The Yeshiva in Jewish Tradition

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The Yeshiva or “*Metivta*”

The institution of yeshiva, or *metivta*, is a national Jewish treasure in which the soul of the nation resides, a source of living waters for the preservation of the Jewish nation in the form and character unique to it alone. It behooves us therefore to delve into the inner essence of the yeshiva (or *metivta*[1]) in order to understand its nature and composition, thus enabling us to promote its further development and perpetuation in that unique form that has no analogue among any other nation…..

The Yeshiva of Eretz Yisrael

This yeshiva that was born with Israel and followed it everywhere is the yeshiva of the Sanhedrin located in the *lishkat haGazit*. It was the nerve center of the nation, holding session even on the eve of Shabbat and of Jewish holidays, as the sages homiletically interpreted the verse (*Shir haShirim* 7:3) “Thy navel is like a round goblet [*aggan haSahar*] wherein no mingled wine is wanting”: “Thy navel”—this is the Sanhedrin. Why was it called ‘navel’?—Because it sat at the navel-point of the world” (*Sanhedrin* 37b). It is to this yeshiva that the Torah refers when it says, “then you shall arise, and go up unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose ... According to the law which they shall teach you, and according to the judgment which they shall tell you, shall you do; you shall not turn aside from the sentence which they shall declare unto you, to the right nor to the left.” That yeshiva was the heart of the nation, the very life source whence all derived benefit. “Your belly is like a heap of wheat” (*Shir haShirim*, *ibid*.)—just as all can benefit from a heap of wheat, so did all benefit from the deliberations of the Sanhedrin.[2] This yeshiva was like a promontory whence the Sanhedrin gazed down upon every aspect of the lives of the people, with all of life’s problems that newly arise from day to day. Like faithful sentries, the Sanhedrin remained perpetually on their watch, never

straying from it—just as life and its affairs in all their ramifications never cease in their movements and currents, thus requiring those watchmen to stand guard at their posts with ready and constant vigilance.
The supreme Bet Din, the legislative body of the nation, called “yeshiva” because of its permanence, united the people into a single monolithic unit for all Torah rulings and everything affecting the nation. So long as that Bet Din existed, there never was any dispute in Israel on any matter of halakha. However, when the supreme Sanhedrin went into exile—disbanded and relegated to storefronts, as it were—it lost its power and its acknowledged importance, from which time onward disputes of halakha were rampant, and the Torah became more like two or multiple Torahs, in the yeshivot of Shammai and Hillel, and later in the courts and study halls of the greats of each generation, “each in his respective location” (*ibid*.), but each of which was essentially equivalent in composition and form to the central yeshiva that had resided in the *lishkat haGazit*. All those yeshivot were united and concentrated around the yeshiva of Hillel and the family dynasty of the *Nasi*,[3] which, so long as it existed, was the yeshiva that legislated for the Jewish nation, and gave us the Mishna—the legal codex for the entire Jewish people.

The Babylonian *Metivta*

On the basis of an aggadic tradition passed down by our sages of blessed memory—that since the time of our patriarchs the yeshiva never ceased to exist among the Jewish people—we can assert with absolute certainty that after the destruction of the first Temple, the *metivta* was established in Babylonia with the same structure and character as the yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael had had. For it would never occur to us to imagine that the Jewish community that was exiled from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia resided there with no leader or legislator of its own to preserve its continuity of existence and its character.
We find support for this position in a different aggada of our sages, which states,

The Holy One, blessed be He, did a charitable thing for Israel in that he anticipated the exile of Zedekiah while the exile of Jeconiah was yet in being, for it is written (*Melakhim* II 24:16) with reference to the latter, “And the craftsmen [*heHarash*] and the smiths [*masger*], a thousand.” *Harash* implies that as soon as they opened a learned discussion, all the others became as though deaf; and *masger*, that when they closed the discussion of a halakha, it was not reopened. (*Sanhedrin* 38a).

The *harash* and the *masger* were the Sanhedrin, legislators and guardians of the nation, and it was they who founded and perpetuated the *metivta* during the first Babylonian exile.
The evidence is persuasive: The ascent of Ezra the Scribe, who was among the first wave of repatriates gone up to Eretz Yisrael to build the Second Temple, and about whom Scripture says (Ezra 7:10): “For Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of God, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances.” King Artaxerxes too called him (*ibid*. 7:12): “the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven.” There can be no doubt that Ezra received his Torah traditions in Babylonia, where he served as the head-of-*metivta*. And this is evident also from Hillel’s ascent to Eretz Yisrael. For although he was a disciple of Shemaiah and Avtalyon[4] in Eretz Yisrael, he certainly received his foundational learning from the yeshiva of Babylonia. Likewise, when Rav ascended from Babylonia he found the *metivta* in Pumbeditha headed by Samuel, who had been known also in Eretz Yisrael as among the greatest of his generation, and the leader of the Babylonian community.
After Rav's arrival yet another *metivta* was founded under his leadership, from which time onward there existed two *metivtot* with their respective titular heads—Geonim who banded together and rendered decisions in all aspects of halakha and communal practice. Those rulings were publicized to all enquirers, signed by one or the other of the Geonim of Pumbeditha or Sura. They issued decisions regarding halakha, communal leadership, Torah learning, and interpretation to the entire Diaspora.

