

Jerusalem Perspective

A Monthly Report on Research into the Words of Jesus

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Rabbinic Interpretation *kal ve-HO-mer*

Throughout the history of Judaism, the Torah has been investigated and analyzed by means of various rules of interpretation. These hermeneutic (interpretative) principles are simply statements of deductive reasoning.

Hillel, a contemporary of Herod the Great, compiled a list of seven such rules. We will focus upon the first in the list, קל וחומר (*kal ve-HO-mer*, simple and complex). This is a logical deduction that can be drawn from a simple truth about a less obvious situation, or from something known about something unknown. For example, "Silence becomes a scholar; how much more a fool" (Tosefta Pesahim 9:2). Notice the key phrase "how much more," which appears in most examples of rabbinic simple-to-complex reasoning.

In the Mishnah

The tractate Yevamot in the Mishnah preserves a הלכה (*ha-la-ḲAH*) or rabbinic legal ruling inferred from Deuteronomy 23:3 and 23:7 by means of this principle:

No Ammonite or Moabite may be admitted into the congregation of the LORD, and this is a permanent prohibition. Ammonite and Moabite women, however, may immediately be admitted [after conversion]. Egyptians and Edomites are prohibited only until the third generation, regardless of whe-

ther they be males or females.

Rabbi Shimon said, "This is deduced by the *kal ve-HO-mer* principle. If where Scripture permanently prohibited the males it permitted the females immediately, how much more should the females be permitted immediately where Scripture prohibited the males only until the third generation?" (Yevamot 8:3)

Non-Legal Contexts

Two further examples from the Mishnah illustrate this type of reasoning in non-legal contexts:

If, speaking of a "light" commandment which deals with something that is worth only an issar, the Torah said, "in order that you may prosper and have long life," how much more for "heavier" commandments in the Torah? (Hullin 12:5)

Once again the phrase "how much more" signals the use of simple-to-complex reasoning, used

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Jesus and the *te-fi-LIN* Oral Torah

As we explained in our previous issue, the Gospels attest to the fact that Jesus had tassels on the four corners of his outer robe (Matt. 9:20, 14:36; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:44). Although there is no explicit evidence in the Gospels, we have reason to suggest that he also may have worn phylacteries.

Phylacteries

The word "phylactery" is derived from the Greek *phylakterion*, and literally means a protecting charm or amulet. "Phylacteries" is an unfortunate translation, as there is little if any evidence to suggest that they were regarded as amulets in Jesus' day. The Hebrew word is תפילין (*te-fi-LIN*, the plural of *te-fi-LAH*, prayer).

te-fi-LIN refers to either of the

two small leather capsules containing tiny slips of parchment inscribed with the scriptural passages recorded in Exodus 13:1-10, 11-16, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and 11:13-21.

Today, as in Jesus' day, the *te-fi-LIN* are strapped on the forehead and the arm. The arm *te-fi-LIN* consists of one compartment containing a parchment on which all four passages are written, while the head *te-fi-LIN* is divided into four compartments each of which contains a parchment with one of the four passages written on it.

"As a Sign"

Wearing *te-fi-LIN* was an observance of the commandment to bind the commandments of the LORD "as a sign on your arm and as a

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Rabbinic Interpretation

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here to urge the observance of all the commandments, whether they are major or relatively insignificant. The specific commandment referred to, found in Deuteronomy 22:6-7, commands that a mother bird be released when caught with her young. At that time a bird was valued at one issar, about one twenty-fourth of a day's wage.

In the following passage, simple-to-complex reasoning is used to teach something about the nature of God:

Rabbi Meir said, "While the man is in agony, what does the Tongue [a name for God] say? 'My head is hurting! My arm is hurting!' If the Scripture has thus spoken: 'I agonize over the blood of the wicked,' how much more over the blood of the righteous that is shed?" (Sanhedrin 6:5)

This passage refers to Deuteronomy 21:22-23, which speaks of a criminal who is being put to death. Rabbi Meir expounds the Hebrew words קללת אלהים (*ki-le-LAT* *ʔe-lo-HIM*) as "a painful thing of God," rather than "a curse of God," and the inference therefore is that when even a criminal is enduring pain, God says, "I am in pain."

