

# **Neurology & Pain Management**

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## **Rabbi Akiva and Suffering**

Moses gave us the written Torah, the text we read and spend our lives struggling with to make sense and meaning each generation. There is a Hagadah that speaks of Moses receiving the law and his complete mystification as to the meaning of the crowns and extra markings. The Midrash then recounts how Hashem tells him about the future and a Rabbi Akiva who will interpret laws from these extras. After seeing his Torah he asks why Rabbi Akiva wasn't given the Torah instead. Then asking what will be Rabbi Akiva's reward he was shown his martyrdom.

"Rab Judah said in the name of Rab, When Moses ascended on high he found the Holy One, blessed be He, engaged in affixing coronets to the letters. Said Moses, 'Lord of the Universe, Who stays Thy hand?'<sup>1</sup> He answered, 'There will arise a man, at the end of many generations, Akiva b. Joseph by name, who will expound upon each tittle heaps and heaps of laws'. 'Lord of the Universe', said Moses; 'permit me to see him'. He replied, 'Turn thee round'. Moses went and sat down behind eight rows [and listened to the discourses upon the law]. Not being able to follow their arguments he was ill at ease, but when they came to a certain subject and the disciples said to the master 'Whence do you know it?' and the latter replied 'It is a law given unto Moses at Sinai' he was comforted. Thereupon he returned to the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, 'Lord of the Universe, Thou hast such a man and Thou givest the Torah by me!' He replied, 'Be silent, for such is My decree'. Then said Moses, '**Lord of the Universe, Thou hast shown me his Torah, show me his reward**'. 'Turn thee round', said He; and Moses turned round and saw them weighing out his flesh at the market-stalls. 'Lord of the Universe', cried Moses, 'such Torah, and such a reward!' He replied, 'Be silent, for such is My decree'.

(T.B.Menachot 29b)

I am struck by the rabbinic interpolation of Moses' desire to know Rabbi Akiva's reward as if to highlight the differences between the two great leaders, one representing the written law and the other the oral interpretive law. Rabbi Akiva we are told desired nothing more than to be able to fulfill the divine command to love God with all ones' soul to the point of martyrdom with no reward other than death, whereas Moses asks God "what will be his reward" as if the narrator wishes us to be informed of the martyr's untimely and seemingly unjustified death. The other literary motif is

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<sup>1</sup> Heb *mi meakev*...who prevents You from letting **me** have the full Torah now...or who stops You from giving Torah as it is!

the retort; 'Be silent, for such is My decree'. Which will be repeated when the angels cry out in dismay watching rabbi Akiva's slow torture.

The story regarding his martyrdom is told in the Talmud and in other midrashim. In the following pericope the question of reward and punishment is raised by the angels not man.

Our Rabbis taught: Once the wicked (Roman) Government issued a decree forbidding the Jews to study and practice the Torah. Pappus b. Judah came and found R. Akiva publicly bringing gatherings together and occupying himself with the Torah. He said to him: Akiva, are you not afraid of the Government? He replied: I will explain to you with a parable. A fox was once walking alongside of a river, and he saw fishes going in swarms from one place to another. He said to them: From what are you fleeing? They replied: From the nets cast for us by men. He said to them: Would you like to come up on to the dry land so that you and I can live together in the way that my ancestors lived with your ancestors? They replied: Art thou the one that they call the cleverest of animals? Thou art not clever but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more in the element in which we would die! So it is with us. If such is our condition when we sit and study the Torah, of which it is written, For that is thy life and the length of thy days, (Deut. 30:20) if we go and neglect it how much worse off we shall be! It is related that soon afterwards R. Akiva was arrested and thrown into prison, and Pappus b. Judah was also arrested and imprisoned next to him. He said to him: Pappus, who brought you here? He replied: Happy are you, R. Akiva, that you have been seized for busying yourself with the Torah! Alas for Pappus who has been seized for busying himself with idle things! When R. Akiva was taken out for execution, it was the hour for the recital of the Shema', and while they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting upon himself the kingship of heaven. His disciples said to him: Our teacher, even to this point? He said to them: All my days I have been troubled by this verse, 'with all thy soul', [which I interpret,] 'even if He takes thy soul'. I said: When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling this? Now that I have the opportunity shall I not fulfill it? He prolonged the word ehad until he expired while saying it. A bath kol went forth and proclaimed: Happy art thou, Akiva, that thy soul has departed with the word ehad! The ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He: **Such Torah, and such a reward?** [He should have been] from them that die by Thy hand, O Lord. (Ps. 17:14) He replied to them: Their portion is in life. A bath kol went forth and proclaimed, Happy art thou, R. Akiva, that thou art destined for the life of the world to come.

