

“The End of the Insight?”
Dazzling Wisdom of Rabbi Meir, week 1

Colors used to link Eruvin phrases with notes. Verbal description of color-links w/few explanations, p.2. Plain text follows.

Is R' Meir uninterested in practice, or over-focused on consequences? Unable to scale-down his vision or showing-off his smarts, mocking his *chaverim* and tradition? Offering a Cubist view? Hinting at a Taoist reading? Sending a message we haven't deciphered yet? -- musings from Virginia Avniel Spatz 11/12/22

“ברוך... אשר יצר את האדם בחכמה וברא בו

נקבים נקבים, הללים הללים

גלוי וידוע לפני כסא כבודך

שאם יפתח אחד מהם או אם יסתם אחד מהם

אי אפשר לעמוד לפניך” -- blessing from B. Ber 60b

So, so you think you can tell
 Heaven from Hell? Blue skies from pain?
 Can you tell a green field from a cold steel rail?
 A smile from a veil? Do you think you can tell?
 – Waters/Gilmour (Pink Floyd)
 “Wish You Were Here” (1975)

- Failure of even one duct or conduit, opening of a needed boundary or blockage of a crucial opening, threatens an individual’s existence (Ber 60b, above);
- Ritual categories *tamei* and *tahor* ordered Temple-based worship, and failure to distinguish one from the other threatened communal life;

(B. Eruvin 13b) אמר רבי אחא בר חנינא
 גלוי וידוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם
 שאין בדורו של רבי מאיר כמותו,
 ומפני מה לא קבעו הלכה כמותו?
 שלא יכלו חביריו לעמוד על סוף דעתו.
 שהוא אומר על טמא טהור
 ומראה לו פנים,
 על טהור טמא ומראה לו פנים.

Turn and face the strange
 -- David Bowie,
 “Changes”
 (1972)

- R’ Meir somehow challenges his colleagues in delimiting such categories or finding the end of the issue: perhaps there are still more facets to perceive concerning boundaries and openings?
- R’ Acha bar Chanina starts off naming “*Mi She’amar*,” a reminder that words create, as does failing to speak, and that even one boundary where it doesn’t belong can have grave consequences.

None of us is free. None of us is free. None of us is free. **If one of us is chained**, none of us is free.



YouTube screenshot from Aug 2020 music video, “None of Us Are Free,” St. Matthew’s Episcopal (Sterling VA) “The 9:30 Band. Image, annotated: “If one of us is chained,” two women in separate video windows, singing: One, wearing “Black Lives Matter” earrings, shuts eyes in emotion of song. One uses ASL sign for “chained” as she sings, looking straight at camera. Credits name lead vocalists Ashley Williams and Akila O’Grady.

There are people still in darkness. And they just can't see the light
If you don't say it's wrong, then that says it's right
 We got to look out for each other. Let our [kin] know that we care
 Got to get the message, send it out loud and clear

– from “None of Us Are Free” by Barry Mann, Cynthia Weil, & Brenda Russell, 1993.
 (Few famous covers: Ray Charles, 1993, Lynyrd Skynyrd, 1997, Solomon Burke 2002.
 Also in *Rise Up Singing* website and songbook.)

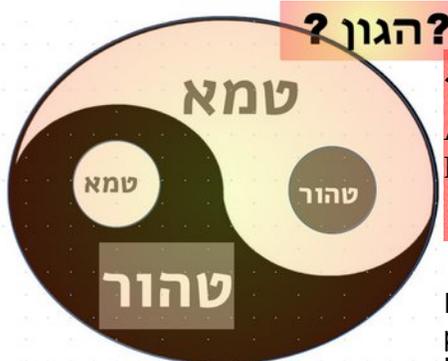
Colors are used to link words in Eruvin and commentaries, as follows:

