

Toldot Shimshon

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Chapter II – Mishnah 9

חמשה תלמידים היו לו לרבן יוחנן בן זכאי, ואלו הן, רבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס, ורבי יהושע בן חנניה, ורבי יוסי הבהו, ורבי שמעון בן גמאל, ורבי אלעזר בן ערד. הוא הנה מונה שבחן. רבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס, בור סיד שאינו מאבד טפה. רבי יהושע בן חנניה, אשרי יולדתו. רבי יוסי הבהו, חסיד. רבי שמעון בן גמאל, ירא חטא. ורבי אלעזר בן ערד, כמעין המתגבר.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five disciples and they were these: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, Rabbi Yosei, the priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel and Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach. He [Rabbi Yochanan] used to list their outstanding virtues: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus is a plastered cistern which loses not a drop; Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananiah, happy is the woman that gave birth to him; Rabbi Yosei, the priest, is a pious man; Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel is one that fears sin, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach is like a spring that [ever] gathers force.

התלמידים הללו נאים לרבם, ורבם נאה להם, ונצאו מפלל שאר התלמידים, לטעון בדבר הקדש, אשריהם ואשרי חלקם בתיים. והפשטנים הקשו, שכמה תלמידים היו לו. אבל "סוד ה' ליראיו", ונכבדות נדבר בו, שמצאנו בכתבי האר"י זלה"ה, שרבן יוחנן בן זכאי ורבי עקיבא, הם שני זרועות דמשה, ולכן היו מאה ועשרים שנה, ועיין שם. והזרוע מתפשט עד היד, ובכל יד יש חמש אצבעות, ומשום הכי, חמשה תלמידים היו להם. ואפילו שיהיו להם תלמידים אחרים, אינו מונה אלא אותם שהיו במדרגה של זאת היד הגדולה.

These disciples were beneficial to their master, and their master was beneficial to them, and they left the category of other disciples to claim something new, happy are they and happy is their lot in life. Those that seek the simple understanding questioned, that [Rabban Yochanan] had a number of disciples. But “the counsel of the L-rd is for those who fear Him,”¹ and “glorious things will be spoken of him,”² that we have found in the writings of the Ari,³ may he be remembered for life in the World-to-Come, that Rabban Yochanan and Rabbi Akiva were two arms of Moses, and therefore they had lifespans of 120 years, the

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¹ Ps. 25:14.

² Cf. Ps. 87:3.

³ Rabbi Avraham Azulai (1570–1644), Moroccan kabbalist. *Chesed L'Avraham*, Maayan 5, Nahar 28.

same as the lifespan of Moses.⁴ **The arm extends to the hand, and on every hand there are five fingers, and because of this, they each had five disciples.**⁵ **Even if he would have had other disciples, we only count those who were at the level of “the great hand.”**⁶

ואחר כך הוא הנה מונה שבחן, לפי שעל כרחיו לומר שלא היו כולם שווים במדרגה, כשם שכל אצבע משווה מחבירו, כדאמרינו פרק קמא דכתבות, דאצבעות היד, כל תדא ותדא למלתיה עבנדא, דאמר מר, זו זרת, זו קמיצה, זו אמה, זו אצבע, זו גודל. ופרש רש"י, זו זרת, מן הקטנה מודדין זרת של חושן. זו קמיצה, מאצבע שאצל הקטנה מתחילין לקמוץ המנחה. זו אמה, מהגדולה מודדין אמת הבגין והפלים. זו אצבע, למתן דמים של חטאת. זו גודל, לבהן יד דאחרון ודמצרע. עכ"ל.

Afterward, he listed their praises, for it's necessary to say that they were not all equal in level, just as each finger is different from its neighbor, as it says in the first chapter of tractate Ketubot that the fingers of the hand are such that:

Each and every one was designated for its matter, as the Master said: This [pinky finger] is [for measuring] a span [zeret] [the distance between the pinky finger to the tip of the thumb used in measuring the breastplate of the High Priest]. This [ring finger] is [used for taking] a fistful [kemitza] [of the meal-offering]. This [middle finger] is [used for measuring] a cubit [ama] [the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger]. This is [the index] finger [etzba] [which is used to sprinkle the blood of sin-offerings on the altar]. This is [the] thumb [gudal] [which is used for placing the blood and oil in the purification ritual of a leper].