(Talmud Berachot 61b)

In both Talmudic passages the dissonance between the reward supposedly due and the cruel martyrdom is highlighted. Rabbi Akiva clearly represents an archetype of suffering and martyrology:

In the following pericope, Rabbi Akiva in his own words welcomes suffering in a parable of a king upset with his four sons.<sup>2</sup>

### מסכתות קטנות מסכת שמחות פרק ח

#### הלכה יא

רבי עקיבא אומר ארבעה בנים למלך, אחד לוקה ושותק, ואחד לוקה ומבעט, ואחד לוקה ומתחנן, ואחד לוקה ואומר לאביו הלקני. אברהם לוקה ושותק, שנאמר קח נא את בנך את יחידך אשר אהבת את יצחק ולך לך אל ארץ המוריה והעלהו שם לעולה, היה לו לומר, אתמול אמרת לי, כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע, ושותק, שנאמר וישכם אברהם בבקר ויחבש את חמורו ויקח את שני נעריו ואת יצחק בנו. איוב לוקה ומבעט, שנאמר

<sup>2</sup> Masechet Semachot chapter 8

אומר אל אלוה אל תרשיעני הודיעני על מה תריבני. חזקיה לוקה ומתחנן, שנאמר ויתפלל אל ה', ויש אומרים אף היה מבעט, שנאמר והטוב בעיניך עשיתי, דוד אמר לאביו הלקני, שנאמר הרב כבסני מעוני ומחטאתי טהרני.

This mashal, authored by Rabbi Akiva, encodes his whole approach to suffering: "A king had four sons: one would be silent when beaten, one would entreat forgiveness; one would kick out and the last one would ask for more punishment". These four sons represent our four ways of reacting to pain and suffering. We often suffer in isolation and silence, we often beg for forgiveness for our sins feeling guilty and accepting the suffering as punishment, often we rebel and "kick" feeling the universe is unjust and worse absurd. Four key historical figures are used to explicate the parable's four sons. Abraham represents that aspect of suffering in silence. Job represents the sufferer who complains, Chizkiyahu the king represents the sufferer who pleads and prays for healing, and finally David represents the sufferer who welcomes suffering. Rabbi Akiva teaches us his path, the way of suffering as welcomed guest by quoting King David's psalm (51:4) whereby the fourth son/ King David says to his father/Father in heaven "hit me (again!) " Quoting from verse 4 in Psalm 51 as follows;

1. To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David,
2. When Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.
3. Be gracious to me, O God, according to your loving kindness; according to the multitude of your mercies blot out my transgressions.
4. ***Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.***
5. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is always before me.
6. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight; so that you are justified in your sentence, and clear in your judgment.
7. Behold, I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.
8. Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts; therefore teach me wisdom in the inmost heart.
9. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
10. Let me hear joy and gladness; that the bones which you have broken may rejoice.
11. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
12. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a constant spirit inside me.
13. Do not cast me away from your presence; and do not take your holy spirit from me.

14. Restore to me the joy of your salvation; and uphold me with a willing spirit.
15. Then I will teach transgressors your ways; and sinners shall return to you.
16. Save me from blood guiltiness, O God, you God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness.
17. O Lord, open you my lips; and my mouth shall declare your praise.
18. For you do not desire sacrifice; or else would I give it; you do not delight in burnt offering.
19. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
20. Do good in your good will to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem.
21. Then shall you be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then shall they offer bulls upon your altar.

