

# Toldot Shimshon

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## Chapter II – Mishnah 16

רבי אלעזר אומר, הוי שקוד ללמוד תורה, ודע מה שתשיב לאפיקורוס. ודע לפני מי אתה עמל. ונאמן הוא בעל מלאכתה שישלם לך שכר פעולתה.

**Rabbi Elazar said: Be diligent to learn the Torah; And know how to answer an Epicurean, and know before Whom you toil, and that your Employer is faithful, for He will pay you the reward of your labor.**

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"וּטְהַרְיָדִים יְסִיף אִמְצִי", ויבקש רחמים שיהיו הכל מאמצין פחו, ומטעם "ויאחז צדיק בַּרְכוּ". התחיל לומר "הוי שקוד", דמשמע פעול מאחרים, שאחרים יהיו יועצים או מכריחים אותו. ולא אומר, "הוי שקוד בלימוד התורה", דהיינו שמעצמו ישקוד בלימודים. לרמזו למה שאירע לו, שמלבד מה שאמרו ו"ל בפרק כ"ב דשבת, ששכח תלמודו מתמת סמרא דפרוגיתא, עוד שכח תלמודו, לפי שאשתו לא נתנה לו עצה טובה, כדאמרינו במדרש קהלת על פסוק "כי העשק יהולל חכם", כשנפטר רבן יוחנן בן זכאי, הלכו תלמידיו ליבנה, ור' אלעזר בן ערד הלך אצל אשתו, המתין להם שיבואו אצלו, ולא באו. פינן שלא באו, בקש לילך אצלם, ולא הניחתו אשתו. אמרה לו, מי צריך למי. אמר לה, הם צריכים לי. אמרה לו וכו', שמע לה וישב לו, עד ששכח תלמודו. לאחר זמן, באו אצלו ושאלו לו, פת היטין או פת שעורים, מיסב נא וכלם בלפתן. ולא ידע להשיבם. עכ"ל.

**“One whose hands are clean grows stronger,”<sup>1</sup> and he will request mercy that all [Heavenly beings] should strengthen his power,<sup>2</sup> for the reason that “the righteous man holds to his way.”<sup>3</sup>**

[Rabbi Elazar] begins by saying, “Be diligent to learn the Torah,” which means he should seek an action from others, that others will advise or press him so that he learns. It doesn't say, “Be diligent in the study of Torah,” which is that by his own efforts he should be diligent in learning. This hints at what happened to [Rabbi Elazar], that apart from what [the rabbis] of blessed memory said in the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of tractate Shabbat,<sup>4</sup> that he forgot his learning because of his attraction for the wine of Phrygia, he also forgot his learning because his wife did not give him good advice. This is as it is said in Midrash Eccl. Rabbah on the verse, “Surely oppression turns a wise man into a fool”<sup>5</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Job 17:9.

<sup>2</sup> Sanhedrin 44b.

<sup>3</sup> Job 17:9.

<sup>4</sup> Shabbat 147b.

<sup>5</sup> Eccl. 7:7.

When Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai died, his students went to [learn at] Yavneh, while Rabbi Elazar ben Arach went to his wife [at Emmaus]. He waited for them to come to him, but they did not come. Since they didn't come, he asked [her] if he could go to them, but his wife did not allow him. She said to him, who needs whom? He said to her, they need me. She said to him: "In the case of a food container and mice, does the food go to the mice or do the mice go to the food?" He listened to her, and remained there until he forgot his learning. After a while they came and asked him, "Which is better to eat along with a 'relish,' wheat bread or barley bread?" But he couldn't answer.

- Midrash Eccl. Rabbah 7:2

ומשום הכי אמר, "הוי שקוד", השתדל שיהיו לה יועצים טובים שישקידוהו על דלתות התורה, ולא להפך. וכמו שפיתבנו לעיל בפרקין על ר' אלעזר אומר, לב טוב, שרבי אלעזר בן ערד שכח תלמודו, ומן השמים הוזירוהו לו, לפי שהיה לו לב טוב. אף במשנה זו פונונתו להזהיר את האדם, שיהיה לו לב טוב וטהור, דבוק בהקדוש ברוך הוא, שבה מן השמים וסיעוהו להיות שקוד בלימודים, על דרך, הבא ליטהר מסייעין אותו. ונהו "שקוד", לשון פעול.