-Ketubot 5b

Rashi explains, “ ‘This is the span [zeret],’ from the small finger [i.e., the pinky] they measure the span of the [High Priest’s] breastplate. ‘This is the fistful [kemitza],’ from the finger next to the small one [i.e., the ring finger], they begin to remove a handful of the meal-offering. ‘This is the cubit’ [ama], from the largest [finger, i.e., the middle finger], they measure a cubit of the [Temple] building and the [Temple] vessels.⁷ ‘This is the [index] finger,’ for placing the blood of the sin-offering. ‘This is the thumb [gudal],’ for the thumb [bohen] of the hand of Aaron and the metzora.⁸

⁴ Sifrei Devarim, Vezot haBracha, 357:33: “He was one of the four who died at the age of 120: Moses, Hillel the Elder, R. Yochanan b. Zakkai, and R. Akiva.”

⁵ Yevamot 62b: “Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda [bar Ilai], Rabbi Yosei [ben Halafta], Rabbi Shimon [bar Yochai], and Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua.” [A sixth important disciple of Rabbi Akiva’s was Rabbi Nechemiah.]

⁶ Ex. 14:31.

⁷ Mishnah Keilim 17:10, “Rabbi Meir says: all cubits were of the moderate length except that for the golden altar, the horns, the surround and the base. Rabbi Judah says: the cubit used for the building was one of six handbreadths and that for the vessels one of five handbreadths.”

⁸ Metzora refers to a person suffering from *tzara’at*, often mistranslated as “leprosy,” though it is not a physical disease, but a result of a spiritual defect.

וצריך לדקדק, אמאי נקטינהו הש"ס להפך. שהנה לו להתחיל מן הגודל. ויש לומר, דהואיל שהגודל אינו בסדר שאר אצבעות, משום הכי לא רצה להתחיל ממנו, דדלמא הוא אצבע בפני עצמו, ואין לו להמנות ראשון לאחרים, שאינו בסדר. וגם באצבע לא רצה להתחיל, לפי שבאמת אינו הראשון, שהרי הגודל קדם לו, אף על פי שאינו בסדר. ומשום הכי, התחיל בנרת. ואחר שמנה הארבעה ההולכים בסדר, מנה גם הגודל.

It's necessary to investigate, why the Talmud⁹ took this in the opposite order than one would have expected, for it should have begun from the thumb, but instead started with the pinky. It can be said, that since the thumb is not in order with the remaining fingers, i.e., because it is opposed to them, because of this, [the Talmud] didn't want to start from it, that perhaps it's a finger on its own, and it's not right to count it first to the others, because it is not in order with them. It also didn't want to start with the [index] finger, because it's not truly the first, as the thumb precedes it, even though [the thumb] is not in order with [the index finger], as the thumb is opposable to the other fingers. Because of this, [the Talmud] started with the *zeret*, i.e., the pinky. After it counted the four fingers preceding in order, it also counted the thumb.

ואף רבן יוחנן בן זכאי נמי שמר זה הסדר, ומנה שבחן של תלמידיו, מכון לאלו המעלות שיש באלו הקמח אצבעות. וכנגד הנרת, מנה שבחו של רבי אליעזר, שהנה בור סיד שאינו מאבד טפה. והענין היא, שהרי החשן הוא מכשיט נגד הלב, ובחשן היו בו כל כ"ב אותיות הקדש, וע"ב אותיות, כדאיתא במפרשים. ובתוכו היו אורים ותומים, מהם יבא בלב הפה, לפי לדעת להצמיד ולחבר האותיות, ולכונן בתשובת השאלה. ואף רבי אליעזר כשחלה, אמרינו בפרק ז' דסנהדרין, שנטל שתי זרועותיו והניחם על לבו, ואמר שהם פשני ספרי תורה שנגללו, הרבה תורה למדתי, והרבה תורה לימדתי, ולא חסרתי מרבומי כו', ולא חסרוני תלמידי כו'. וזהו בור סיד שאינו מאבד טפה. והניח שתי זרועותיו על לבו דוקא, והחשן היה כנגד הלב.

