

Plain text version, with image descriptions, of "Eyes and Teachers for Dazzling\_Spatz.pdf"

first two pages = **“The End of the Insight?” Dazzling Wisdom of Rabbi Meir, week 1**

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

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

“ברוך... אשר יצר את האדם בחכמה וברא בו נקבים ונקבים, חללים חללים”

גלוי וידוע לפני כסא כבודך

“שם יפתח אחד מהם או אם יסתם אחד מהם אי אפשר לעמוד לפניך”

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)

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

[Voice of the page author]

- 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;
- 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.

Image: 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.

Lyrics: 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.

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-- “שלא יכלו ... לעמוד” with “אי אפשר לעמוד” in Ber 60b: R’ Meir’s friends cannot stand... and in the prayer, we say “...we could not stand.”

in Ber 60b, seems “קבעו” --3 with a phrase about “ducts and conduits” , חללים חללים, נקבים נקבים, חללים חללים” 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) referencing R’ Meir] and with[ “שהוא אומר” referencing YHVH] with[ “5-- “מי שאמר והיה העולם”

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: [Page author says] 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 ruling

ועל סוף דעתו – לא יכלו להבין באיזה דבריו נכונים ובאיזה אין דבריו נכונים RASHI : שהיה נותן דעת מיושב והגון על אין הלכה כהלכה

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

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.

[PART 2, 11/27/22 plain text -- this begins page 3 of document "Eyes and Teachers for Dazzling\_Spatz.pdf," earlier doc from first week of class plus additional pages]

**Further on why R' Meir's colleagues "cannot stand at the end of his insights."** Is he stuck in a too-large vision? Uninterested in practice, or over-focused on consequences (with maybe too many on-the-other-hands to make a decision)? Grand-standing? Offering unfamiliar perspectives?

NOTE: Different sources transliterate names and HLK-words differently. No attempt here at consistency.

[Three columns of text L>R  
Column 1)] A few possible clues:

Yebamot 62b relates that Rabbi Meir was one of five students who helped revive Torah after a tragic disaster:

רבי מאיר, ורבי יהודה, ורבי יוסי, ורבי שמעון, ורבי אלעזר בן שמוע, והם הם העמידו תורה איתה שעה

Rabbi Akiva had lost 24,000 students, who all died in one period because of disrespect:

וכולן מתו בפרק אחד, מפני שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה

When Meir died, the world lost a great drasher/parable-maker (Sotah 49A):

משמת רבי מאיר בטלו מושלי משלים

After R' Meir died, conflict ensued over his students' sharing of halakhot. The head of the academy tried to ban Meir's students from entering at all. When they did, more disturbance resulted....Different practices are involved, but the same basic drama unfolds in Kid 52b and Naz 49b-50a, concluding with one rabbi despairing:

תורה מה תהא עליה

[Column 2)] [quotation']Halakha comes from the root HLKh, to walk or go to. Halakhah is the act of going forward, of making one's way. A halakhah, a path-making, translates the stories and values of Judaism into ongoing action.- Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism* (Beacon Press, 1999), 21. [end quotation]

Going forward – for us as for R' Meir – means heading into unknown territory. Lots of paths were untested in R' Meir's day, and there was a lot of stumbling. So, too, in ours. Our rabbi ancestors' stories left us some clues about what pitfalls we might face, where and how to seek light, and the dangers and disappointments of finding ourselves lost and at odds about which way to try next. But the path is ours to forge.

Rachel Adler argued for male/female gender equity as essential to a path contemporary Jews could walk in integrity. She and many thinkers of the last century helped fellow Jews seek new ways forward. There are so many more facets of thought and action to explore – and so many more stories to tell.

[Column 3] [quotation] To whom may [Halakhic man] be compared? To a mathematician who fashions an ideal world and then uses it for the purpose of establishing a relationship between it and the real world, as was explained above. The essence of Halakha, which was received from God, consists in creating an ideal world and cognizing the relationship between that ideal world and our concrete environment in all its visible manifestations and underlying structures. There is no phenomenon, entity, or object in this concrete world which the a priori Halakha does not approach with its ideal standard. - Joseph B. Soloveitchik *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1983), 19. [end quotation]

A mathematician's "ideal" world can look and behave differently in Euclidean and non-Euclidean space, and both the "real" and the "ideal" worlds of just a few decades back differ from those in which I try to function today. Is any of them more like God's "ideal world"? Maybe it depends on how many facets we see and how.

Boxed text below columns:

Were Meir and Akiva particularly inept at training students to manage conflict with respect? Do their stories, instead, reflect the overall complexity and delicacy of the Torah endeavor? When R' Meir "ומראה לו פנים," and his colleagues could not find the end of his insight, was he somehow stumbling on, in Adler's words, "an unfixable, intrinsically oppressive system"?