Because of this, [Rabbi Elazar] said, "Be diligent," strive to have good counselors who will be diligent for you with opening the doors of the Torah, and not the other way around, i.e., not closing them. We wrote above in our chapter, Mishnah 11, regarding "Observe which is the right way to which a man should cleave, . . . [to which] Rabbi Elazar said, 'A good heart,' " that Rabbi Elazar ben Arach forgot his learning, and from Heaven it was returned to him, because he had a good heart. So too in our Mishnah, his intent is to warn the man that he should have a good and pure heart, clinging to the Holy One, Blessed be He, that by this he will be assisted from Heaven to be diligent in his learning, in the way that, "If one comes to purify himself, they assist him."<sup>6</sup> This is the meaning of "be diligent," the language of a verb without the infinitive, expressing the idea of indirectly causing an action.

ועוד יובן, במה שכתב התורת חיים בפרק ד' דסנהדרין, דרב דאמר, אדם הראשון מין היה, מדכתיב "איפה" - אן נטה לבך. סבירא ליה פמאן דאמר עץ שאכל אדם הראשון, אחרוג היה. ולדידיה נראה דאיסור עץ הדעת הוא רמז שיהיה לבו של אדם דבוק בו בהקדוש ברוך הוא תמיד, לא יפרד עולמית, כמו שכתוב "ובו תדבק". לפי שהוה יתברך נמשל לאילן, כבכול, בגודע, והיגו מה שאמרו, ארבעה נכנסו לפרדס, ואחר קצץ בנטיעות. ולבו של אדם, ששם משכן הנשמה הנאצלת ממנו יתברך כגר מגר, נמשל ודומה לאתרוג, כדאיחא במדרש. לכה גזר הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא יאכל מן העץ, כדי שלא יפריש לבו ונשמתו ממנו יתברך. נמצא, כי במה שעבר על הצווי, קצץ בנטיעות, והיה דומה לאחר, שהיה מין, והיגו דדריש "איפה", אן נטה לבך וכו', עיין שם באורך.

This will also be understood, by what is written by the *Torat Chaim*<sup>7</sup> on the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Sanhedrin (38b), where it is written: "And Rav Yehuda says [that] Rav says: Adam the first [man] was a heretic, as it is written:

<sup>6</sup> Yoma 38b.

<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Avraham Chaim Schor (c. 1560–1632), author of Talmud commentary *Torat Chaim* (Lublin 1624).

“And the L-rd G-d called to the man and said to him: ‘Where are you?’”<sup>8</sup> [meaning, to] **where has your heart turned** [indicating that Adam turned from the path of truth].” [Rav’s] **opinion is like the one who says that: The tree from which Adam ate was an etrog,<sup>9</sup> and to him, it appears that the prohibition of the Tree of Knowledge was a hint that the heart of man should cling always to the Holy One, Blessed be He, never separating [from Him], as it is written, “to G-d you shall cling,”<sup>10</sup> This is because [G-d], may He be blessed, is compared to a tree, as it were, as is known.<sup>11</sup>**

**This is what [the rabbis] said, “Four entered the orchard . . . and Acher cut down the shoots [of saplings, i.e., he became a heretic].”<sup>12</sup> The heart of a person, where the soul resides, the soul that emanates from [G-d], may He be Blessed, as a candle is lit from a candle, is compared and similar to an etrog. This is brought in the Midrash Rabbah, parashat Emor 30:14. For this reason, the Holy One, Blessed be He, decreed that [Adam] should not eat from the tree, so that his heart and soul would not be separated from Him, may He be Blessed. It was found that in the way that he transgressed that commandment, “he cut down the shoots,” and was similar to Acher, who was a heretic. That is what [Rav] taught, “ ‘Where are you?,’ where has your heart turned?”**

- Torat Chaim (Lublin 1624), page 41a

See there at length.