In Jesus' Teachings

The use of simple-to-complex reasoning is proportionately as fre-

quent in the teaching of Jesus as it is in the teaching of other rabbis. The Mishnah is approximately six times the size of the Gospels, and it has exactly six times as many occurrences of this hermeneutic principle: eighteen in the Mishnah to three in the teachings of Jesus.

Like Rabbi Meir, Jesus used the "If... how much more..." pattern when speaking of God's great care for his children. In the next issue of JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE we will examine the use of kal ve-HO-mer reasoning in the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus and the Oral Torah

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symbol on your forehead" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:18-21).

It might be argued that this is metaphorical language and simply means "remember well." For example, the same expression is used in Exodus 13:16. There, following the commandment to sacrifice every first-born male animal and redeem every first-born male child, the Israelites are informed that "it will be a sign on your arm and a symbol on your forehead." Obviously, this observance could not be attached to one's body.

However, by at least the second century B.C., the biblical instructions to bind the commandments of the LORD "as a sign on your arm and as a symbol on your forehead" were interpreted to mean that one was obligated to bind Scripture texts to the head and arm (Safrai, *The Jewish People in the First Century*, II, p. 799).

Contemporaries of Jesus would have viewed the wearing of *te-fi-LIN* as a biblical commandment, but in fact the literal understanding of this commandment is an interpretation, part of the Oral Torah. The word *te-fi-LIN* itself is not even found in the Bible.

Worn Everyday

In the first century, *te-fi-LIN*

were part of ordinary everyday Jewish dress. Putting on *te-fi-LIN* only during morning weekday prayers, as normally practiced today, is a later custom. In Jesus' time they were worn throughout the day, and removed only for work or when entering a place that was ritually unclean (Safrai, p. 798).

Fragments of *te-fi-LIN* dating from the first century have been found in the Judean Desert in caves near the Dead Sea. The most dramatic find, head *te-fi-LIN* dating from 1 to 50 A.D. with three of the four parchment slips still folded and securely tied in their original compartments, was published by Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin in *Tefillin from Qumran* (Israel Exploration Society, 1969).

The head *te-fi-LIN*, including the strap, was quite modest and would not have drawn attention to itself. The capsule found at Qumran is rectangular and extremely small, approximately one-half by three-fourths inch (13 by 20 mm). A small postage stamp would easily cover it.

Hypocrisy Criticized

In Matthew 23:5, Jesus criticized those who "make their phylacteries wide." As with his criticism of the public display of almsgiving (Matthew 6:2), one must not view Jesus' words as a condemnation of wearing *te-fi-LIN* in general. Rather, Jesus was condemning religious hypocrisy that led to enlarging *te-fi-LIN* as a demonstration of "higher spirituality."

Just as Jesus faulted the ostentatious wearing of *tsi-tsi-YOT* or fringes which he himself wore, he probably also was wearing *te-fi-LIN* while criticizing those who wore them hypocritically. Had he not worn *te-fi-LIN*, it is unlikely that his criticism would have been directed only at the excesses. Criticizing the way they were worn implies Jesus' acceptance of the practice and the rabbis' literal interpretation of this biblical command.

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Like the *pa-TAH*, *ka-MATS* represents the “a” sound, as in “father.” In ancient times, there was a difference in the length of these two vowels. Modern Hebrew, however, does not distinguish between them. In the system of transliteration used in *JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE*, we indicate both the *ka-MATS* and the *pa-TAH* with the letter “a.”

We have learned all the new elements in the word **אָבִי**. Together the words **אָבִי** and **אָבִי** have taught us five consonant symbols and four vowel symbols.

We also have learned that the *shin* is pronounced “sh” when there is a dot at its upper right-hand corner (שׁ), but “s” when the dot is at the upper left-hand corner (שׂ). We likewise have learned two different pronunciations of the *bet* — “b” when it has a dot in its center (בּ), and “v” when there is no dot (ב).

The Circle Drawer

As pointed out in Lessons Five and Six, *Abba* replaced the biblical *ʾa-VI* (my father) in the sense of “daddy” in rabbinic literature. This is further illustrated in a story about Honi the Circle Drawer, a Jewish miracle-worker who died in 65 B.C.