Even Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai maintained this order, and counted the praises of his disciples, aimed at these virtues of these five fingers. Corresponding to the *zeret*, i.e., the pinky, he counted the praise of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus is a plastered cistern which loses not a drop. The matter is that the breastplate is an ornament adjacent to the heart,¹⁰ and the breastplate had within it the 22 holy letters, and 72 letters, corresponding to the 72-lettered name of G-d, as was brought by the commentators.¹¹ Within [the breastplate] were the oracles called *Urim* and *Tumim*, and they would enable the [High] Priest's heart to arrive at the means to know how to combine and compose the letters, and to determine the answer to the question asked of them.¹² Even Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, when he fell ill, i.e., at the end of his life, it says in the 6th chapter of Sanhedrin (68a): “He raised his two arms and placed

⁹ Literally, “the Shas,” an acronym for *Shisha Sedarim* [ששה סדרים], the “six orders” of the Mishna and Talmud.

¹⁰ Rashi on Ex. 28:4.

¹¹ Bachya ben Asher ibn Halawa (“Rabbeinu Bachya,” 1255–1340) on Ex. 28:30.

¹² *Ibid.*; see also Ramban on Ex. 28:30; see also Yoma 73b.

them on his heart, and he said: Woe to you, my two arms, **they are like two Torah scrolls that are now being rolled up** [and will never be opened again]. **I have learned much Torah, and I have taught much Torah.** I have learned much Torah, **and I have not taken away from my teachers** [i.e., I have barely received anything from their wisdom], even like a dog lapping from the sea. I have taught much Torah, **and my students have taken away from me** [only a tiny fraction of what I could offer], only like a paintbrush [taking] **from a container** [of paint].” **This is the meaning of a plastered cistern which loses not a drop. He specifically placed his two arms on his heart, and the breastplate was adjacent to the heart.**

רבי יהושע בן חנניה, אשרי יולדתו. פנגד הקמיצה, שבו מתחילין לקמוץ המנחה, ומי זרפו להתנדב מנחה, עני. ורבי יהושע בן חנניה היה עני, פדאמריןו בכרכות, שאמר לרבו גמליאל, אי אתה יודע צערן של תלמידי חכמים, במה הם עסוקין, וממה הם גיזונין. ואיתא בזהר ובספרי המוסר, שהאשה שאינה צנועה, גורמת עניות לבעלה ולבניה, ובניה אינם נחשבים בעולם לכלום. ואם כן, מי שרואה רבי יהושע בן חנניה עני, יוכל לתלות שאמו גרמה לו, בשביל שלא היתה צנועה. משום הכי קאמר, אשרי יולדתו, שזכתה שבנה יהיה חכם גדול וחסוב, שאם לא היתה צנועה, לא היתה זוכה לבן כזה, כמו שאמרו במסכת יומא, במעשה דקמחית.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah, happy is the woman that gave birth to him. He corresponds to the ring finger, with which they begin to remove a handful of the meal-offering. Who is accustomed to donate a meal-offering? A poor person.¹³ Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananiah was poor, as it is said in tractate Berachot, that he said to Rabban Gamliel, who was shocked to learn that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah worked as a blacksmith, “If only you knew the hardship of Torah scholars, how they make a living, and how they feed themselves!”¹⁴ It’s brought in the Zohar¹⁵ and in Books of Morality,¹⁶ that when a woman is not modest, she causes poverty to her husband and to her sons, and her sons are considered by the world to be worthless. If so, whoever saw Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah was poor, would be able to attribute that his mother caused this, because she was not modest. Because of this possibility, as it is said, “Happy is the woman that gave birth to him,” that she merited that her son would be a great and important Torah scholar, for if she had not been modest, she would not have merited a son such as this, as it says in tractate Yoma, in the incident with Kimchit.¹⁷

¹³ Menachot 104b.

¹⁴ Berachot 28a.

¹⁵ Zohar III:125b.

¹⁶ Kav Yashar, chapter 58.

¹⁷ Yoma 47a. Kimchit had seven sons, all of whom served at one point as High Priest. She attributed this to the fact that, “In all my days, the beams of my house never saw the braids of my hair,” as she was extremely modest and was strict about covering her hair, even inside her own house.