Rabbi Akiva is interpreting the loving kindness and mercy of Hashem in verse 3 with the need to be washed and cleansed of sin in verse 4 rereads the psalm away from its literal meaning (as a plea for forgiveness per se as noted in 13,14,15, etc. or admission of guilt in verses 5,6,7 or even a desire for cleansing in verse 4,9,14, or finally a plea for saving grace in verse 16.)

For Rabbi Akiva it is clear that none of the washings and cleansings could not be possible without the purifying effect of suffering that David obviously went through.

Rabbi Akiva reads this psalm as welcoming suffering! We know his approach well from other comments of his elsewhere <sup>3</sup>

Our Rabbis taught: When R. Eliezer fell sick, four elders went to visit him, viz., R. Tarfon, R. Joshua, R. Eleazar b. Azariah, and R. Akiba. R. Tarfon observed, 'Thou art more valuable to Israel than rain; for rain is [precious] in this world, whereas thou art [so] for this world and the next.' R. Joshua observed, 'Thou art more valuable to Israel than the sun's disc: the sun's disc is but for this world, whilst my master is for this world and the next.' R. Eleazar b. Azariah observed, 'Thou art better to Israel than a father and a mother: these are for this world, whereas my master is for this world and the next. But R. Akiba observed, '**Suffering is precious.**' Thereupon he [the sick man] said to them, 'Support me that I may hear the words of Akiba, my disciple, who said, "**Suffering is precious.**' Akiba,' queried him, 'whence dost thou know this?' — He replied, 'I interpret a verse: Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem etc. and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. (II Kings 21, 1) Now it is [elsewhere] written, these are also the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out. (Prov.25, 1). Now, would Hezekiah king of Judah have taught the Torah to the whole world, yet not to his own son Manasseh? But all the pains he spent upon him, and all the labors he lavished upon him did not bring him back to the right path, save suffering

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<sup>3</sup> Sanhedrin 101a, Pesikta deRav Kahana, Parah 39b., Pesikta rabbati, ed Friedmann 64b.

alone, as it is written, And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people: but they would not hearken unto him. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon (II Chron. 33:10) And it is further written, And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And prayed unto him, and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem unto his kingdom, and Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God. (ibid.12) **Thus thou learnest how precious is suffering.'**

All three of the Tannaim who visited the ailing Rabbi Eliezer used the same approbation and rhetorical devices. "You are more precious than rain/sun/father and mother" for those only do X where as you have many times X.! In a move to make him feel better they praised his life's accomplishments. However he asks to be raised in his bed after the astonishing remarks of his disciple Rabbi Akiva "**Suffering is precious**" and demands where here derived such a notion. Again it is directly from his method of exegesis he replies. Interpreting the chapter from

II Kings 21, he recounts how after raising a fine young king (Manasseh) the boy went after evil ways despite the obvious proper upbringing by his father King Hezekiah! What kind of response to such a righteous man! Yet by bringing the chapter from II Chronicles to bear Rabbi Akiva is able to show how Hashem sent Manasseh torment and suffering which then brought him back to the Lord. The suffering had a precious purpose especially for the Father Hezekiah the righteous.

From this plain exegesis Rabbi Akiva tells his teacher how precious suffering is! What kind of message is encoded here! His teacher was none other than Rabbi Eliezer who suffered the ignominy of being placed in cherem/excommunication at the end of his life! Did he need suffering for such a purpose, was he wicked!! Furthermore this kind of exegesis is very uncharacteristic of Rabbi Akiva! His mystical tendencies led much further astray than the mere side by side placement of two texts one from Kings and one from Chronicles. Where is the *drush* here! The plain meaning itself is obvious! God's punishing of Manasseh led to his repentance!

But Rabbi Akiva's Torah was different. His exegesis and *drush* lead directly to his notion of *mesiras nefesh* and even martyrdom. I would like to suggest that his target was not Manasseh rather the righteous king Hezekiah himself! The *drush* leading Rabbi Akiva to make his bold paradoxically comforting statement to the dying Rabbi Eliezer was precisely that sufferings are precious but to only to the righteous themselves!!! King Hezekiah felt the preciousness of suffering the wicked son despite all his efforts to raise him as a righteous man for despite his efforts the Lord had other plans that included his suffering this son. It is the very suffering of the king that was precious.