Honi received his descriptive title when he was implored to pray for rain during a severe drought. He drew a circle on the ground, stood within it and declared to God that he would not move from the circle until it began to rain. God answered his prayer.

Shimon ben Shetah, a leading Pharisaic spiritual authority of his day, was upset with this audacious attitude toward God. He sent a message to Honi: “If it were not that you are Honi, I would have placed you under a ban. But what

Hebrew Nuggets

can I do to you since you wheedle and cajole God, and he gives you what you want like a pampered child who wheedles and cajoles his father thus — *ʾa-BAʾ*, take me to bathe in warm water, wash me in

quired this extra meaning because the essence of repentance is returning to God. “Return O Israel to the LORD your God,” wrote Hosea the prophet (Hosea 14:1).

In Other Words

There are many other Hebrew words with whose letters you are now familiar. Try your hand at reading the following words, then practice by reading while covering up the transliterations we have provided:

- **יָבִיא** (*yu-VAʾ*, he will be brought)
- **שָׁאַב** (*sha-ʾAV*, he drew water)
- **שָׂבַע** (*sa-VAʿ*, he ate his fill)
- **אַבִּיב** (*ʾa-BUV*, in post-biblical Hebrew a Temple flute, and in modern Hebrew an oboe)
- **אָבִי** (*ʾav*, father)
- **עָבִיב** (*ʿav*, cloud)
- **עָשָׂב** (*ʿash*, moth)
- **בָּא** (*baʾ*, he came)
- **יָשַׁב** (*ya-SHAV*, he sat)
- **שָׁבִיעַ** (*sha-VU-aʿ*, week)
- **שָׂשׂוּ** (*SA-su*, they rejoiced)
- **שָׂשׂוּ** (*sas*, he rejoiced). Remember, the שׂ stands for the “s” sound, not the “sh” sound, when there is a dot at the upper left-hand corner of the letter.)

The addition of the *ka-MATS* also makes it possible for you to read two adjectives:

- **שָׂבַע** (*sa-VE-aʿ*, full, satisfied)
- **יָבֵשׁ** (*ya-VESH*, dry)

Final Letter

The final letter of the word **אָבִי** is *ʾA-lef*. As we have already learned, the *ʾA-lef* is a silent letter. It therefore adds nothing to the pronunciation of the word. If we pronounce only the final syllable, it is **בָּא** (*baʾ*).

You have now learned almost twenty percent of the Hebrew consonants and over thirty-five percent of the Hebrew vowels. Soon you will be able to read and pronounce correctly every word in the Hebrew Scriptures.

In Lesson Nine we will learn the word “hallelujah.”

Lesson Eight: *ka-MATS*

In the two previous lessons we learned the first two letters of the word אָבִי — ʾA-lef and bet. We also met for a second time the vowel symbol pa-TAH, pronounced as the “a” in “father.” Its symbol is the short horizontal line which we see under the first ʾA-lef in אָבִי. In this lesson we find a new vowel sign under the bet of אָבִי. This small “T”-like symbol is called ka-MATS.

cold water, give me nuts, almonds, peaches, and pomegranates’ — until he gives him what he asks” (Taʾanit 23a).

Return & Repent

With each new letter or vowel symbol you learn, the number of Hebrew words you can read grows dramatically. You now have the tools to read nineteen more words, together with the thirteen words we have introduced previously — a total of thirty-two words.

One important new word which you now can read in its various forms is the Hebrew word meaning “to return”:

- **אָשׁוּב** (*ʾa-SHUV*, I will return)
- **יָשׁוּב** (*ya-SHUV*, he will return)
- **יָשׁוּבוּ** (*ya-SHU-vu*, they will return)
- **שָׁב** (*shav*, he returned)
- **שָׁבוּ** (*SHA-vu*, they returned)

It is interesting to note that in Hebrew the word for “return” also can mean “repent.” “Return” ac-

How Long Was Jesus in the Tomb?

We are not told on what night of the week Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples. However, the Gospels make it absolutely clear that Jesus died and was buried on the “Day of Preparation” (Luke 23:54; Mark 15:42; Matthew 27:62; John 19:31). In the literature of the period, this always is a reference to Friday, the day on which all Sabbath preparations had to be made.