[end page 3]

[start page 4]

...The Halakha...situates us in our history (on the path from Sinai) and cosmos, and enables us to recognize each other as part of the same destiny. It is thus our homos, the way

**we conceive alternative (ideal) reality and the bridge that links our reality to this vision.**

The community has a shared vision -- standing with God at Sinai, being God's partners in the world -- that requires a roadmap for reaching and attaining it. The Halakha provides the "map" to follow to approach that shared vision. -- Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Toward a Liberal Theory of Halakha," *Tikkun Magazine*, July/August (Vol. 10: 4, 1995)

[Two columns of text ]

[Boxed text in column 1: ]

[After the Flood and Dispersion, God feared misuse of the first, eternal world-filling light and so]

"...arose and concealed it [וַיִּגְנֹז] from them, as it is stated: "And from the wicked their light is withheld" (Job 38:15)

And for whom did God conceal [the light]? For the righteous people in the future, as it is stated: "And God saw the light, that it was good" (Gen 1:4), and "good" is referring to none other than the righteous, as it is stated: "Say of the righteous that it shall be good for them, for they shall eat the fruit of their actions" (Isa 3:10). When the light saw that it had been concealed for the righteous, it rejoiced, as it is stated: "The light for the righteous shall rejoice" (Prov 13:9) – From Chagigah 12a

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 חבריו לעמוד על סוף דעתו שהוא אומר על טמא טהור ומראה לו פנים על טהור טמא ומראה לו פנים

גָּנַז

– 1) to save, hoard up, reserve. – 2) remove from sight, hide. – 3) to declare a book apocryphal, to suppress, prohibit the reading of

גָּנִז m. -- store, treasure.

[Column 2]

אור עולם באוצר חיים / אורות מאפל אמר ויהי

In the Treasury-of-life is light eternal / God spoke, and out of darkness came light  
– from 'Or Olam, by Yose ben Yose (4th-5th Centuries CE); lines added to *Yotzeir Or* blessing on the High Holy Days

Eternal, eternal light. Source of life, source of life  
Light of creation, God's living treasure.  
O holy light, God's holy light

Light from darkness/ Light from darkness  
God spoke, and it was so  
Light from darkness/ Light from darkness/ Creator of heaven and earth

When the light of the moon/ Shall be as the light of the sun  
And the light of the sun/ Shall be sevenfold  
As the light of the seven days,/ Seven days of the week

Oh, in the future/ There will be a more perfect light  
The light resides/ Within Each one of us,  
Just waiting for us/ Just waiting for us  
To act justly, to act with purity,/ Clarity and joy

When we help one another,/ We bring this light into the world.  
The ongoing creation/ Of light from darkness  
O holy light, O holy light/ Eternal light, O holy light

– “Eternal Light” by Norma Brooks, Psalm Full of Soul  
Based on 'Or Olam; Gen 1:3-5; Isaiah 30:26, 45:7  
More info and recording: [tinyurl.com/2bca4u6w](http://tinyurl.com/2bca4u6w)

Below the two columns:

**What's the connection between light and righteousness or justice?**

**How do we access enough light to conceive of new realities?**

**What kind of light helps build the bridge that links our reality to this vision?**

[end page 4]

[start page 5]

[Centered text]

אמר רבי אחא בר חנינא תנא לא רבי מאיר שמו אלא רבי נהוראי שמו ולמה נקרא שמו רבי מאיר  
שהוא מאיר עיני חכמים בהלכה ולא נהוראי שמו אלא רבי נחמיה שמו ואמרי לה רבי אלעזר בן ערך  
שמו ולמה נקרא שמו נהוראי שמנהיר עיני חכמים בהלכה

אמר רבי האי דמחדדנא מחבראי דחזיתיה לרבי מאיר מאחוריה אילו חזיתיה מקמיה הוה מחדדנא  
טפי דכתיב והיו עיניך רואות את מורידך

[Surrounding texts:]

[surrounding 1)] Rabbi Meir, per Sefaria, was 4<sup>th</sup> generation Tannaim (139-163) and third most cited sage in the Mishnah. He “was an unusual but prolific scholar who studied under Elisha b. Abuya, R. Ishmael and R. Akiva. He later became the head of the court in Usha, until he quarreled with R. Shimon ben Gamliel. At that point, he left Palestine altogether. He was also known to have experienced many miracles.”

In Bialik & Ravnitsky's *Book of Legends*, the entry for Meir is a shared one with Elisha ben Abuya (AKA "Acher"), his teacher and later the Talmud's most famous apostate, and with his wife Beruriah, one of the few women mentioned in Gemara, and the only one whose word is quoted as law. Presenting them together is a mark of how intertwined their three stories are.

The trio's relationship – their friendship and their intellectual interactions – seems to have disturbed contemporaries and later scholars. Several stories seem to question the sexuality of Beruriah and Meir. Eventually, Rashi records a dreadful, tragic story of Beruriah's death, linking her demise to sexual impropriety. (See, e.g., Kid 81b and Rashi for Avodah Zarah 18a).