ועל זה אמר התנא, "הגוי שקוד ללמוד תורה", שבגזירה יהיה תמיד דבוק בהקדוש ברוך הוא, ולא תטעה אחרים המנות, כמו שאמרו ז"ל, "ולא תתרו אחרים לבבכם", זו מינות ואפיקורסות. ואדרבא, סמיה ליה, נדע מה שתשיב לאפיקורוס.

**About this, [Rabbi Elazar] said, “be diligent to learn Torah,” that by this you will always be clinging to the Holy One, Blessed be He, and you will not turn after heresy, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said, “so that you do not follow your heart and follow your eyes in your lustful urge,<sup>13</sup> this is [a reference to] heresy and Epicureanism.” To the contrary, rely upon Him, “and know how to answer an Epicurean.”**

<sup>8</sup> Gen. 3:9.

<sup>9</sup> This was the opinion of Rabbi Abba of Acco, per Gen. Rabbah 15:7 and 20:8.

<sup>10</sup> Deut. 10:20.

<sup>11</sup> Zohar II:60b (Beshalach, 348): “It is written, ‘And he cried to Hashem, and Hashem showed him a tree’ (Ex. 15:25). A ‘tree’ means only Torah, as it is written, ‘She is a Tree of Life to those who lay hold on her’ (Prov. 3:18). And Torah means the Holy One, blessed be He. Rabbi Abba said, ‘Tree’ means the Holy One, blessed be He.”

<sup>12</sup> Chagigah 14b: Four entered the orchard [i.e., dealt with the loftiest secrets of Torah], and they are as follows: Ben Azzai; and ben Zoma; Acher [i.e., Elisha ben Avuya]; and Rabbi Akiva. . . Ben Azzai glimpsed [the Divine Presence] and died. . . Ben Zoma glimpsed [the Divine Presence] and was harmed. . . Acher chopped down the shoots [of saplings. In other words, he became a heretic]. Rabbi Akiva came out safely.”

<sup>13</sup> Num. 15:39.

אי נמי, דאמרינו בפרק קמא דחגיגה, אמרי לרבי יהושע בן חנניה, ומאי תהוי עלון מן מנבאי. אמר להו, "אבדה עצה מבנים נסרחה חכמתם", כיון שאבדה עצה מבנים, נסרחה חכמתם של עכו"ם. ולכן, אחר שהזהיר "הוי שקוד ללמוד תורה", שאז בנדאי יהיה חכם גדול, וכשיש חכם גדול בישראל, תהיה אף בעכו"ם ובהמנים ואפיקורוסים חכמה גדולה, שהרי לא אבדה עצה מבנים, צריף נמי שינדע מה שישב לאפיקורוס, דהא בלא הא, לא סגי.

**Alternatively, as it is said in the first chapter of tractate Chagigah:**

**[The sages] said to Yehoshua ben Chananya [when he was dying]: What will become of us, from [the threat of] the heretics [when there is no scholar like you who can refute them]? He said to them, "Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom vanished?"<sup>14</sup> Since counsel has perished from the prudent, [from the Jewish people, the] wisdom of the nations of the world has vanished [as well, and there will be no superior scholars among them].**

- Chagigah 5b

**Therefore, after he warned, "be diligent to learn Torah," for then there will certainly be a sage in Israel, and when there is a great sage in Israel, there will also be great wisdom among the nations and the heretics and the Epicureans, for counsel will not have perished from the prudent, it's also necessary that he will now how to answer an Epicurean, "for this, without that, does not suffice."<sup>15</sup>**

ולפי שצריף לתשובת המינים אף ידיעת הדברים שאינם תלויים בחכמה, ואין צורך כלל בידיעתם, משום הכי הזהיר "נדע מה שתשיב", שצריף שתשתדל לדעת אותם, כהיה דאמרינו בפרק ה' דבתרא, אימיה דאברהם וכו', ואימיה דהמן וכו' אימיה דשמשון וכו'. ופריף, למאי נפקא מינה. ותריץ, לתשובת המינים.