Jesus prophesied that he would remain in the grave until the third day after his death. The Son of Man, Jesus said, would be turned over to the Gentiles who would put him to death, but on the third day he would rise from the dead (Luke 18:31-32). Peter also proclaimed, “God raised him from the dead on the third day” (Acts 10:40).

If Jesus was buried late Friday afternoon, how long would he have had to remain in the tomb to fulfill his prophecy? To answer this, we must know something about the Hebrew way of reckoning time, and examine two interesting Hebrew idioms.

The Jewish Day

Non-Jews think of a day as divided into two parts: a twelve-hour period of light followed by a twelve-hour period of darkness. Jews, however, think of a day as divided into a period of darkness followed by a period of light.

The Jewish day has always begun with the night. This is borne out by Genesis 1:5, “And there was evening, and there was morning — the first day.” Nightfall has been defined by the sages as the moment when at least three stars become visible in the heavens — around 7:00 p.m. at Passover season.

Light for Night

Matthew 28:1 may reflect two Hebrew idioms which provide a

clue to the time of the resurrection.

The King James Version reads: “In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week....” This is confusing since, according to the Hebrew way of reckoning time, the end of the Sabbath would be roughly eleven hours before dawn on Sunday.

The Greek text of Matthew 28:1a reads *Ὅψε δὲ σαββάτων τῆ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν σαββάτων...* (literally, “Late [of] Sabbath in the lightening to one of Sabbath”). This makes little sense in Greek, but perfect sense in Hebrew.

According to Jerusalem scholar Jehoshua M. Grintz (“Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 79 (1960), 32-47), “late of Sabbath” is a Hellenized form of the Hebrew expression *במוצאי שבת* (*be-mo-tsa’E sha-BAT*, at the exiting of Sabbath), which means the hours immediately after the end of Sabbath; and the enigmatic “in the lightening to one of Sabbath” derives from the beautiful Hebrew idiom *אור לאחד בשבת* (*or le-’e-ḤAD ba-sha-BAT*, light to [day] one in the Sabbath). In Hebrew, *שבת* (*sha-BAT*, Sabbath) can mean either “Saturday” or “week.”

In this usage, “light” (*אור*, *or*) surprisingly is a synonym for “night,” that is the night before the next day. In Hebrew, “light” can be used euphemistically to mean something almost the opposite of its literal meaning.

When a Hebrew-speaker employed the idiom *light to*, he was not thinking of light in a literal sense any more than an English-speaker is thinking of literal light when he uses the idiom “I see the light.” On the contrary, the Hebrew-speaker had in mind those hours of darkness preceding the coming day.

Rabbinic Examples

Two passages from rabbinic literature illustrate this idiomatic use of the Hebrew word for “light.”

The following ruling was handed down by Israel’s sages: *אור לארבעה עשר בודקין את החמץ לאור הניר*. This literally means “Light to the fourteenth [of Nisan] search for the leaven by the light of a lamp” (Pesahim 1:1). In other words, the search for leaven commanded in Exodus 12:15 was to be conducted after dark on the evening before the day preceding Passover.

Another illustration of this Hebrew idiom is found in the ruling of Rabbi Judah: *בודקין אור לארבעה עשר ובשעת הביעור* — “Search [for the leaven] on the night of [light to] the fourteenth and on the morning of the fourteenth and at the time of its removal” (Pesahim 1:3).

Hebraic Reading

According to this Hebraic reading of Matthew 28:1, it seems that the Galilean women may have returned to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body shortly after dark on Saturday evening. That was when they found the tomb empty.

Jesus therefore may have remained in the tomb only a little more than twenty-four hours. By the standard Jewish method of reckoning time, even such a short period would have satisfied the prophecy that Jesus remain in the tomb until the third day after his death: a part of Friday, all of Saturday and a part of Sunday.

This interpretation agrees with the fact that the women, despite the imminent approach of the Sabbath and its preparations, took the time before the Sabbath began to prepare the burial spices (Luke 23:56). Their intention apparently was to wash and anoint Jesus’ body as soon as possible after the Sabbath ended. If they had intended to do this late Saturday night or early Sunday morning, they could easily have waited until the Sabbath was over to prepare the spices.