[surrounding 2)] Two of the rabbis with whom R' Meir is identified are of the same time period, although in the 5th generation, c.135 - c.170 CE, of Tannaim:

While R. Nehorai may be a second name for one of the other scholars, many citations use this name. Most of these citations are homiletic and some of them come in the context of his discussions with the prophet, Eliyahu.

R. Nechemiyah was a student of R. Akiva, and was among those active in laying the groundwork for the Mishnah. The son of a scholar, he humbly supported himself as a potter. – Sefaria again

[surrounding 3)] Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh was earlier, 3rd generation c.80 – c.110 CE, a close student of R. Yochanan b. Zakkai.

*Jewish Enc*, summarized: R' Eleazar ben Arakh's counsel was valued, as Ps 1:3: "Whatever he does prospers." Beneficiaries of his counsel called him "Prophet," but he said: "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet,\*\* but my teachers taught the traditional verity that every counsel subserving the promotion of the glory of God realizes good results." [Citation: Mid Tehillim 1:3]

\*\*"Amos answered... 'I am not a prophet [לֹא נְבִיא], and I am not a prophet's disciple. I am a cattle breeder and a tender of sycamore figs'" (Amos 7:14). This "I am not a prophet" trope, quoting Amos – perhaps a distant kin of Star Trek's "I am a doctor, not a \_\_\_\_\_" – appears with different characters and different careers/vocations elsewhere in Talmud.

Below surrounding text are definitions: עֵינַי f. (b. h.; עֵינַי) – עֵינַי to be round, curved. denom. עֵינַי - 1) eye, sight, look. – 2) anything resembling the eye, hole, ring – 3) spring, עֵינַי, עֵינַי, עֵינַי ch. Same. --1) eye, sight – 2) ring, collar; hole. – 3) [guide,] guide-post on cross-roads (only in pl.). – 4) **spring, well**

Then, with note that R' Yochanan ben Zakkai is speaking in both cases:

ושבח ר' אלעזר בן ערך בטוב ההבנה והיות כל ענין עמוק קל אצלו ותבונתו מוספת על הענין  
And he praised Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh [for] good understanding and that every deep matter was easy for him and that his comprehension added to the [discussion]. – Rambam on Avot 2:8

וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֶרֶךְ מְעִיֵן הַמַּתְגַּבֵּר

And R' Eleazar ben Arakh is **like a spring** that [ever] gathers force. -- Avot 2:8

**"an ever-strengthening fountain"**: His heart (mind) is broad and he adds analysis and reasoning from his own knowledge. – Bartenura (16<sup>th</sup> C CE)  
Finally, downward arrow pointing off the page links the "spring, ever-strengthening fountain" to the following page

[start page 6]

[Arrow from previous page continues...]

Note repeats: Different sources transliterate names and HLK-words differently. No attempt here at consistency.

[Shape of page: Talmud to right. Note below reading: "What is the moral of this story? What is the value of Torah in isolation from communal endeavors?" Arrows lead from that question box to three bits of text]

Talmud Text:

אמר רבי אחא בר חנינא תנא לא רבי מאיר שמו אלא רבי נהוראי שמו  
ולמה נקרא שמו רבי מאיר שהוא מאיר עיני חכמים בהלכה ולא נהוראי שמו אלא רבי נחמיה שמו  
ואמרי לה רבי אלעזר בן ערך שמו ולמה נקרא שמו נהוראי שמנהיר עיני חכמים בהלכה

What is the moral of this story? What is the value of Torah in isolation from communal endeavors?

1) So, what happened to R' Eleazar ben Arakh and the ever-strengthening fountain that was his learning?

Surprisingly, there are few halachot and only a single halachic midrash associated with Eleazar ben Arach. An explanation is that after Yochanan ben Zakkai's death, when his disciples remained at Yavneh to study together, Eleazar ben Arach chose instead to move to his wife's home in Emmaus, a town located between Jerusalem and Jaffa and that was famed for its pure water, pleasant climate, and warm baths. Isolated from other scholars, the keen mind of Eleazar ben Arach deteriorated, and it was said that he completely forgot all that he had learned (ARN 14).

–Ronald L. Eisenberg, *Essential Figures in the Talmud* (Jason Aronson, 2013)

2) This same story is also associated with R' Nehorai, whose related teaching is found in Avot 4:14 (or 15 or 18, depending on verse divisions):

Rabbi Nehorai says: Exile yourself to a place of Torah, and do not say that it will follow after you, that your colleagues will make it yours. Do not rely on your understanding (Prov 3:5)

3) There are additional tales in which it appears that the rabbi wanted to return to communal study, but he was convinced by his wife's appeal to his ego: "They need you and so should come to you." There could be lessons there about humility and about balancing personal and familial obligations. (But also, sadly, it seems: the too-common caution that anything or anyone not 100% all about the academy was trouble or distraction.)