רבי יוסי הפהו, חסיד. והוא כנגד האמה שבו מודדין האמות, ואמרינו בפרק ב' דקמא, האי מאן דבעי למנהי חסידא, ליקיים מילי דברכות. ואיתא ברעיא מהימנא פרשת קרח דף קע"ט, "מאה באמה", "אמה" - באתנוי "מאה" איהו, ואיהו בהיפוד אתנוי "האם", לקבל מאה ברכאן וכו', עכ"ל. וכן במשפן, היה אורף הקצצר מאה באמה, והיו שם מאה אדנים, כדמיון מאה ברכות, המתמלאים מהבריכה העליונה, ולפיכך חייב אדם לברך מאה ברכות בכל יום, כדי למשוך מכל אחד מאלו הברכות.

Rabbi Yosei, the priest, is a pious man. He corresponds to the cubit, i.e., the middle finger, by which they measure the cubits, and it is said in the second chapter of tractate Bava Kama (30a), “Rav Yehuda says: One who wants to be pious should observe the matters of [tractate] Nezikin [so as to avoid causing damage to others]. Rava said the matters of [tractate] Avot. And some say the matters of [tractate] Berachot.” It is brought in Raaya Meheimena [“The Faithful Shepherd”], a section in the Zohar, parshat Korach, page 179a, on the term “ ‘one hundred cubits’ [מאה באמה] [me’ah va’ama].¹⁸ “Ama” [אמה] [“a cubit”] has within its letters “me’ah” [מאה] [“one hundred”], and [me’ah] is the reverse of the letters of “ha’em” [האם] [“the mother”], which hints at the feminine Sefira of Binah, intuitive understanding, to receive one hundred blessings, corresponding to the one hundred blessings that we are obliged to make every day.¹⁹ Also, in the Tabernacle, the length of the court was one hundred cubits, and there were a hundred pedestals,²⁰ corresponding to the one hundred blessings, which are filled from the Heavenly Upper Pool.²¹ Therefore, a person must make one hundred blessings every day, in order to draw down blessings from each one from these blessings from the Upper Pool.

ועוד איתא ברעיא מהימנא פרשת פינתס דף ר"י"ד] ע"ב, אינהו חסיד המתחסד עם קונו, כגון דוד, דהנה מספר אורייתא דלעילא עם קודשא בריה הוא, עכ"ל. ואם כן, נגד האמה שרומז מאה ברכות, היה הוא זריז וחסיד, והיה מספר בתורתו שם הוי"ה עם שם אהי"ה, בגימטריא "אמה" עם הכולל. ואתי שפיר, דדוד דהנה חסיד הוא בעצמו תישן המאה ברכות בכל יום, כדאיתא בטור ארץ חיים סימן מ"ו. ובאמה, בו מודדין אמת הבגנו והכלים, שהבגנו היא התורה, והכלים הם המאה ברכות, והכל הוא סוד של "מאה באמה", והוא החסיד.

It is also brought in Raaya Meheimena, in parshat Pinchas, Zohar II, page 214b, “Who is pious [חסיד] [chassid]? He who is kindly [מתחסד] [mitchassed] towards his Maker. For example, David, who was composing Biblical verses from Above with the Holy One, Blessed He.” If so, corresponding to the ama, which alludes to the one hundred blessings, he was alert and pious, and with his teachings combined “the Name of Existence” [the Tetragrammaton],²²

¹⁸ Ex. 27:9.

¹⁹ Menachot 43b: “It is taught in a Baraita that Rabbi Meir would say: A person is obligated to recite one hundred blessings every day, as it is stated in the verse: ‘And now, Israel, what [ma] [מה] does the L-rd your G-d require of you’ (Deut. 10:12).” Rabbi Meir interprets the verse as though it said, “And now, Israel, one hundred [me’ah] [מאה] [blessings] does the L-rd your G-d require of you.”

²⁰ Ex. 27:9–19.

