

Thirteen Qualities of Compassion

*Rab Judah said: A covenant has been made with the thirteen attributes that they will not be turned away empty-handed, as it says, Behold I make a covenant.
(b.Rosh HaShanna 17b)*

*6 And YHWH passed by before him, and proclaimed, YHWH, YHWH Elohim,
merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,
7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and
that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the
children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth
generation.
(Ex. 34:6-7)*

Children Engaging in Torah

*Rab Judah said in Rab's name: What is meant by. Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm? Touch not mine anointed' refers to school children; 'and do my prophets no harm', to disciples of the Sages. Resh Lakish said in the name of R. Judah the Prince: The world endures only for the sake of the breath of school children. Said R. Papa to Abaye, What about mine and yours? Breath in which there is sin is not like breath in which there is no sin, replied he. Resh Lakish also said in the name of R. Judah the Prince: School children may not be made to neglect [their studies] even for the building of the Temple. Resh Lakish also said to R. Judah the Prince: I have this tradition from my fathers — others state, from your fathers: Every town in which there are no school children shall be destroyed. Rabina said: It shall be laid desolate.
(b.Shabbat 119b)*

14 And YHWH Elohim said unto the serpent: Because you have done this, cursed are you from among all cattle, and from among all beasts of the field. Upon your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life.

15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. They shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise their heel.

(Gen. 3:14-15 HRV)

This passage makes a very surprising reference to the seed not of a man, but of a woman. Targum Psuedo-Jonathan reads:

And it shall be that when the sons of the woman study the Torah diligently and obey its injunctions, they will direct themselves to smite you on the head and slay you; but when the sons of the woman forsake the commandments of the Torah and do not obey its injunctions, you will direct yourself to bite them on the heel and afflict them. However, there will be a remedy for the sons of the woman, but for you, serpent, there will be no remedy. They shall make peace with one another in the end, in the very end of days, in the days of the King Messiah.”

The Targum Yerushalami interprets as follows:

“And it shall be that when the sons of the woman study the Torah diligently and obey its injunctions, they will direct themselves to smite you on the head and slay you; but when the sons of the woman forsake the commandments of the Torah and do not obey its injunctions, you will direct yourself to bite them on the heel and afflict them. However, there will be a remedy for the sons of the woman, but for you, serpent, there will be no remedy. They shall make peace with one another in the end, in the very end of days, in the days of the King Messiah.”

Both of these targums interpret the “seed” of the woman as those who study the Torah and obey it, however in doing so they “make peace with one another” and these are described as “the days of King Messiah.” Thus the Targums identify Torah Observant Israel with the Messiah in this passage as the “seed” of the woman.

The Midrash Rabbah makes this identification of the “seed” of the woman as the Messiah clear in its comment to Gen. 23:5 referring to the naming of Seth it says:

“And she called his name Seth: For God has appointed me another seed, etc. R. Tanhuma said in the name of Samuel Kozith: [She hinted at] that seed which would arise from another source, viz. the king Messiah.”
(Genesis Rabbah 23:5)

Who has Created These?

Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who (מי *Mi*) has created these (אלה *Eleh*), that brings out their host by number: he calls them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one fails.
(Is. 40:26)

The Word

The Zohar gives some important light on the “Word” as found in the opening verses of Yochanan. In the portion of Zohar in question, Rabbi El’azar (the son of Shimon bar Yochai) is giving an exposition on the passage “Lift your eyes on high and see: Who created these?” (Isaiah 40:26) His father, Shimon bar Yochai interrupts him saying:

Rabbi Shim’on said, “El’azar, my son, cease your words, so that the concealed mystery on high, unknown to any human, may be revealed.”

Rabbi El’azar was silent.

Rabbi Shim’on wept and paused for a moment. Then he said, “El’azar, what is these? If you answer, ‘Stars and constellations,’ they are always visible there and were created by What, as it is said: By the Word (Davar) of YHWH the heavens were made (Psalms 33:6). As for things concealed, such would not be referred to as these, for that word indicates something revealed. This mystery was only revealed one day when I was at the seashore. Elijah came and asked me, ‘Rabbi, do you know the meaning of Who created these?’ I answered, ‘These are the heavens and their array, the work of the blessed Holy One. Human beings should contemplate them and bless Him, as is written: When I beheld Your heavens, the work of [2a] Your fingers, the moon and stars that You set in place, ... YHVW our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth! (Psalms 8:4, 10).

“Elijah said to me, ‘Rabbi, the Word (מְלֶכֶה) was concealed with the blessed Holy One, and He revealed it in the Academy on High. Here it is:

‘When Concealed of all Concealed wished to be revealed, it produced at first, a single point, which ascended to become thought. Within, it drew all drawings, graved all engravings, carving within the concealed holy lamp a graving of one hidden design, holy of holies, a deep structure emerging from thought called מי (Mi), Who, origin of structure. Existent and non-existent, deep and hidden, called by no name but Who.

‘Seeking to be revealed, to be named, it garbed itself in a splendid, radiant garment and created אֱלֹהִים (elleh), these. אֱלֹהִים (Elleh) attained the name: these letters joined with those, culminating in the name אֱלֹהִים (Elohim). Until it created אֱלֹהִים (elleh), it did not attain the name אֱלֹהִים (Elohim). Based on this mystery, those who sinned with the Golden Calf said “אֱלֹהִים (Elleh), These are your gods, O Israel!”

(Exodus 32:8). Just as מי (Mi) is combined with אלה (elleh), so the name אלהים (Elohim) remained for all time. And upon this mystery the world is built.”

Then Elijah flew off; I did not see him. From him I discovered the Word (מלה), whose mysterious secret I have demonstrated.”

R. Eleazar and all the companions came and prostrated themselves before him, weeping for joy and saying, ‘If we had come into the world only to hear this we should have been content.’

(Zohar 1:1b-2a)

In this section of Zohar Elijah appears and reveals the Mystery of the Word which was taught in the “academy on high”, that when the “Concealed of concealed” (the Infinite One, Eyn Sof) wished to be revealed, Eyn Sof *garbed itself in a splendid, radiant garment* (generally identified by commentators as the Ten Sefirot). Here the Zohar identifies that splendid, radiant garment as the Davar/Millah (Word).

The concept of the “Word” (Greek: Logos; Targum Aramaic: Memra; Zohar Aramaic: Millah; Syriac Aramaic: Milta Hebrew: Davar) already had a very special and unique meaning in the Second Temple Era. The LOGOS/MEMRA was a very important concept in the Second Temple Era, and if we are to understand what Yochanan (John) is saying, we must understand this concept.