We began with the Talmudic pericope regarding R. Akiva's martyrdom and above we have discussed the Torah/ *drush* of Rabbi Akiva<sup>4</sup>. I believe both that his method of exegesis leads

directly and naturally to the notion of self sacrifice. His exegesis as well as his life and death were devoted to *mesiras nefesh* the notion that martyrdom and self-sacrifice is the proper posture for the God-fearing disciple.

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This idea is brought to the fore in the works of a Tzaddik whose life is intimately connected to Rabbi Akiva. In a powerful Torah, Parshas Korach the **Noam Elimelech** contrasts the spiritual archetypes Moses, Job and Rabbi Akiva with respect to *mesiras nefesh*.

“And how does the Tzaddik operate to be able to nullify decrees and influence (bring down *shefa*) the world surely it is through the holiness and purity of his *mesiras nefesh* for all Israel so that he is unified with a perfect true unity. In this way the tzaddik appears to the creator blessed be He as unique among the celestial beings as well as the mortals and it is precisely because of this (ability) that the tzaddik in his *mesiras nefesh* and unity with all Israel is named so called. And only through this method can he nullify the decrees and influence (cause *shefa to come down*) for them.

## Jacob

We find (Gen 33:20) “and he called Him ‘El elokei Yisrael’” and commenting on this verse the Talmud (Megilla 18a)<sup>5</sup> and God called Jacob ‘El’ which means strength as it is written “he has also taken the mighty of the land” (Ezek: 17;13) meaning Hashem gives the Tzaddik the power and strength to nullify decrees. However this ability requires refinement and great purity and for the Tzaddik not to be distracted from any of the above i.e. even thoughts about sustenance lest because of these there might be an obstacle for the Tzaddik in his worship...

And the source for all this is the Tzaddik because of his *mesiras nefesh* and his efforts in true unification brings down great mercy to the world to nullify all decrees and bring down *shefa* influence of goodness and all types of blessing. And it is this the verse hints to (Job 14; 4) “Who can bring a clean thing from an unclean? Not one.” Meaning who can transform purity from impurity i.e. great mercy from harsh judgments and klippot to transform them into mercies.” Not

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Hashem says “ Let this elder be, for he is worthy to avail himself of My glory.” “Let this elder be” meaning “leave him alone, or put him aside for now” since he will avail himself of My glory later, when he will give his life for My glory in the sanctification of My name!”  
תלמוד בבלי מסכת תגיגה דף טו

<sup>5</sup> R. Aha also said in the name of R. Eleazar: How do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, called Jacob El [God] Because it says, And the God of Israel called him [Jacob] El. (Gen 33:20) For should you suppose that [what the text means is that] Jacob called the altar El, then it should be written, ‘And Jacob called it’. But [as it is not written so], we must translate, ‘He called Jacob El’. And who called him so? The God of Israel. R. Eleazar understands the verse to mean “and he (Jacob) erected an altar there, and the God of Israel called him (Jacob) ‘El’. However the simple meaning of the verse apparently is “and he (Jacob) erected an altar there and he called it (altar) “El, God of Israel”. Clearly Jacob intended the altar to be a reminder of the miracle God had performed for him. (see Rashi ad loc, also Ramban and Gur Aryeh there).

one!” means impossible without the efforts of the Tzaddik to unify through his *mesiras nefesh* in complete unification.

## **Job**

This is what Job also said (Job 23:13) “He is One and is unchangeable, and who can turn him? And he does what his soul desires.” Meaning Job was wondering about Hashem since He was unique and solitary so who would be able to change His mind to nullify the decrees. So he replied “And he does what his soul desires.” Meaning the soul of the Tzaddik who desires and longs and yearns for and is *moser nafsho* and reaches the true unification; he too is called ‘One’.