**Because it is necessary to answer the heretics, Rabbi Elazar holds that he needs even the knowledge of things that do not depend on wisdom, and even things for which there is no need at all to know them. Because of this, [Rabbi Elazar] warned, "and know how to answer," that it is necessary that he should strive to know them. This is like the teaching in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Bava Batra (91a), "The mother of Abraham [was called] Amatlai bat Karnevo. The mother of Haman [was called] Amatlai bat Orevati. . . . The mother of Samson [was named] Tzelelponit." [The Gemara] challenges, "what is the practical difference," and explains, "to answer the heretics [who ask the names of these women. One can reply that there is a tradition handed down concerning their names.]"**

ואחר כך אמר, ונדע לפני מי אתה עמל. לפי שלתשובת המינים צריף לטרוח ולעמול לתרץ הקשיות שלהם על הפסוקים, כדאמרינו בפרק קמא דעבודה זרה, משתבח להו ר' אבהו למיני ברב ספרא, דאדם גדול הוא. יומא חד אשכחיה, רמו ליה קראי, ולא הנה בידיה. אתו אמרו ליה לר' אבהו. אמר להו, אימור דאמינא לכו, בתנאי, בקראי מי אמרי. ומאי שנא אתון דנדעיתו, והוא לא ידע. אנו דשכיסן גבייכו, רמינו אנפשינו ומעיינינו בקראי ונדעינו, אינהו לא מעייני בקראי.

**Then [Rabbi Elazar] said, "and know before Whom you toil," because to answer the Epicureans one needs to take pains and labor to resolve their questions on the verses. This is as it is said in the first chapter of tractate Avodah Zarah:**

<sup>14</sup> Jer. 49:7.

<sup>15</sup> Niddah 70b.

**Rabbi Abahu would praise Rav Safra to the heretics [by saying] that he is a great man.** They exempted him from paying taxes for 13 years. **One day [the heretics] found Rav Safra and raised [questions on Biblical] verses to him, and he didn't have [the answer] at hand. They came to Rabbi Abahu and told him about this. He said to them, I said this [praise] with regard to [the Oral law's teachings of the] tannaim, regarding the Bible, who said this [praise] to you? They said to [Rabbi Abahu]: What is different about you [sages of the Land of Israel], that you know [the Bible as well], but [Rav Safra of Babylonia] did not know? [Abahu] said to them: We, who are situated among you [heretics and are forced to debate the meaning of verses], we impose upon ourselves [this obligation] and analyze [verses in depth. By contrast], those [sages of Babylonia, who are not forced to debate you], do not analyze [the Bible in such depth].**

- Avodah Zarah 4a

ולפי שפכודו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, הוא להכחיש דעותיהם הנפסדות, כדי שלא ימשכו רבים אחריהם בטעיותיהם, משום הכי כתב, "ודע לפני מי אתה עמל". אף על פי שפמדומה לה לאבד ומנה, אינו כן, אלא אדרבא, תשא שזכר טוב מאת ה'. וכמו שפצינו בר' אבהו גופיה, דאמרינו במדרש סוף פרשת חיי שרה, וזה לשונו, כד דמד ר' אבהו, אחוו ליה תלת עשר נהרי אפרסמון, אמר להון, אילין דמן. אמרו ליה, דידך. אמר להו, אילין דאבהו, ונאני אמרתי לריק נגעתי לתהו והקבל פחי כליתי אכן משפטי אתה" וכו'. עכ"ל. והטעם שהיה סובר שיגע לריק ולתהו והקבל, לפי שהוכרח כל ימיו להתעסק בתשובת המינים, כמו שכתבו המפרשים ז"ל.

**According to the honor of the Holy One, Blessed be He, he should deny their worthless opinions, so that they will not pull many after them in their errors. Because of this, [Rabbi Elazar] wrote: "Know before Whom you toil." Although it seems to you that you are wasting your time to study the ways and arguments of the heretics, in order to refute them, it is not so, but to the contrary, you will receive a good reward from G-d. As we find for Rabbi Abahu himself, as it says in the Midrash at the end of parashat Chayei Sarah, and this is its language:**

**When Rabbi Abahu died, thirteen rivers of balsam were shown to him. He said to [the Heavenly hosts], whose are these? They said to him, yours. He said, these are Abahu's? "I thought, 'I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for empty breath.' But my case rested with the L-rd, my recompense was in the hands of my G-d."**