[Fourth section:] Another famous story about R' Eleazar ben Arakh (Chag 14b) involves traveling with his teacher and asking permission to share a mystical teaching by the side of the road. Things got so intense that "fire descended from heaven and encircled all the trees in the field, and all the trees began reciting song":

וירדה אש מן השמים, וסיבבה כל האילנות שבשדה, פתחו כולן ואמרו שירה

Then Yochanan ben Zakkai kissed his student on his head and said, "Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, who has given a son to our father Abraham, a descendant who is capable of understanding, speculating, investigating, and expounding on the Divine Chariot. He added, "There are some who preach well but do not act well, and others who act well, but do not preach well, but you preach well and act well. Happy are you, O Abraham our father, that Eleazar ben Arach has come from your loins" – Eisenberg, *Essential Figures* [more on this story, p.12 below]

[Final box:] What is the moral of THIS story? And what, if anything, does this suggest about R' Meir and his colleagues' inability to "stand on the end of his insight"?

[end page 6]

[top is Talmud lines, followed by Hebrew for verse, Isaiah 30:20, mentioned plus Targum and then English translations, that seem to follow the Hebrew and Aramaic, followed by Robert Alter's translation and note.]

אמר רבי האי דמחדדנא מחבראי דחזיתיה לרבי מאיר מאחוריה  
אילו חזיתיה מקמיה הוה מחדדנא טפי דכתיב והיו עיניך רואות את מוריך

...וְלֹא יִכְנַף עוֹד מוֹרֶיךָ וְהָיוּ עֵינֶיךָ רֹאוֹת אֶת־מוֹרֶיךָ:

Then your Guide will no more [yikanef]\* but your eyes will watch your Guide;  
– JPS 1917 \*"be ignored" -- meaning uncertain

...וְלֹא יִסְלַק עוֹד שְׂכִינְתָּה מִבֵּית מִקְדָּשָׁא וְיִהְיוּ עֵינֶיךָ חֹזְנִין יְת שְׂכִנְתִּי בְּבֵית מִקְדָּשָׁא:  
Targum Jonathan for Isa 30:20

yet thy teacher shall not withdraw himself any more, but thy eyes shall see thy teacher:  
– Koren Jerusalem bible

“...But your Teacher shall no longer be concealed, and your eyes shall see your Teacher”  
*your Teacher*. While other understandings are conceivable, the most likely reference  
is to God  
*concealed*. The **verb yikanef** is anomalous, but it may be related to the noun *kanaf*, the corner  
of a garment or a wing, perhaps suggesting a condition of lying under a fold -- Robert Alter

[Around this text are some 3 definitions and commentaries on definitions:]

1) THE Hebrew **kanaf is a homonym**; most of its meanings are metaphorical. Its primary signification is “wing of a flying creature,” e.g., “Any winged (*kanaf*) fowl that flieth in the air” (Deut. 4:17).

The term was next applied figuratively to the wings or corners of garments comp. “upon the four corners (*kanfoth*) of thy vesture” (ib. 22:12). It was also used to denote the ends of the inhabited part of the earth, and the corners that are most distant from our habitation. Comp. “That it might take hold of the ends (*kanfoth*) of the earth” (Job 38:13); “From the uttermost part (*kenaf*) of the earth have we heard songs” (Isa. 24:16).

Ibn Ganah (in his Book of Hebrew Roots) says that *kenaf* is used in the sense of “concealing,” in analogy with the Arabic *kanafu alshalan*, “I have hidden something,” and accordingly explains, Isaiah 30:20, “And thy teacher will no longer be hidden or concealed.” It is a good explanation, and I think that *kenaf* has the same meaning in Deut. 23:1, “He shall not take away the cover (*kenaf*) of his father”; also in, “Spread, therefore, thy cover (*kenafeka*) over thine handmaid” (Ruth 3:9).

– Rambam *Guide for the Perplexed*  
Pt1, Ch 43 (Friedlander 1903 trans)

2) **vb. denom.** from 2 כָּנַף.

only Niph. **be cornered**, thrust **into a corner, or aside**;

– Impf. 3 ms. מוֹרֶיךָ עוֹד יִכְנַף וְלֹא יִסְלַק Is 30:20 *and no more shall thy teachers be thrust into a corner* (cf. Di); > others, who render *hide themselves*,

(cf. Arabic كَفَّ *enclose, guard*, but this rather for protection)

3 (סליק, סליק), ch. same, (corresp. to h. עלה) 1) to rise, go up; to go away.... when [Rabbi Abba] went up from (Babylonia to Palestine) —2) to occur [as in "happen to"] —3) to stop, hush, keep silence. —4) to turn out, result -- 5) to occur to the mind; to desire; to entertain an opinion -- 6) to grow, heal up

סליק

to remove -- 2) to dismiss with payment; to settle, satisfy

- (אסתליק, איסליק) to remove one's self, rise, go away; to be removed, taken away; to die. -- 2) to be accounted.