The Yeshivot of the Diaspora

With the destruction of the *metivtot* of Babylonia the final central authority of the *metivtot* disintegrated, except that their brilliance was not extinguished entirely; rather, the *metivtot* splintered into rays of illumination that were dispersed to the length and breadth of the Diaspora—each community with its own yeshiva, which continue to exist even in our own day, both in Eretz Yisrael and the Diaspora. These yeshivot bear the stamp of the yeshiva of Eretz Yisrael and the *metivtot* of Babylonia, under the leadership and direction of the *metivta* heads who can be described as "*dammesek eliezer*,"[5] homiletically interpreted by our sages (*Yoma* 25a) as one who draws of his master's teachings and gives of it to others to drink. He draws water from deep wells and gives drink to all his disciples, quenching their thirst, refreshing and invigorating them by spreading the words of Torah that he has received from his own teachers. Thus, he imparts the life spirit to the entire nation, like rain from heaven that falls in timely fashion and just where it is needed, satisfying the thirst of the earth and causing it to bring forth its produce in a great multitude of variations of blossoms and flowers, bringing healthy and verdant life and eternal youthful vigor to all who reside there.

The Internal Structure of the Yeshivot

Now that we understand the essence of the yeshivot as called by their proper name, and their enormous influence on the Jewish people generation after generation and in every community, let us probe into the inner nature of the yeshivot, in order to perceive the hidden illumination that is stored within them. We learn from the extant written sources that the later yeshivot were copies, in miniature, of the central Yeshiva that served all of Israel from the *lishkat haGazit* in Jerusalem, from the earliest periods of Jewish history and through all its ten exiles in Eretz Yisrael (*Rosh Hashanah* 31).
Each yeshiva had its head-of-yeshiva or head-of-*metivta*, who would draw pure, lucid waters from the depths of the living Torah wellspring—water clarified and purified of any clod of clay or other dross that could cloud its appearance or impair its quality. The master would draw from these wellsprings of living waters and give drink to his students, taking a graded approach in accordance with their ability to assimilate the material, until such time that the students would themselves become, as the result of their master's efforts, "inexhaustible founts" in their own right. But that was not all. The head of the *metivta*, being a compassionate father as well, would be wholeheartedly solicitous, even anxious, for the future of his yeshiva and the material upkeep of its permanent students. Sustaining Talmudic scholars and their disciples was the perpetual concern of the head of the *metivta*, who bore upon his own shoulders the full burden of their support, because he clearly understood that yeshivot like his were the citadels for preserving the Jewish nation in its unique form and character, and the wellspring whence flowed those vital waters that freshen the nation's dry bones, and infuse it with renewed youthful vigor. Moreover, the head-of-yeshiva stood guard for the preservation of Judaism's unity and inner integrity, while the Jewish nation, in turn, acknowledging him as their faithful leader overseeing the house of Israel, accepted his authority and obeyed him implicitly.

Also under the leadership of the head-of-*metivta* were the municipal judges, the heads of the *kallah*,[6] and the rows of students from the general audience who were not permanent students of the *metivta* but only informal participants.[7] For both the yeshiva of Eretz Yisrael and the *metivta* of Babylonia followed the model of the great Sanhedrin with its rows of disciples in the *lishkat haGazit*, and the lesser Sanhedrin that presided in the Temple courtyard with its rows of both permanent disciples and informal participants.
Such are the general outlines of the image of the yeshiva that have survived in the sources still extant. No one knows, however, what actual curriculum was followed in those stately yeshiva halls, nor do we have any reliable source of information on that subject. We can judge, however, from the wealth of Torah and its abundance of variations that the yeshivot have bequeathed to us, that although the yeshivot dedicated themselves primarily to the study of the Torah of Israel, clearly the Torah consists

not only of laws and statutes; rather, the Torah is the "*eshkol haKofer*"[8] that is all-encompassing. It is impossible to understand the Torah at all, let alone to penetrate to its nethermost depths, without having profound and wide-ranging knowledge of the sciences and worldly disciplines, all of which are hidden in the depths of God's creation and its mysteries.