This is also hinted in the following Talmud passage (Pesachim 22b) “As it was taught, Simeon Imsoni— others state, Nehemiah Imsoni- interpreted every *eth*<sup>6</sup> in the Torah [but] as soon as he came to, thou shalt fear [eth] the Lord thy God, (Deut.6;13) he desisted. Said his disciples to him, ‘Master, what is to happen with all the *ethin* which you have interpreted?’ ‘Just as I received reward for interpreting them’, he replied, ‘so will I receive reward for retracting’.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently R. Akiva came and taught: Thou shalt fear [eth] the Lord thy God is to include scholars.<sup>8</sup> “

According to our thesis it becomes clear that only Rabbi Akiva had the license for such an exegesis.

## **Rabbi Akiva**

For in the Talmud (Berachot 61b) it states “When R. Akiva was taken out for execution, it was the hour for the recital of the Shema’, and while they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting upon himself the kingship of heaven. His disciples said to him: Our teacher, even to this point? He said to them: All my days I have been troubled by this verse, ‘with all thy soul’, [which I interpret,] ‘even if He takes thy soul’. I said: When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling this? Now that I have the opportunity shall I not fulfill it? He prolonged the word *ehad* until he expired while saying it. A bath kol went forth and proclaimed: Happy art thou, Akiva that thy soul has departed with the word *ehad*! The ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Such Torah, and such a reward? [He should have been] from them that die by Thy hand, O Lord. (Ps. 17:14) He replied to them: Their portion is in life. A bath kol went forth and proclaimed, Happy art thou, R. Akiva, that thou art destined for the life of the world to come.”

And it is quoted in commentaries (Heichalot de Rabbi Shimon 6:5) that God forbid such a thing happened in reality to a Tzaddik rather it looked as if he was being subject to such torture, but the judgment was from them. Rather Rabbi Akiva when he (usually) came to the recital of the Shema accepted upon himself the yoke of heaven and was *moser nefesh* in a perfected unification

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<sup>6</sup> Eth is usually the sign of the accusative but here is interpreted as an extending particle.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Separating’ (myself from them). Since the *eth* in one verse does not signify extension, it cannot do so elsewhere. His whole method of *drush* was called into question since there is nothing that could compare to the God.

<sup>8</sup> Rabbi Akiva suggested that there is a comparison to God, the talmid chacham or the Tzaddik as R. Elimelech will show.

(Zohar Leviticus 11b) and kept on strengthening himself more and more in *mesiras nefesh*. When his pupils asked him “Our Rabbi thus far!” we still do not understand your motives! He replied” All my days I have been troubled by this verse, ‘with all thy soul’, [which I interpret,] ‘even if He takes thy soul’. I said: When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling this? Now that I have the opportunity shall I not fulfill it?” meaning he was always expecting (*metzapeh*) through his *mesiras nefesh* that his worship should have such an effect to be able last and be fulfilled through the generations (as well) to come, so that they too will be able to work through *mesiras nefesh* the same effects. That is the meaning of “When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling this” that I may be able to fulfill and have such an effect even for generations to come. This is the meaning of the expression “Thou shall fear [eth] the Lord thy God” [eth] is to include scholars, meaning that the Talmidei Chachamim are great in their unity in an integrated class yet the perfected Tzaddik who towers above them to inter-include them in his *mesiras nefesh* in perfect unification, is comparable to God, in his ability to nullify decrees and bring down *shefa* and influence therefore (Rabbi Akiva is the one whose exegesis identifies the word) [eth] includes the scholar.<sup>9</sup>

This is the meaning of the verse “This is the chukat of the Torah, and you shall take for yourselves etc.” meaning it represents a statute that you shall walk in (or with) my statutes, meaning with my attributes i.e. unifying yourselves with *mesiras nefesh* and through that you will accomplish this high level.

“You shall take for yourselves” that Hashem said to Moses “that all Israel shall take themselves to you and thereby become unified in you like one person. And you are that (archetypal) Tzaddik who can inter-include all of them; you should worship in the path of *mesiras nefesh* and in your unifications; so that the Red Heifer (i.e. red meaning judgments characterized by the color red c.f. Zohar Chukat 180b) “if they be though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” (Isa. 1:18), you shall cause them to become purified and transformed into great mercies (Zohar ibid. Lekutei Torah ‘veyikchu’), that all become purified and wholesome. The Shechina which is known as the Red Heifer is also hinted at here which will become elevated through your worship (Zohar Chukat 180). However it should be “without blemish” meaning there should be no blemish in your *mesiras nefesh* and unifications rather all should be perfected and refined and with great clarity.”

