael ben Elishah who was High Priest; in Berakhot 7a, this Ishmael ben Elishah reports, "Once I entered the Holy of Holies to burn the incense and I saw Akatriel the Lord of Hosts [Akatriel being one of God's names] seated upon the high and exalted throne. He said to me, 'Ishmael, my son, bless me.' I said to Him, 'May it

be Thy will that Thy pity will conquer Thine anger and that Thy mercy will rule over Thy judgment, and that Thou wilt act with Thy creatures according to the principle of mercy and allow them the benefit of judgment.' He nodded His head to me in consent." For some discussion of his confused identification, see A. J. Heschel, *The Theology of Ancient Judaism* (Hebrew, London, 1962, Vol. 1, p. xxvii, note 3), and literature cited therein. As Dr. Eliezer Slomovic has pointed out to me, the fact that God calls Ishmael "my son" here may have something to do with the tradition in our text connecting the sage with Gabriel.

3. This passage is problematic, since usually a decree is not valid until it has been signed. Compare, however, Numbers Rabbah 11:6 and Rosh Hashana 18a.

4. The six other handsome men in the world are, according to Version II (Jellinek, VI, p. 23), Adam, Jacob, Joseph, Saul, Absalom, and Rabbi Abahu.

5. Justice, literally the principle of justice (*midat hadin*) is a concept that first appears in Rabbinic literature as an attribute of God alongside His parallel attribute of mercy (*midat harahamim*). In later Rabbinic literature, these two attributes come increasingly to be seen as virtual hypostases of the divine power, almost as independent forces in heaven, and by the fourth century the principle of justice is described as a kind of prosecuting angel whose role in heaven resembles the one Satan serves in the Book of Job, as an antagonist of mankind. The Throne of Glory, *kisei hakavod*, upon which God sits, is a frequent subject of the Heikhalot literature, which records the songs sung by the heavenly creatures who bear it. In our text, the throne appears to be little more than a synecdoche for God.

6. The Biblical nation of Edom, by tradition believed to have descended from Esau, was identified with Rome in Rabbinic typology; for a thorough discussion of the identification, see Gerson D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," (in A. Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Cambridge, Mass. 1967, pp. 19-48). Samael is the angel identified with Satan, at least from the third century on, and he is also represented as the guardian angel of Rome, and therefore as the antagonist of Michael, the guardian angel of Israel. It has been suggested that his name means "the blind angel" (see, Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, New York, 1974, pp. 385-388). Metatron (or Matatron) is identified, in Heikhalot traditions as well as in the Book of Jubilees, with the Biblical figure Enoch who "walked with God" (Gen. 5:22); according to these traditions, Enoch ascended to heaven and was changed into an angel in addition to becoming the master-scribe who recorded the deeds of mankind; see Scholem, pp. 377-381.

7. Two sages by the name of Shimeon ben Gamliel are prominent figures in early Rabbinic history, both of whom occupied the office of patriarch or *nasi*, the official presidency of the Sanhedrin. Recognized by the Roman government as the head of the Jews, the patriarch held religious and political authority within the internal affairs of the Jewish community, outside Palestine as well as inside. The position was a hereditary one, and the patriarchs, scions of the fam-

ly of Hillel, claimed that Hillel himself was descended from the house of David, a claim which, true or not, bolstered the legitimacy of their own line. Rabbi Shimeon ben Gamliel mentioned in our text is probably Shimeon ben Gamliel II who lived in the first half of the second century and was one of the few survivors after the Romans destroyed the house of the patriarch in revenge following the Bar Kokhba Revolt. It is possible, however, that our legend has confused him with Shimeon ben Gamliel I, the nasi during the time of the Destruction who was traditionally believed to have died a martyr (Semahot 8).

8. Rabbi Ishmael's face was actually so brilliant the emperor's daughter could see her own reflection in it. Version II (Jellinek, Vol. VI, p. 24) adds the following note, a slightly garbled version of the account in Abodah Zarah 11b: "The brilliant countenance of Rabbi Ishmael is still preserved in Rome in the wicked kingdom of Edom. Once every seventy years a man is brought forward, placed upon [the shoulders of] a cripple, and dressed in the clothes of Adam [e.g., skins of animals]. Then they place the skin of Rabbi Ishmael over his face, hang a tablet weighing four zuz upon his neck, and a public announcer proclaims before him, 'Let him who can see, see. If he will not see it now, he never will.' And he completes the proclamation, 'Woe to this one [e.g., the cripple]! So this one [e.g., the healthy man carrying the cripple] shall rise!' And may the Holy One, blessed be He, utterly destroy Edom the wicked, in order to fulfill what is written, 'I shall unleash my revenge on Edom...' " (Ezek. 25:14). This apocryphal account is very possibly based upon the kinds of circus festivals the Roman emperors used to stage, but the significance of the spectacle described in it is far from clear. For some discussion of its historical context and meaning, see Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, New York, 1942, p. 145, note 7, and literature cited therein.

9. Hebrew *bat kol*, literally a voice, reverberating sound, or echo. Such oracular voices are frequently cited in Rabbinic literature, and are the principal means by which divine revelation occurs since prophecy ceased. On the use of the term and its meaning, see Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, New York, 1950, pp. 194-199. Note that in the context of our text, the oracular voice appears almost as the public voice of God; it seems to contradict the more private statement God makes immediately before the bat kol speaks.

10. The text here may be slightly problematic since we have just been told that Rabbi Ishmael has ceased to cry out, and it would therefore be more logical for the emperor to ask him why he has stopped.