[Final box at bottom, with Coverdale translation set in colorful fairy-ish box]

I don't read Old English but wonder if these translations (via BibleHub.com) reflect *yikanef* v. *yisaleik* --

Geneva Bible of 1587: ...thy raine shalbe **no more kept backe**, but thine eyes shall see thy raine ?

Bishops Bible of 1568: ...thy rayne shalbe **no more so scant**, but thyne eyes shall see thy rayne ?

And this one just seems so SVARA-appropriate:

Coverdale bible of 1535 (first complete bible translation into "modern" English):

**But thine instructor fleyth not farre from the, yf thine eyes loke vnto thine instructor**

[end page 7]

[start page 8]

[Text centers around image created from two photographs, one boat with a single rower facing away from the viewer and one boat with a single rower facing toward the viewer. The boats are situated in this composite over one body of water. Credits: Facing boat: Gulver via Pixabay; Aft boat: Dezalb via Pixabay  
The original images' are largely obscured by words, shared below in this document.]

[Facing boat image is covered with these words:] Alicia Ostriker, Lori Lefkowitz, Avivah Zornberg, Arthur Waskow, Benay Lappe and SVARAniks, Sharon Freundel, Natl Havurah Cmt, Gerry Serotta, Max Tickin (z"l), Brant Rosen, Susannah Heschel; our children

[Below the facing image:] Some of their teachers: Allen Ginsburg, Yehuda Amichai, Max Kaddushin, Rav Soloveitchik, Abraham Joshua Heschel

[Aft-facing image is covered with these words:] Living or not, I saw their influence from behind -- Phyllis Tribble, Mordechai Kaplan, The Havurah, Martin Buber, Robert Alter, \*Jonathan Sacks\*

\*I handed Alter the OJ at breakfast and attended his lecture. I asked R' Sacks a question, which he answered, at a synagogue talk. But we never learned face-to-face

[Top of page begins with the following:] *yikanef* or *yisaleik* -- Did the Teacher leave or hide? Is the Teacher headed away because that's where the forward path is? Is it, rather, knowledge that is hidden -- as punishment? or as protection? Are there questions we are just meant to avoid? Things we don't learn until later?

Some definitions, a few boating associations, and some remarks on teachers whom I've seen face-to-face or only from the back.

אמר רבי האי דמחדדנא מחבראי דחזיתיה לרבי מאיר מאחוריה

ואילו חזיתיה מקמיה הנה מחדדנא טפי

surrounding the central graphic are definitions

Counter-clockwise, from near the rear-facing boat toward the one facing forward:

[near rear-facing boat]

אַחֹר m. (b. h.; v. חֹר )

– 1) back, hind-part, buttock....the back (outside) and the inside of a vessel – 2) last.

– 3) farthest back, earliest.

[below image]

(אַחֲרָא), אַחֲרָא ch. same. לאחורא backward.

—אַחֲרָי behind, after

חֲזִית f. (חֲזוּ; cmp. חֲזִית fr. חֲזוּ) cutting; rough, unfinished side...Esp. the rough side of a fence or wall, indicating that the neighbor had no right to it, border-mark.

חֲזוּתָא ch. same 1) vision.... – 2) watch-tower Targ. Is. XXIII, 13

[from Isa 23:13 is an arrow pointing off the page]: Bob Dylan's "Watchtower," p. 11 here

חֲזִי, חֲזִי (b. h.) [to divide,] to discern, see

חֲזִי, חֲזִי ch. same , to see, recognize, to decide.

[near front-facing boat]

טָפָא II

(= h. טָפָא, v. טוּף)

– to float.

טָפָא, טָפִי III (v. טָפָא I)

– to join, add, increase.

טָפָא I b.h. (v. טוּף I) to touch closely;

to join, add

טָפָא II (v. טוּף I)

to float; to drip.

אַיִלָא

transf. beak of a ship (a beam to which the head of a ram [אַיִל] was attached), prow

אֵילָן

If, "oh that!

[near top of image]

[end of page 8]

[start of page 9]

[This page repeats the boat images, fore and aft, twice. One with images of Jimi Hendrix and one with images of David Bowie, as follows:

HENDRIX. Center image, atop the water, is a headshot, enhanced with extra color, showing Hendrix in a black hat with several decorative chains around his neck (it is advertised as "wallpaper" for a laptop). Next is image, cropped into the aft-facing boat is photo of Hendrix, seen from the back, wearing a fancy beaded shirt, at Woodstock. Cropped into the facing boat is front-facing picture taken from a Hendrix tumbler, no further details.