The Noam Elimelech clearly spells out the spiritual discipline for the Tzaddik. *Mesiras nefesh* is the methodology by which the Tzaddik includes all others by his total devotion to am Yisrael he becomes God-like and is noticed above to avert the harsh decrees.

In true Lurianic form the Shechina is also elevated by his worship however there must be so self involved in the process. Total selflessness is required so as not to spoil the effort by personal intrusions of benefit or pleasure.

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<sup>9</sup> Only the caliber of a rabbi Akiva whose worship included such a level of *mesiras nefesh* had the license to be able to compare the scholar with God and make such an exegesis possible.

In **Lekutei Halachot** of Reb Nosson Breslover the archetypal picture of Akiva is connected to the very act of creation and the Midrash that describes the forces of din and rachamim, stern justice versus mercy competing for the attention of the creator as the very archetype upon which the world should be founded on:

"צדיק יבחן ה' (א"תהלים י) כמו שכתוב, חנינת כל היסורים שהצדיקים סובלים וזהו ב' ג' כ' כמו שאמרו רבותינו זכרונם, כפשתני הנה כל מה שיודע שפשתנו יפה הוא מקיש עליה ביותר הם. "יזכיר וכו' כי את אשר יאהב ה' (משלי ג) וכו' שכתוב (ב"ב ראשית רבא פרק ל) לברכה ינים בעצמן כי הם מאמינים ויודעים שהיסורים והד, ל"ממתיקים הדין בשרשו בתחלת המחשבה הנה שזוהו בחינת ר, ידי זה באמת הם זוכים לעלות ולכלול בתחלת המחשבה - ועל. הם טובות גדולות זו תורה זו, מעליו השלו, עקיבא שסרקו את בשרו במסרקות של ברזל ושאל מ'שה רבנו 'כי יסורים של צדיקים כאלו בחינת ר. כך עלה במחשבה! שתוק, והשיב לו השם יתברך! ש'כרה ר'א את העולם במדת הדין הם נמשכין מתחלת המחשבה שרצה השם יתברך לב, עקיבא וחבריו אבל ראה, כדי שיזכו הכל לכלול בתחלת המחשבה. ל"כדי שיזכו לעמ'ד בנסיון בלי סיוע דלעלא כנ' ידי - ואז יש כ'ח לכל לשבר היצר הרע על. 'וכן הקדים מדת הרחמים - על, שאין העולם מתקיים שהוא, סיוע דלעלא

פי הם. "יזכיר וכו' כי את אשר יאהב ה' (משלי ג) וכו' שכתוב (ב"ב ראשית רבא פרק ל) פי הם מאמינים ויודעים שהיסורים והדינים בעצמן, ל"בתחלת המחשבה הנה ממתיקים הדין בשרשו שזוהו בחינת ר, ידי זה באמת הם זוכים לעלות ולכלול בתחלת המחשבה - ועל. הם טובות גדולות זו תורה זו, עליו השלום, רקו את בשרו במסרקות של ברזל ושאל מ'שה רבנו עקיבא ש'ם 'כי יסורים של צדיקים כאלו בחינת ר. כך עלה במחשבה! שתוק, והשיב לו השם יתברך! ש'כרה הם נמשכין מתחלת המחשבה שרצה השם יתברך לבר'א את העולם במדת הדין, יבא וחבריו עק אבל ראה, חשבה כדי שיזכו הכל לכלול בתחלת המ. ל"כדי שיזכו לעמ'ד בנסיון בלי סיוע דלעלא כנ' ידי - ואז יש כ'ח לכל לשבר היצר הרע על. 'וכן הקדים מדת הרחמים וכו' - על, שאין העולם מתקיים, ל"עקיבא וחבריו כנ'ים כמו ראבל הצדיקים גדול, ל"שהוא בחינת מדת הרחמים כנ', סיוע דלעלא דהינו שסובלים כל, דהינו במדת הדין לבד, הם עובדים השם יתברך כמו שעלה בתחלת המחשבה והם משברין הכל. דשהכל נמשך ממדת הדין מיני יסורים ועומדים בכל הנסיונות והקטרוגים כך עלה, שזוהו בחינת שתוק, ידי זה זוכין באמת לעלות ולכלול בתחלת המחשבה - ועל "בעצמן כנ' ל"במחשבה כנ'