- Gen. Rabbah 62:1

**The reason he thought he had labored in vain and for empty breath, was because he was compelled to spend all his days dealing with answering heretics, as the commentators wrote.**

ולפי שעדיין הנה מקום לומר, שבאותו זמן שמתעסק עם המינים והאפיקורוסים בהבליים שלהם, הנה עדיף ליה טובא לפלפל עם התכמים בתורת האמת והצדק. משום הכי, הוסיף "ונאמן הוא בעל מלאכתך שישלם לך שכר פעולתך", דתנן בפרק אלו מציאות ובשלחן ערוך חשן משפט סימן רס"ה, הנה בטל מסלע, לא יאמר לו, תן לי סלע, אלא גותן לו שכרו כפועל. אבל אם יתנה עם בעל האבידה או עם הבית דין, ליטול כל מה שמפסיד בביטול מלאכה שלו, הרי זה נוטל. ואם אין שם בעלים ולא בית דין, שלו קודם. עכ"ל. והכי נמי, הבית דין מתנים, והקדוש ברוך הוא מבטיחו ליתן לו שכרו כנגד כל מה שמפסיד ממלאכתו.

**But there was still room to say that at the same time he was dealing with the heretics and the Epicureans in their futilities, it would have been better for him to argue with the sages in the law of truth and justice. Because of this, [Rabbi Elazar] added, “and [know] that your Employer is faithful, for He will pay you the reward of your labor.” For it is taught in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of tractate Bava Metzia, which is entitled “These found objects” and in the Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat, siman 265, se’if 1:**

[If in the course of tending to and returning the lost item, the finder] **was idle from** [labor that would have earned him] **a sela, he shall not say to** [the owner of the item]: **Give me a sela** [to compensate me for my lost income]. **Rather,** [the owner] **gives him his wage as** [if he were] **a laborer** [a payment that is considerably smaller]. **But if he stipulated** [in advance] **with the owner or with the court** [that if he were able to find and return the lost object] **that he would take the entire lost income, then** [if he finds and returns the lost object], [the entire lost income] **is taken. And if there is no owner and no court, the finder takes precedence.**

- Bava Metzia 30b

**Indeed, the court provides, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, promises to give him his wages against all that he loses from his work.**

וזהו שכר "פעולתך" דקתני, ולא תני סתם, "ליתן לך שכרך". ודייק נמי לומר "בעל מלאכתך", דהיינו מלאכה זו של תשובת המינים, נאמן הוא ליתן לך השכר שלם, שהיה מגיע לך בפלפול עם התכמים בתורת האמת. ועיין עוד לקמן בסוף פרקין.

**This is the reward of “your labor” that was taught by Rabbi Elazar. He didn’t teach a vague expression, “to give you your reward,” but rather he specified, “He will pay you the reward of your labor.” Also, he was precise to say “your Employer.” That is, G-d will pay you the reward of the labor of answering the heretic. He is faithful to give you the complete wages, which would have come to you if you had instead spent your time in debating with the sages in the true law. See further below at the end of our chapter.**

ועוד יש לפרש "ונאמן הוא בעל" וכו', דאמרינו בפרק [ט"ז] דשבת, דרבן גמליאל בעא לאחוכי ביה בההוא פילוסופא וכו', ואבד ממונו, דהיינו שרגא דדהבא וקמרא לובא, כדי להתלוצץ ממנו. והנה סלקא דעתין לומר, דלא שפיר עבדו לאבד ממונם, קדא, דעבר על "בל תשחית". ועוד, דעבר על "לא תקנם", לא תתן להם מתנת חנם. ועוד, דמורידין, ואין מעלין.