BOWIE: Center image, atop the water, Bowie's face is colored like a rainbow, and he is holding up one finger over his lips in a "shhhh" gesture. Cropped into the aft-facing boat is a still of Bowie from the back with lights shining around him, from the 1983 video "Look Back in Anger." Cropped into the front-facing boat is a smiling, camera-facing image of Bowie taken from a 1978 story in the Irish Mirror.

Two blocks of text read:]

I always saw Jimi Hendrix (1942-1970, so young!) from the back. He was gone before I was old enough to pay much attention to him, as a person or a performer. His music was part of my consciousness from very early, though, and his cultural influence grew in my lifetime. I learned and listened more, saw a 1969 interview on the Dick Cavett Show –which meant seeing Hendrix and hearing his voice in a more direct way....My family watched Cavett back when – tho I was too young to be up that late, while Hendrix was still alive – so I sort of read Hendrix back into my young life. I certainly never faced him as a person, nor did I meet Bowie. Doubt such proximity would have helped me as a young person. But temporal proximity does matter:

Even though I never saw him in person, David Bowie (1947-2016) was a different sort of presence in my life... from 1969-ish, when I discovered that some songs were “too long for radio” (AM radio, that is) and met Major Tom; 1972 when I first heard: “I turned myself to face me, but I never caught a glimpse....turn and face the strange,” watched parents freak out about his “influence,” and not-yet-b’mitzvah-age classmates declared that liking him was a sign of some fundamental “strangeness” – a strangeness not to be celebrated but avoided personally and whispered about in others...through different relationships to Bowie and to “strange” in my actual teen and college years. Hendrix and Bowie, as personas of influence, and as creative forces in my decades, shaped my life.

[end page 9]

[start page 10]

[This page uses just the aft-facing boat, which is superimposed with Exodus 33:22-23 (below). Text appears in three basic columns:]

[Column 1] Paraphrased from Jerusalem Talmud Beitzah 5:2 [Consideration of whether it is forbidden to clap the backs of the hands on Shabbat or only to clap palms of the hands...]

Rabbi was celebrating a family marriage with folks clapping the backs of their hands [לְאַחֲרֵי יְדֵיהֶן] on the Sabbath. R' Meir\* passed by, heard their sound, but could not see how they clapped. He asked: "Are Sabbath prohibitions lifted?"

Rabbi heard his voice and said "Who is that who comes to trouble us [לְרַדּוֹתֵינוּ] in our home?" [others: "hide [לְצַנְעֵינוּ]"]. R' Meir heard his voice and fled, with guests running after him. The wind blew his turban from R' Meir's neck. Rabbi peeked from the window and saw the neck of R' Meir from behind. He said, I attained learning only because I saw R' Meir's neck from behind.

לֹא זָכִית אֲנִי לְאוֹרֵייתָ אֶלָּא בְּגִין דְּחָמִית קַדְלִיה דְּרַבִּי מְאִיר מִן אַחֲרֵי

R' Johanan and R' Simeon ben Lakish both said: “We attained learning only because we saw Rabbi's finger from [the back of his sleeve (text illegible)]”

[Note appears in water, at bottom of boating image:] \*Translator's note: Since according to all other sources R' Meir died during R. Simeon ben Gamliel's lifetime,

[Column 2:]

וְהָיָה בְּעֵבֶר כְּבֹדִי, וְשָׁמַתִּיךָ בְּנִקְרַת הַצּוּר וְשָׁכַתִּי כְּפִי עָלֶיךָ, עַד עֲבָרִי.  
וְהִסְרֹתִי אֶת־כְּפִי וְרָאִיתָ אֶת־אֲחֻרָיוּפְנֵי לֹא יֵרָאוּ:  
Exodus 33:22-23

[Column 3]: Moses sees God’s “behind,” and God shares Their attributes. Some say it is those attributes, results, or evidence, of God’s presence in the world – God’s “behind,” in a sense – that Moses saw and that we can see.

יה = מ-אחור ["YAH" = "m-achor"]

Similarly, we see each other’s “behind”: our work in the world, the way we make others feel... And maybe that’s what Rabbi saw of R’ Meir, a hint of the ways in which R’ Meir, as a colleague and a teacher, was an exemplar of God’s “behind,” bringing light to the community. Perhaps Rabbi’s remark is meant to acknowledge how R’ Meir – even in, or because of “trouble” – is channeling the fountain/spring of God’s light, Torah, as are the rest of us.

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[Below the columns:] God saw what people were capable of doing in the Flood/Babel generations and so hid the original, world-filling light. And for whom did God conceal [the light]? For the righteous people in the future.... Hag 12a

The light is concealed – maybe (from/with) behind YAH -- >>> מ אחור יה  
>>> Waiting for people to speak and act justly, as in the “Eternal Light” song/teaching

**What’s the connection between light and righteousness or justice?**

[end of page 10]  
[start of page 11]

[page is three columns,  
text consists of song lyrics at center, with two sets of commentary on Isaiah 23:13 at sides  
It begins with centered header:]

**Musical/Historical Interlude:**

(This is what my mind hears when reading “Isaiah 23:13” as Jastrow’s citation for “watchtower.”)