For there are great Tzaddikim that do not need help from above and the Lord behaves with them initially with the Middas Hadin. They are able to withstand all the trials and suffering all kinds of sufferings and troubles that emanate from the Middas hadin.

And this is the matter of all the trials the Tzaddikim suffer as it is written (Psalms 10:1) "The Lord examines the tzaddik" like the flax worker; the better he knows how to beat the flax the better the product (Gen Rabba 32) and as it is written "those whom the Lord loves he reproves" (Prov.3).

For they sweeten the judgments at their source at the origin of thought, for they believe and know that the trials and judgments in their essence are great goods. Through this way they truly merit to become elevated and be included at the source of thought.

And this is the aspect of rabbi Akiva whose flesh was stripped with metal combs and Moses our teacher asked (God) "is this Torah and is this its reward!" and God replied "be silent for this is what arose in My thought"

For the trials of the Tzaddik are constellated by the aspect (archetype) of rabbi Akiva and his colleagues in the original thought with which God desired to create the world with the Midas Hadin so that they might be able to withstand the trials without divine help, in order to be included back into the original thought. However He saw that the world could not stand (being subjected only to the Middas Hadin) so he preceded with the Middas Harachamim etc. in that way there would be help from above to break the evil inclination.

But the great Tzaddikim like Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues; they worship God as it was when the original thought arose. Meaning with the Middas Hadin alone i.e. they suffer all types of trials and withstand them all and adversaries that arise from the Middas Hadin. They are able to break everything themselves and thus are able to become elevated and included in the original thought which is implied in the retort "silence! Thus did it arise in My mind".

For the notion of Din arose from the beginning of Tzimtzum of the *chalal hapanui* etc as is known. (As is written in Torah 64 of Reb Nachman's Likutei Mehoran) for the *chalal hapanui* represents the difficulties that philosophically cannot be answered. But the great Tzaddik in the archetype of Moses can enter into these questions as well which is the notion of the *chalal hapanui*. This is what is meant by the tzaddik being able to become elevated to the original thought which represents the initiation of the Tzimtzum<sup>10</sup> form which the Din originates. And is able to withstand the trials there and suffer all the sufferings and judgments and through

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<sup>10</sup> Prior to Creation, there was only the infinite *Or Ein Sof* filling all existence. When it arose in G-d's Will to create worlds and emanate the emanated...He contracted (in Hebrew "*tzimtzum*") Himself in the point at the center, in the very center of His light. He restricted that light, distancing it to the sides surrounding the central point, so that there remained a void, a hollow empty space, away from the central point... After this *tzimtzum*... He drew down from the *Or Ein Sof* a single straight line [of light] from His light surrounding [the void] from above to below [into the void], and it chained down descending into that void.... In the space of that void He emanated, created, formed and made all the worlds.

( *Etz Chaim, Heichal A"K, anaf 2* )

The exact nature of the *tzimtzum* became the subject of disagreement among later kabbalists. Some viewed the *tzimtzum* as a metaphorical act of self-limitation in which the *Or Ein Sof* was merely concealed rather than removed, while the essence of G-d remained completely unchanged. Others maintained that the *Or Ein Sof* was actually removed, not merely concealed another opinion maintained that the *tzimtzum* was the actual withdrawal of G-d's essence as well as the removal of the *Or Ein Sof* a fourth view held that the *tzimtzum* consisted of a concealment (but not a withdrawal) of both G-d's essence and the *Or Ein Sof*.