11. Job 13:15

12. Rabbi Akibah (50-135 C.E.) is among the most prominent members of the second generation of Tannaim, and the subject of many tales and legends in Rabbinic literature. He was especially celebrated for his unique powers of interpretation whereby he endeavored to exploit the significance of virtually every word, and sometimes letter, in the Torah. The crownlets cited in our text are the decorative flourishes scribes traditionally make upon the letters of the Torah;

however, no interpretations for these crownlets are actually preserved in Rabbinic literature, and the claim made in our text, which is repeated elsewhere about Rabbi Akibah, is probably a rhetorical exaggeration of sorts. Aside from his scholarly accomplishments, Rabbi Akibah was also famous for encouraging the Bar Kokhba Revolt—according to one source, he proclaimed Bar Kokhba to be the messiah (Lamentations Rabba 2:2)—while after the Hadrianic persecutions, he was imprisoned by the Romans for teaching Torah and eventually executed. For a different account of his martyrdom, along with his famous interpretation of Deut. 6:5 as he was dying, see Yerushalmi Berakhot 9:5.

13. Deut. 32:4.

14. Rabbi Joshua the Grits-Dealer (HaGarsl), Akibah's student, attended his teacher while he was in prison (about which, see Erubin 21b) and was present when Tinnelus Rufus condemned Akibah to death. For a slightly different version of the story of his meeting with Elijah, see Midrash Proverbs 9:2.

15. According to Mishnaic laws of ritual purity, a priest is forbidden to pollute himself by coming into contact with a human corpse, "the father of all impurity." Hence Rabbi Joshua's question, which Elijah answers by claiming that the corpse of a righteous person does not communicate impurity even to a priest like himself, presumably because the purity of righteousness overpowers any impurity brought about by death. According to the medieval German Tosafists (Yebamot 61a and Baba Mezi'ah 114b), what Elijah meant was that because Rabbi Akibah was a martyr and other Jews hesitated to bury him out of fear of the Roman government, it was permissible even for a priest to bury him, so great is the commandment of burying the dead.

16. Rabbi Hanina, or Hananiah, ben Teradion, head of the yeshiva at Sikhnin in the Galilee, was among the more illustrious sages of the second century C.E. According to the account in Semahot 8:9, he and Rabbi Judah ben Baba, after hearing of Rabbi Akibah's martyrdom, together prophesied that Judaea would soon be filled with corpses, a prophecy that was fulfilled shortly later with Rabbi Hanina's own death. For much the same account of his martyrdom as in our text, except that it takes place in isolation, see Abodah Zarah 17b-18a.

17. In other words, the executioner intended the wet tufts to prolong Rabbi Hanina's tortuous death.

18. Rabbi Judah, also known as Rabbi Judah the Prince or simply as Rabbi, was patriarch in the latter half of the second century and beginning of the third, and was responsible for the final redaction of the Mishna. Yohanan the High Priest is the Hasmonean King John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.E.), who appointed himself to the High Priesthood. The Sadducees were the rivals and opponents of the Pharisees from whom the Rabbinic sages claimed their own ideological descent.

19. Rabbi Yuda, or Judah, Ben Baba (Bava), a second century sage, was known for his exceptional piety: "All his deeds were for the sake of heaven."

After the crushing of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, he forbade the popular use of foliatum, aromatic oil of spikenard, as a sign of national mourning, and he also continued to ordain scholars in defiance of the Hadrianic prohibition. For a different account of his martyrdom, after he was discovered performing the ceremony of ordination, see Sanhedrin 14a.

20. Hebrew *sheinat sus*, "the sleep of a horse," which the rabbis defined as sixty winks (Succah 28b).

21. Ps. 145:3.

22. Rabbi Yuda, or Judah, ben Dema (Tema) lived in the middle of the second century.

23. Shabuot, Pentecost, is one of the three pilgrimage holidays and occurs in the late spring, seven weeks after Passover. According to tradition, it celebrates the giving of the Torah to Israel at Sinai.

24. Ps. 31:20.

25. Ex. 34:6; Deut. 7:10.

26. For this expression, compare Gen. 27:33.

27. Cf. Is. 5:25; 9:11, 16, 20; 10:4; Ex. 6:6; and Deut. 4:34.

28. Rabbi Hutzapit the Translator (*Hameturgeman*)—so called because he was the official "mouth-piece" for Rabban Gamliel of Yabneh and transmitted the sage's opinions to the public—lived at the beginning of the second century. According to late traditions, his body was defiled in the public market and the sight of his mutilated corpse caused the apostasy of Elishah ben Abuyah.

29. Rabbi Hanina, or Hananiah, ben Hakhinai, was a student of Akibah and lived in the late second century.

30. Gen. 2:1ff.

31. Rabbi Yeshivav the Scribe, a colleague of Akibah, lived in the latter half of the second century.

32. The text reads *torah mah tehei 'aleinu*, a very problematic phrase; I have translated *'aleinu* as *'aleiha*, on the basis of Esther Rabbah 7:18 and Nazir 50a.

33. Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamu'a, one of the last pupils of Akibah, was ordained by Rabbi Judah ben Baba and lived in the middle of the second century; it is doubtful whether he was actually martyred.

34. I wish to record a special debt of gratitude to Dr. Eliczer Slomovic who generously discussed several problems of translation with me, and supplied me with a number of the references in these notes, particularly those in notes 2, 3, and 32 above.