## Pious Irreverence: Confronting God in Rabbinic Judaism

### I. Rabbinic Opposition

#### 1. Sifre Deuteronomy Sifre 307

Another explanation: *The Rock – the Powerful One – His work is perfect:* His actions in regard to all creatures of the world are perfect; there can be no complaint whatsoever about His work.

None of them can look at Him and say: Why should the generation of the flood have been swept away? Why should the people of the tower [(of Babel)] have been scattered from one end of the earth to the other? Why should the people of Sdom have been swept away by fire and brimstone? Why should Aaron have assumed the priesthood? Why should David have assumed the kingship? Why should Korach and his followers have been swallowed up by the earth? Therefore the verse goes on to say: “For all His way is justice” – He sits in judgment on everyone and dispenses to each what is appropriate for him.

#### 2. Mekhilta Rabbi Ishmael Vayehi 6

“He is one; who can dissuade Him.” [Job 23:13].”… He judges alone for all those who come into the world – and there is no one to challenge his words.

Rabbi Akiva said to him: Enough Pappus!!

Rabbi Pappus responded: And how do you [Akiva] explain “Who is one – who can dissuade him?”

He [Rabbi Akiva] said to him [R. Pappas]: One should not challenge [ל.tolist] the words of Him who spoke and the world came into being, for every word is in accordance with truth [Ｉם nip] and every decision in accordance with justice [בדין].
### II. Rabbinic Ambivalence

#### 4. Pesika Rabbati 47

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blessing the man whom suffering has smitten, but who overcomes the intensity of his resentment and raises no cry against the measure of justice.</th>
<th>פSİקתא רבֵּה (אַיֵּשׁ שָלֹם) פיסקא מד - אַחָר מָות</th>
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<tr>
<td>Behold, when suffering befell Job, had he overcome his resentment and not raised a cry against the measure of justice, he would have risen to great and praiseworthy eminence.</td>
<td>ידבר לו אל משה אחרי מות: וא서י אדם שנגעו בו ייסורים וכבש, רחמתי</td>
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<td>As R. Hanina bar Papa said: Had he not raised a cry, even as now we say in the Tefillah, “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob,” we would also be saying “and God of Job.”</td>
<td>כעסו ולא קרא תגר אחר מדת הדין, או כעסו ולא קרא תגר כשם שאומרים: ואלהי איוב, בא א&quot;ר חנינא בר פפא אילו לא קרא תגר כשם שאומרים</td>
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<td>The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Job: Why raise you a cry?</td>
<td>אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא, ]למי [ למה ]אתה קורא תגר שהגיעוך הייסורים</td>
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<td>Or consider yourself greater than Abraham? Because he ventured to say: “Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?” (Gen. 15:8) I put him to trial after trial, saying to him, “know of a surety that your seed shall be a stranger” (Gen. 15:13). Yet he did not raise a challenge.</td>
<td>או קורא אתה ד嫚י прин התמיד (כפיה) [כפיו] שלע מצוהах שיביטל גזרתי עליו מיתה ועל תולדותיו ולא קרא תגר, אלא אתה שיביטל גזרתי עליתיה ועל תולדותיו ולא קרא תגר, או קורא אתה ד嫚י прин התמיד (כפיו) [כפיו] שלע מצוהах שיביטל גזרתי עליו מיתה ועל תולדותיו ולא קרא תגר</td>
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<td>Or consider yourself greater than Isaac? Because he persisted in loving Esau I made his eyes dim: “And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see” (Gen. 27:1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Or consider yourself greater than Moses? Because he spoke in anger to Israel, saying “Hear now, you rebels” (Numbers</td>
<td>או קורא אתה ד嫚י прин התמיד (כפיו) [כפיו] שלע_memcpy לא קרא תגר, אלא אתה גדול ממַיִץ אָדום, או קורא אתה ד嫚י прин התמיד (כפיו) [כפיו] שלע_memcpy לא קרא תגר, או קורא אתה ד嫚י принהתמיד (כפיו) [כפיו] שלע_memcpy לא קרא תגר</td>
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I decreed as punishment for him that he should not enter into the Land. Yet he did not raise a challenge.

What is the meaning of They perish for ever without any regarding it [Job 4:20]? Job said to God: Oh that I knew where I might find Him.... I would order judgment before Him [23:3].

This is to be compared to a palace soldier [ברייתי] who being drunk kicked at [the door of] the prison and allowed the prisoners to escape. He threw stones at the bust of the governor of the city, cursed the magistrate, and said, "Show me where the king of this city lives and I will teach him justice [מלמדו אתי ידין]."