- 1) “גלוי וידוע” in Eruv 13b with same in Ber 60b.
- 2) “אי אפשר לעמוד” in Ber 60b: R’ Meir’s friends cannot stand... and in the prayer, we say “...we could not stand.”
- 3) “קבעו” with a phrase about “ducts and conduits: חללים חללים” in Ber 60b, seems akin to squeezing or drilling meaning of “kav’u” and to the idea that the bodily tubes are meant to be fixed.
- 4) “על סוף דעתו” in Eruvin/Rashi with “יפתח אחד מהם” and “יסתם אחד מהם” in Ber 60b and with “If one of us is chained” in the song, “None of Us Are Free” (less linguistic than abstract/poetic).
- 5) “מי שאמר והיה העולם” [referencing YHVH] with “שהוא אומר” [referencing R’ Meir] and with the line, “If you don't say it's wrong, then that says it's right,” from “None of Us Are Free.”
- 6) “ומראה לו פנים” with Pink Floyd and David Bowie lyrics – more reference to facets and facing.
- 7) The expression “הגון” in the Rashi commentary with a Yin-Yang view of *tamei/tahor*.

Perhaps R’ Meir’s teachings suggest that seeds of one status are inherent in the other: That would help explain why his associates couldn’t stand at the “end” of his teachings. This might also fit with the idea that his teachings were “balanced” in a way that confounded (simple) halakhic rulings.

Rashi

על סוף דעתו - לא יכלו להבין
 באיזה דבריו נכונים
 ובאיזה אין דבריו נכונים
 שהיה נותן דעת מיושב והגון
 על אין הלכה כהלכה



הגון -- fit worthy respectable decent; related to Arabic word for "noble." pi. part. pass. הִגִּין = מְהוֹגֵן
 From verb: to balance, make corresponding
 הִגֵּן

Image: yin-yang symbol with Hebrew words טמא and טהור placed so that Yin=Tahor and Yang=Tamei. Caption/title is Hebrew word *hagun* [הגון], between question marks.

There is a famous statement in the Talmud (Erubin 13b)... “...Because his colleagues, *Lo Yochln Lamod al Sof Daato*, could not accept the conclusions to which his knowledge might lead! For this sage could make what is pure impure and prove it by logic and reason, as well as make what is impure pure and again prove his deductions by logic and reason!” So keen were his analytic gifts that “he could make pure the most impure of insects, and offer a hundred and fifty reasons to substantiate his logical proofs.” It was just this gift that made his colleagues wary of his legal opinions. You cannot judge the laws and doctrines of a people only by the rules of logic or scientific truth. You need *Tebunah*, that understanding that comes from sympathetic insight into your people's ways of life, from reverence and from deep humility.

– from “The Rabbi In Present-Day Jewish Life” by Dr. Israel H Levinthal

Levinthal was leader of Brooklyn Jewish Ctr, 1919-82 when he died, age 94; pres. of the local ZOA, visiting professor at Jewish Theological Seminary. This was an address to JTS grads, June 1935. *The Brooklyn Jewish Center Review* 1936. April/Nisan 5696, p. 5, 6, 16. <https://brooklynjewishcenter.org/cr1936.php>

The rest of the *Review* content offers a fascinating historical glimpse, including a report on then six-week-old German legislation: “What the Nuremberg Anti-Aryan Laws Really Mean.” Content caution: the *Review* assumes Ashkenormative, straight-cis-male-dominated, Zionist Jewish thought/life in New York in 1936.

Plain text version. **“The End of the Insight?” Dazzling Wisdom of Rabbi Meir, week 1**

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Eruvin 13b

אמר רבי אחא בר חנינא

גלוי וידוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם שאין בדורו של רבי מאיר כמותו,

ומפני מה לא קבעו הלכה כמותו? שלא יכלו חביריו לעמוד על סוף דעתו. שהוא אומר על טמא

טהור ומראה לו פנים על טהור טמא ומראה לו פנים.

blessing from B. Ber 60b

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[Voice of the page author]

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Rashi: לא יכלו להבין באיזה דבריו נכונים ובאיזה אין דבריו נכונים -
שהיה נותן דעת מיושב ו הגון על אין הלכה כהלכה

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