**Also, to explain the statement that “your Employer is faithful,” as it is said in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Shabbat:**

Imma Shalom, the wife of Rabbi Eliezer, was **Rabban Gamliel’s** sister. There was a [Christian] philosopher in their neighborhood who spread the reputation [about himself] that he did not accept bribes. They **wanted to mock this philosopher** [and reveal his true nature]. **[Imma Shalom] gave him a golden lamp** [as a bribe], **and [then she and Rabban Gamliel] came before him** [as if they were seeking judgment]. **She said to [the philosopher]: I want to share [in the inheritance] of my father’s estate. He said to them: Divide it.** [Rabban Gamliel] **said to him: It is written in our [Torah]: In a situation [where there is a] son, the daughter does not inherit.** [The philosopher] **said to him: Since the day you were exiled from your land, the Torah of Moses was taken away and the sinful folio [i.e., the Christian bible] was given [in its place]. It is written in there: A son and a daughter shall inherit alike.**

**The next day [Rabban Gamliel] brought [the philosopher] a Libyan donkey** [as a bribe]. [Afterward, Rabban Gamliel and Imma Shalom came before the philosopher for a judgment.] **He said to them: I proceeded to the end of the sinful folio, and it is written: I did not come to subtract from the Torah of Moses, and I did not come to add to the Torah of Moses. And it is written there: In a situation [where there is a] son, the daughter does not inherit.**

**She said to him: May your light shine like a lamp** [alluding to the lamp she had given him]. **Rabban Gamliel said to him: The donkey came and kicked the lamp** [thereby revealing the entire episode].

- Shabbat 116a–b

**They lost their money, that is, the golden lamp and the Libyan donkey, in order to mock him. It enters our mind to say, that it’s not nice that they lost their money, for this violates the prohibition “do not waste.”<sup>16</sup> Also, this violates the prohibition, “give them no quarter,”<sup>17</sup> which is that we should not give them a chance to acquire property in the Land of Israel<sup>18</sup> and that one may not give them an undeserved gift.<sup>19</sup> Further, regarding heretics, and informants, and apostates, they should be lowered into a pit, and not raised from it.<sup>20</sup>**

<sup>16</sup> Deut. 20:19–20.

<sup>17</sup> Deut. 7:2.

<sup>18</sup> Avodah Zarah 20a.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Avodah Zarah 26b.



קא משמע לן, "ונאמן הוא" וכו', שעשו אדרבא מצנה גדולה, ודא, דכל ליצנותא אסירא, בר מליצנותא דעבודה זרה, דשריא. ועוד, כמו שפירשו המפרשים, שעשה זה כדי לקיים כבוד הדין של התורה, שהיו המינים כופרים בדין הרושע של תורה, כדאמרינן בפרק יש נוטלין, בכ"ד בטבת תבנא לדינא, שהיו הצדוקים אומרים, תירש הבת עם בת הבן וכו'. ועל זה אמר, "ונאמן הוא" וכו', שהפל הולך אחר הפוננה. ודייק לומר, "מלאכתך" ו"פעולתך", ולא "מלאכה" ו"פעולה" קתם.

[Rabbi Elazar] comes to teach us, “your Employer is faithful,” that to the contrary they did a great mitzvah, first of all, that “All mockery is forbidden, except for mockery of idolatry, which is permitted.”<sup>21</sup> Also, as the commentators explained, that he did this in order to uphold the honor of the law of the Torah, for the heretics were denying the law of inheritance of the Torah, as it is said in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Bava Batra, entitled “Those who inherit”:

Rav Huna says that Rav says: [Regarding] anyone who says that a daughter should inherit [the estate of her father along] with the daughter of the son [of the deceased], even [if he is] a prince of the Jewish people, one should not listen to him, as this is nothing other than an act of the Sadducees [and runs counter to the ruling of the Mishnah that the descendants of a son inherit before a daughter]. As it is taught [in a *Baraita* in *Megillat Ta’anit*, which describes various minor holidays on which it is forbidden to fast or eulogize]: **On the twenty-fourth of Tevet, we returned to our law** [i.e., the *halacha* was reestablished in accordance with the opinion of the Sages, after having been dictated by the Sadducees]. **As the Sadducees would say: A daughter should inherit** the estate of her father along **with the daughter of the son** of the deceased.

- Bava Batra 115b

About this, [Rabbi Elazar] said, “your Employer is faithful, for He will pay you the reward of your labor,” that everything goes after one’s intention. He was precise to say, “your Employer” and “your labor,” and not simply that He will reward “employment” and “labor”.

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<sup>21</sup> Megillah 25b, quoting Rabbi Nachman.