He entered, and they showed him the king sitting on a dais imprisoning a noble lady, banishing the prefect, putting out the eyes of the general, imposing a sentence on the Count and putting the Magister in the stocks.

When he saw the king of the city doing all this, he was afraid and said, "Please, king, I was drunk; don't be mad at me." So did Job stand and scream [יהוה]: Oh that I know where I might find Him.... I would order judgment before Him [Job 23:3]. He threw stones at His image.... He cursed the ruler.... He then saw the king sitting on His throne, imprisoning a noble lady. Behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow [Num. 12:10]; driving out Jacob in the stocks—[איש שלום], על קטריקי לאברהם, [שם/בראשית]ʵ[ יוסף].

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At once the Holy One blessed be He answered: It is for me to comfort Jerusalem. In keeping with what I have said to comfort Jerusalem. In keeping with what I have
written: “He that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.” [Exodus 22:5] Since I set her on fire, as is said: “From on high has He sent fire” [Lamentations 1:13], I must comfort her, as is said: “For I say the Lord, will be on to her a wall against the fire round about.” [Zechariah 2:9]

The Holy One blessed be He said: I wrote in the Torah “though shall not deliver a bondman onto another master” [Deut 23:16]; yet I turned the children of Israel over to the nations of the earth, as is said: “Their rock had given them over and the Lord had delivered them up.” [Deut. 32:30]. I wrote “though shall not entirely reap the corners of your field” [Lev. 19:9]; yet I vented My wrath entirely as is said: “the Lord has vented His fury entirely.” [Lamenations 4:11]. Indeed, were they not diminished for their sins [by My wrath], no creature could ever prevail against them; against Israel...

Accordingly, when the Holy One, blessed be He, comes to say to Jerusalem: Accept comforting from Me, as is said: Open to me, my sister [Song of Songs 5:2].

She will reply: I shall accept no comforting from You until I and You have reproved [תוכחות] each other, as is said: “Come my beloved let us go into the field” [Song of Songs 7:12] – to a place where no business but ours is going on.

“Let us lodge in the villages” [Ibid.] -- so that I may show You the nations of the earth upon whom You lavish good things, and who nonetheless deny You.

Jerusalem will go on to say: In contrast, Master of the Universe, why did you not deal with me as Joseph did with his brothers, as it is said: “Oh that you were as a brother to me” [Song of Songs 8:1] Think of Joseph – his brothers required him with evil and wished to slay him, yet when they came under his power, he requited them with good, and himself comforted them, as is said: “And he comforted them, and spoke kindly unto them” [Gen. 50:21]...

Jerusalem will further say: Master of the Universe, before You gave the Torah to Israel, You did go around offering it to all seventy nations, no one of which would accept it. It was finally Israel who accepted it. And since it was they who accepted it, how could You have done to them what You have done?

באמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: אני כתבתי בתורה: לא תסגיר עבד אל אדוניו (דברים כ”ג ט”ז) ויאני מסרתים ביד אומות העולם את שמי על כל צורם (יאוהד ק”ו/ヂ")inged, אני מנחם אותה ויאני אהיה לה נאם ה’ חומת אש סביב (ב”ב). אני כתבתי את שמי על כל צורם (יאוהד ק”ו/ヂ") אני מסרתים ביד אומות העולם ויתהלע (שם/דברים/ל”ב), אני כתבתי את שמי על כל צורם (יאוהד ק”ו/ヂ") אני מסרתים ביד אומות העולם ויתהלע (שם/דברים/ל”ב), אני מנחם אותה ויאני אהיה לה נאם ה’ חומת אש סביב (ב”ב).}

ועתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא לומר לירושלים: קבלי ממני תנחומים של פאני לי אחותי (שם = שיר השירים = ה’ ב”), אמרה לו: אני מסרתים ביד אומות העולם ויתהלע (שם/דברים/ל”ב), אני מנחם אותה ויאני אהיה לה נאם ה’ חומת אש סביב (ב”ב)...

ליגלה בכפרים (שם/שיר השירים ז’), אראך לאומות העולם שאתה מסיעים להם טובות נมากม ועליהם.

אמרה לפניב רקב של עם מפי נאを使י לי צרכן מפי内衣 לנו/חיות (א’) ייסף גמלו אחיו זכר, ורחיב אתו ויישב לדורות, וכשבא乙烯 אם ישבו על ידו אשר בקשו לדורות, אמרה לפניב: באהを行い (בראשית נ’ כ”א),...

אמרה לפניב רקב שלעם מפי נאを使י לי צרכן מפי内衣 ואין יימי אומות העולם כל יהודיה שקובליה על שבל נא/חיות (א’)...