The effect of the *tzimtzum* (irrespective of which explanation is offered) is nevertheless clear: it established a radical distinction between Creator and created (from the viewpoint of the created, although not from the viewpoint of the Creator between cause and effect, so that creation comes about by way of a "quantum leap" rather than by way of a developmental, evolutionary order.

this merit to grasp the secret of the *chalal hapanui* and come to know that even there disappeared and hidden, God is present in a wondrous and awesome way, that is impossible to grasp.

Reb Nosson suggests that the *chalal hapanui* that apparent vacated space to which God withdrew His essence prior to creation in order to make space for the world, is a place apparently devoid of God. It is from this place of apparent absence that Din arises and the Middas Hadin has effect in our world. The original thought was to create the world from this archetype until God saw the world could not survive on such strict standards so He used the Middas Harachamim that archetype of mercy. However the tzaddik on the level of Moses and rabbi Akiva is able to survive, and withstand all the trials that do come from the Middas hadin that originated from the *chalal hapanui*. This type of great Tzaddik does not need “help from above” i.e. the Middas Harachamim to assist him in his worship, rather he makes use of the brute force of Middas Hadin and is able to withstand the trials and sufferings and even martyrdom so as to be able to access that original thought of creating the world with Middas hadin and thus have access to the *chalal hapanui*. With that he is able to actually see God in the vacated space and complete the revelation of the divine in this world even in places that seem apparently devoid of His presence.

For Rabbi Nachman the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiva and suffering in general for the Tzaddik in particular has the effect of gaining access through the torment and tribulations, to a divine archetype by which the world was originally intended to be created with. The aspect of Din is that archetype that God had originally intended to create the world with. Through the sufferings and torments the Tzaddik is able to access that original thought pattern and if successful in overcoming the trials and sufferings, able to actually see God in the vacated space the *chalal hapanui*.

In the final analysis for me his martyrdom was not for its own sake but for the Torah, the mythic narrative and the Text. Notice while his flesh was being raked with iron combs he does not state “this for the sake of the Lord”<sup>11</sup> or a protest psalm. Rather he is rehearsing his Torah and the fact that all his life was devoted to the performance of the precepts of The Text, the Torah. All his life he was troubled by the fact that one verse he could not act upon. The mythic narrative of Torah that gave his life meaning was not perfect and complete because of this one verse he could not act out! The organizing principle of his life was the text so the gap in the text troubled him. Finally *despite the agonies of torture* he is pleased and smiles as he is able to fulfill the missing text that one verse of loving God even if He takes one’s soul! Notice it is not even the plain meaning of the text for that merely demands a full heart rather than a duplicitous one. It is his midrashic reinterpretation of the words *bechol nafshechah* with all your soul to include a case ‘even if He should take your soul’ . Rabbi Akiva had his own hermeneutical rules of interpretation (Middot)

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<sup>11</sup> I think of Jesus on the cross who quoted Psalm 21 “Lord why have Thou forsaken me” The words which Jesus spoke told of his own desolation of soul in the midst of His agony. It should be pointed out, however, that they are the first words of Psalm 21, which is a messianic psalm, foretelling the suffering of the Messiah in great detail. It is likely that he recited the entire psalm, but the evangelist in the text of the New Testament only recorded the first words, assuming that those who heard them would recall the entire psalm. Matthew 27:26, 31-37, Mark 15:14-26, Luke 23:26-38, and John 19:1-22

that demanded a use even for the word *es* the usual pointer for the accusative to follow. For his method to be complete he had to live out the very midrashic interpretative rules he had expounded in the flesh! And this one verse escaped him for he could not actually live it through until this moment. The *mesiras nefesh* we are speaking of here is a qualitatively different kind to the usual martyrology cases of dying for a cause. This is **Dying for the text!**

In our making sense of our lives we too must follow this example. We too need to interpret the facts and history of our lives our traditions our illnesses and suffering and most importantly make sense of them. The narrative by which we make sense and meaning of them becomes the ur-text the mythic frame that give life meaning, our particular myth. For this we too must die for! We must suffer for despite whatever happens remain true to this narrative frame.