[Center column:]

"All Along the Watchtower"  
Bob Dylan, 1967;  
Hendrix (1968) version, here, differs slightly

There must be some kind of way outta here/ Said the joker to the thief  
There's too much confusion/ I can't get no relief

Business men, they drink my wine/ Plowmen dig my earth  
None will level on the line [Dylan: None of them along the line]  
Nobody offered his word. Hey, hey [Dylan: Know what any of it's worth]

No reason to get excited/ The thief, he kindly spoke  
There are many here among us/ Who feel that life is but a joke  
But, uh, but you and I, we've been through that/ And this is not our fate  
So let us stop talkin' falsely now/ The hour's late, hey. / Hey

All along the watchtower/ Princes kept the view  
While all the women came and went/ Barefoot servants, too  
Well, uh, outside in the cold distance/ A wildcat did growl  
Two riders were approaching/ And the wind began to howl, hey

All along the watchtower/ All along the watchtower

[Left commentary column] Targum Jonathan for Isaiah 23:13

הָא אַרְעָא כְּסָדָאֵי דִּיּו עֵמָא כַּד לָא הָוָה אַתְוֹרָאָה שְׁכַלְלָהּ לְנַגְוֹן אַקִּימוּ חֲזוֹתָהָּ פָּגְרוּ בְּרִנְיָתָהָ  
שְׁוִיָּהָ לְדַמְחָמְרָא:

Hebrew:

הוּ אַרְץ כְּסָדִים זֶה הָעָם לֹא הָיָה אֲשׁוּר יְסָדָה  
לְצִיִּים הַקִּימוּ (בְּחִינִי) [בְּחֹנִי] עֹרְרוּ אַרְמְנוֹתֶיהָ שָׁמָּה לְמַפְלָה

JPS 1985:

\*Behold the land of Chaldea—  
This is the people that has ceased to be.  
Assyria, which founded it for ships,  
Which raised its **watchtowers** [בְּחֹנִי],  
Erected its ramparts, / Has turned it into a ruin.

\*Meaning of verse uncertain. Emendation yields “The land of Kittim itself—/ Which the Sidonian people founded, / Whose watchtowers they raised, / Whose citadels they erected—/ Exists no more; / Assyria has turned it into a ruin.”

Robert Alter (2019, translation and note):

Look, the land of the Chaldeans,  
this is the people that is no more.  
Assyria founded it for ships,  
they put up their siege towers,  
laid waste its citadels,  
turned it into ruins.

*the land of the Chaldeans.* The switch of viewpoint to Mesopotamia is intended to offer an object lesson to Sidon and Tyre: just as the Chaldeans became a "people that is no more," this prophecy of the destruction of Tyre and Sidon with a particular historical event have not been convincing, and it could be that this is all of a kind of prophetic fantasy rather than the report of an event.

[Right commentary Column:]

Isaiah 21, 30 (JPS 1985):

For thus my Lord said to me:  
“Go, set up a sentry [הַמְצַפֶּה];  
Let him announce what he sees.

He will see mounted men,/ Horsemen in pairs—  
Riders on asses, Riders on camels—  
And he will listen closely,/ Most attentively.”

...And there they come, mounted men—/ Horsemen in pairs!”  
Then he spoke up and said,  
“Fallen, fallen is Babylon,/ And all the images of her gods/ Have crashed to the ground!”  
-- Isa 21:6-7, 9

For it is a rebellious people,/ Faithless children,/ Children who refused to heed  
The instruction of the LORD;

Who said to the seers,  
“Do not see,” To the prophets, / “Do not prophesy truth to us;  
Speak to us falsehoods,/ Prophecy delusions....” -- Isa 30:9-10

And the light of the moon shall become like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall become sevenfold, like the light of the seven days, when the LORD binds up His people’s wounds and heals the injuries it has suffered. -- Isa 30:26 [see "Eternal Light" and 'Or Olam, p.4]

[end page 11]

[start page 12]

[page is two columns, with this header across top:]

Two riders were approaching.... being alone in learning is dangerous; being together is challenging  
*Book of Legends: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash.* H.N. Bialik and Y.H. Ravnitsky (Hebrew 1908-1911). English: Schocken, 1992

[Column 1]

R’ Meir was learning with Elisha ben Abuya – “after he’d gone astray [שֵׁשֶׁת אֲצָא לְתַרְבוּת רָעָה]” –  
regarding this verse: “Gold and glass cannot equal it; neither shall its exchange be vessels of fine gold”  
(Job 28:17)

R’ Meir said to him: This is referring to words of Torah, which are as difficult to acquire as gilded vessels and vessels of fine gold but are **as easy to lose as glass vessels** (see Hag 15a).