[חרזר] אמרה לפניב רקב שלעם מפי נאを使י לי צרכן מפי内衣 ולא קובלו על שבל נא/חיות (א’)...

החרזר אתיה על כל שבל נא/חיות (א’)...

שקובלו ישראל, ועכשו משכובה טעשה כל?
At once, the Holy One, blessed be He, will accept the reproof from Jerusalem, and will say: I acted foolishly arbitrary with you as is said: “I acted in a lordly fashion toward you.” [Jer. 3:14]

Jerusalem will reply: Master of the Universe, is it right (or just) that what You are saying be kept only between us?

Who will let the nations of the earth know about me that I have done Your will? They revile, abuse, and mock me, saying: You rebelled against your God and you were faithless to Him.

Immediately, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to Jerusalem: I shall speak to the nations of the earth about you and make known your works of righteousness, as is said: “I will declare your righteousness; your works also” [Isaiah 57:12]. And the Holy One, blessed be He, will cause the righteousness of Israel to be known to the nations of the earth.

In that time, Michael [Israel’s guardian angel] and Jerusalem will say: “The Lord has brought forth our victory; come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God.” [Jer. 51:10].

Come and look at two men beginning a lawsuit. One tries to silence his opponent, saying “let me be first to speak.” But the other will not let him, saying, “I will speak first.”

When the Holy One, Blessed be He said to Israel: Let us go to law together (Isaiah 43:26) Israel asked: Who will speak first? God replied: You speak first: You speak, that you may be justified (ibid), for if I win out over you in the lawsuit, I will be the one who loses. But if you win out over Me, then I will win. I won out over the generation of the flood and lost. So also I won out over the generation which saw the dispersion of the races of man, and also over the Sodomites. Yet did I not lose? I won out over Jeremiah, but did I not lose in destroying My House and exiling My children?

On the other hand, at the making of the golden calf, Moses won out over Me, and thus I won. My wish is that you win out over Me. As Scripture says, The Lord
But since I am called God of justice and God of truth, make sure when you stand before Me on New Year’s Day to lift up shofars and blow them, [to remind Me that My loss is My gain]. Then no matter how many accusers you have, they will be disregarded.

8. Tanhuma (Buber) Tzav 5
"This is the law of the sacrifice for peace offerings" (Leviticus 7:11) – This text is related to "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Proverbs 3:17). Whatever is written in the Torah is written (as an expression of) [to establish] peace.

You find that the Holy One cancelled the decree [ Shibislar שיביסלרא שלמה] [of utter destruction] for the sake of peace. When? When the Holy One said to Moses "When you approach a town to attack it, you shall offer terms of peace unto it." [Deut. 20:10]. Therefore, it is so stated: "When you draw near to a city to fight against it, you shall offer terms of peace unto it." [Deut. 20:10]. Therefore, it is so stated: "[Wisdom's] ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" [Prov. 3:17]

Now concerning the whole matter, the Holy One had said that he would destroy them [the people of Sihon’s Kingdom], as stated "No, you shall utterly destroy them" [Deut. 20:17]. However, Moses did not do so. Rather he said: Am I to go and smite them now [ станי לך למתם אתיהם ? I do not know who has sinned and who has not sinned [ אני יודע אתו, אני לא יודע]. Instead, I will come to them in peace, as stated, “Then I sent messengers from the desert of Kedemot unto King Sihon of Heshbon with words of peace saying…” [Deut. 2:26]. When he [Moses] saw that he [Sihon] did not come in peace, he smote him, as stated, "So they smote him, his children, and all his people" [Num. 21:35].

The Holy One said to him: I myself told you, "No, you shall utterly destroy them" [Deut: 20:17]. Now you have come to them in peace. By your life, just as you have said, so will I do [ תברך ויהי כדבריך]. Thus it is stated: "When you draw near to a city to fight against it, you shall offer terms of peace unto it" [Deut. 20:10]. Therefore, it is so stated: "[Wisdom's] ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" [Prov. 3:17].

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In every case he [Sihon] did not come in peace, he smote him, as stated [Deut. 20:17]. However, Moses did not do so. Rather he said: Am I to go and smite them now [ станי לך למתם אתו?? I do not know who has sinned and who has not sinned [ אני יודע אתו, אני לא יודע]. Instead, I will come to them in peace, as stated, “Then I sent messengers from the desert of Kedemot unto King Sihon of Heshbon with words of peace saying…” [Deut. 2:26]. When he [Moses] saw that he [Sihon] did not come in peace, he smote him, as stated, "So they smote him, his children, and all his people" [Num. 21:35].

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