²¹ The Upper Pool in Jerusalem is discussed in II Kings 18:17, Isaiah 7:3 and 36:2, but here the text speaks in Kabbalistic terms of a Heavenly Upper Pool from which blessings flow down. See Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla (1248–after 1305), Spanish Kabbalist, *Sha’arei Orah* (Mantua 1561), First Gate.

²² The author writes many of the names of G-d in this work, but he does not write out the Tetragrammaton. Instead, the anagram הוי"ה, the “Name of Existence,” is used to represent the Tetragrammaton.

with the name “I will be” [אהי"ה] [*Ehyeh*],²³ which in Gematria equals *ama* with the total.²⁴ That is, the Tetragrammaton has a Gematria of 26, and *Ehyeh* has a Gematria of 21, which add up to 47. If one takes the Gematria of *ama*, 46, and adds one for the single word, it also adds up to 47. **This is all right, that David was pious,²⁵ he set the one hundred blessings every day, as it says in the Tur, Orach Chaim, siman 46, “Laws of the Morning Blessings.”²⁶ With the cubit [*ama*], they measure a cubit of the building and the vessels, for the building is analogous to the Torah, and the vessels are analogous to the one hundred blessings, and all of this is an esoteric secret of the term “one hundred cubits” [מֵאָה בְּאַמָּה] [*me'ah va'ama*] from Ex. 27:9, and this is the pious man.**

רבי שמעון בן נתנאל, ירא חטא. נגד האצבע, שהוא למתן דמים של חטאת, הנה הוא ירא חטא.

Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel is one that fears sin. He corresponds to the [index] finger, for placing the blood of the sin-offering, he was fearful of sin.

רבי אלעזר בן עזר, מעיני המתגבר. לפי שהיה הגודל, לתחלת קדושתו של אהרן, ולמילוי ידיו להתחזק בכהונת עולם. ועוד, צורת הגודל הוא יותר עב מכל האצבעות, אף על פי שהוא יותר קצר מכולם, ואף רבי אלעזר בן עזר שלא היה לו כל כך זכרון ובקיאיות, הואיל שבחריפותו ובפלוסו היה מקריע את כולם, נקרא מעיני המתגבר והולך תמיד, שהרי עם הפלוס גורם שהתורה לא תשכח, ותהיה מוחזקת לעולם בכהונתו של אהרן.

Rabbi Elazar ben Arach is a spring that [ever] gathers force. He was the *gudal*, i.e., the thumb, for the beginning of the holiness of Aaron, and for the fulfilment of his hands to strengthen the “everlasting priesthood.”²⁷ Furthermore, the shape of the thumb is thicker than all of the other fingers, even though it is the shortest of all of them. So too was Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, who didn’t have such a great memory and expertise, but because by his sharpness and his dialectic skills, he would outweigh them all.²⁸ Thus, he is called a spring that [ever] gathers force, for with the dialectic skills he caused the Torah not to be forgotten, and to be strengthened forever in the priesthood of Aaron.

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²³ Ex. 3:14, “And G-d said to Moses, ‘*Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*’ [“I will be what I will be”], continuing, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites, “*Ehyeh* sent me to you.” ’ ’ ”

²⁴ Using the Gematria method of adding the number of words to the total.

²⁵ Ps. 86:2, “Preserve my life, for I am pious; O You, my G-d, deliver Your servant who trusts in You.”

²⁶ Tur, Orach Chaim, siman 46: “It is taught in a Baraita that Rabbi Meir would say: A person is obligated to recite one hundred blessings every day, and he interpreted this from Scripture [see note 19, above]. Rabbi Natronai [ben Hilai], head of the Academy of Sura, from [the suburb] Matha M’chasya, answered that the servant of G-d [i.e., David] established one hundred blessings, as it is written [that David was] ‘raised on high [הָקָם עַל] . . .’ (II Sam. 3:1), [and the word] עַל has the Gematria of one hundred. Because every day, one hundred Jewish people were dying, and they didn’t know why they were dying, until they investigated and understood by prophecy, and [then] he established for them one hundred blessings [in a day].”

²⁷ Num. 40:14–15: “Then bring his sons forward, put tunics on them, and anoint them as you have anointed their father, that they may serve Me as priests. This their anointing shall serve them for an everlasting priesthood throughout the ages.”

²⁸ As discussed in the next Mishnah.