The story continues:

**Elisha:** ...but your teacher Akiva would not have spoken thus. He would have said: As vessels of gold and even vessels of glass can be repaired if broken [שֵׁשֶׁת שֶׁבְרַח], **so can a disciple of the wise recover** his learning if he has disintegrated [שֵׁשֶׁת שֶׁרָח].

**R’ Meir:** So you, too, must come back.

**Elisha:** I cannot.

**R. Meir:** Why not?

**Elisha:** I was riding a horse on the Sabbath, and I heard a divine voice reverberating: “Return, O backsliding children” (Jer 3:4), “return unto Me, and I will return unto you (Mal 3:7), except for Aher, who knew My strength and yet rebelled against Me.

When R’ Meir [on a donkey] and Elisha [on horseback] reached the Sabbath limit, Aher (Elisha) said to him: Meir, turn back, for I have just measured by the paces of my horse that the Sabbath limit extends only thus far.

**[R’ Meir] replied:** You, too, go back!

**Aher answered:** Have I not just told you that I have already heard from behind the curtain [in heaven], “Return ye backsliding children – except Aher”?

– Bialik & Ravnitsky 243-4: 191 Citation: Hag 15a [paragraph breaks, bold added]

[Column also contains one definition box:]

קָרַח I: to entangle, intercept, to lacerate (like lips on a broken flask or on flax "which spinner moistens with saliva")

II: to be/make wide, over-hanging, flapping, emasculated or impotent

III: to evaporate, be decomposed; to decay; to smell badly

[Column 2:]

Our masters taught: Once, when on a journey, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai was riding an ass and his disciple R. Eleazar ben Arakh was driving the ass from behind [or riding another donkey behind]. R. Eleazar said: Master, teach me a chapter of the Work of the Chariot.

He answered: My son, have I not instructed you that the Work [of the Chariot] is not to be taught even to one person [דְּבַרְהוֹן], **unless he is a sage and able to draw inferences on his own?**

R. Eleazar entreated: Master, then permit me to say something before you that you already taught me. He answered: Say it.

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai immediately dismounted from the ass, wrapped his cloak around himself, and sat down on a stone beneath an olive tree. R. Eleazar said to him: Master, why did you dismount from the ass?

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai: While you are expounding the Work of the Chariot, the Divine Presence might be with us, and the ministering angels might accompany us – is it proper that I should continue riding an ass?

As soon as R. Eleazar ben Arakh began his exposition of the Work of the Chariot, fire came down from heaven and lapped at all the trees in the field, which then burst into song.

What was the song they sang? “Praise the Lord from the earth, ye sea mothers,, and all depths...fruitful trees and all cedars.... Hallelujah (Ps. 148:7, 9, 14).

And an angel was heard from the fire, saying: “surely this is the very Work of the Chariot!”

– Bialik & Ravnitsky 211:46. Citations: Hag 14b, En Yaakov, ad loc.

[paragraph breaks added] Story continues with blessing, see p.6 above

[page 12 ends]

[page 13 starts]

[Page 13 uses the front-facing boat image, top left corner]

**What is the connection between light and righteousness or justice?**

**What is the relationship between light and looking into the eyes of a teacher – or The Teacher?**

והיו עיניך ראות את־מורִיךְ

[Large Hebrew words with arrows:]

שמנהיר עיני חכמים בהלכה [points to]

ורבי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֶרְךָ מֵעֵינַי הַמִּתְגַּבֵּר [points to the above, plus this:] עין

And R' Eleazar ben Arakh is **like a spring** that [ever] gathers force. -- Avot 2:8

But “surprisingly few halachot” are credited to him (per *Essential Figures in Talmud*, above p.6). One story is that he lost his learning – access to, or ability to interpret that spring – when he was separated from the community.

What other explanations might there be? Did the spring gush but not nourish? Causing fields to burst into flames and trees to sing, for example, sounds intense, but does it build coalition, help forge a new future?

Is R' Eleazar ben Arakh's story, along with those about associates of R' Meir who met serious trouble – death, insanity, apostasy – through mystical endeavor, intended as cautionary?

Is the point, maybe, that we should look, beyond, BEHIND, the teacher to The Teacher?

We should not treat one another as idols, either by raising up particular thought leaders to be held as somehow larger-than-life, or by allowing ourselves to fall into our fellows' stuff/*mishegaas*. ...nor should we disregard our fellows' challenges/sensitivities, or fail to respect them as people... Instead, we should endeavor to focus on The Teacher, the source of that spring and that light.

R' Meir famously taught that the reason for a blue thread in *tzitzit* is that blue resembles the color of the sea, which resembles the color of heaven. And heaven resembles the Throne of Glory (Sotah 17a):

In other words, look beyond, or BEHIND, for meaning.

[end page 13,

end document:

Virginia Avniel Spatz, November 27, 2022]