How so? The Torah of Israel begins with the account of the Creation, which is not mere cosmological information, but an extremely profound philosophical inquiry that takes us to supernal realms that normal thought processes are not equipped to grasp: the enigma of *tzimtzum*,[9] the purpose of the Creation and its final mission, the unification of all aspects of the Creation into a single monolithic unit, in which each underlying component is both the cause and the effect of all others, all being equivalent, even while each differs according to its powers of reception; God's celestial and earthly ministers, celestial worlds and our own as well, all united under this crown of Creation, which includes man himself, made in God's image, and carrying within him a Divine soul, and upon his countenance the likeness of God. In this account of the creation of man and the beginnings of humankind can be found that theoretical foundation which is the basis of the entire Torah, and of mankind's completion, namely, the fundamental principles of our faith—human understanding and our capacity to choose between right and wrong, the wonders of Divine Providence on the individual, personal level, the role of Divine predetermination versus the nature of everything theoretically possible, and of sin and repentance.

These topics, all of which find allusion in those first chapters of the account of the Creation, comprise what our sages of blessed memory called *ma'aseh bereishith*, the Works (Mysteries) of Creation, and *ma'aseh merkavah*, the Mystical Speculations of the Chariot.[10] Indeed**,** those topics would not be discussed with students until they had reached a specified age and were able to satisfy certain other conditions (*?agigah* 11b), but there can be no doubt whatsoever that the study of those profound topics, which lie at the very heart and foundation of Judaism's worldview—tightly integrated on the one hand with the mysteries of natural creation, and on the other with knowledge of the True God Who alone rules the world—were secreted in the innermost recesses of the yeshiva and studied there. We find allusions to those subjects in the form of the abundant mystical Aggada that has come down to us. Those subjects are the renowned "crowns adorning the letters of the Torah."[11]

But that is not all. The Jewish sages also studied the latest discoveries of non-Jewish savants and philosophers in the domain of these recondite questions. The Jewish sages acquired eminent familiarity with those, even while demonstrating superlative ability to discard the chaff and to retain only those kernels of truth that could serve the Torah as "apothecaries and cooks,"[12] for the sake of arriving at sound views and untainted beliefs.

The Torah of Israel, with its detailed historical accounts, also encompasses within it the knowledge of the history of mankind, and not only concerning the Jewish nation itself, its genealogical record, and the wondrous events that have befallen it. Rather, the Torah concerns itself with world history—that of all nations and races, and their vicissitudes—for from those accounts are evident the enigma of Divine Providence that is integral to all of humanity, but to Israel and its prophets in particular. This too is one of those things that requires serious study and profound, penetrating insight.

As concerns the commandments of the Torah, the very first mitzvah in the Torah is (*Shemot* 12:2): "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months," that is, the mitzvah of establishing the Jewish calendar, which is impossible to know and understand without an in-depth and comprehensive knowledge of astronomy. In fact, acquiring that knowledge is a distinct mitzvah in its own right, as our sages of blessed memory have stated (*Shabbat* 75b): "How do we know that it is one's duty to calculate the cycles and planetary courses? Because it is written (*Devarim* 4:6), 'for this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations': what wisdom and understanding is in the sight of the nations? Say, that it is the science of cycles and planets."

The mitzvah of observing Shabbat includes the topic of the extension of *te?umin* beyond the city limits,[13] the coverage of which by our sages of blessed memory demonstrates their in-depth and comprehensive knowledge of the science of measurements and measuring, which does not cease to amaze even in our own day.

The laws prohibiting *kil'ayim* (forbidden mixtures) are stated in the written Torah only with extreme terseness (*Vayikra* 19:19): "Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with diverse kinds; thou shalt not sow

thy field with two kinds of seed." Knowing the interpretation thereof requires thorough knowledge of zoology and agronomy, respectively, as well as knowledge of mathematics for computing the configurations of the garden-beds.[14] Similarly, the laws of *tereifot**[15]* testify to our sages' broad knowledge of physiology—the structure, composition, and interconnections, as well as the manner that man's body and soul are affected by the food he eats.

Civil law, even when taken in isolation, is an extensively ramified discipline, interwoven with knowledge of human psychology, by which means one can distinguish cases involving fraud from those that are genuine. Here too our sages of blessed memory were not satisfied to restrict themselves to the foundations of the Oral and Written Torahs; rather, they studied political and economic theory as well, subjects upon which all human civilization depends, as well as the civil law of the world nations that had evolved as the result of dynamic value systems. Our sages implemented new concepts of commercial and political life, evaluating those concepts with reference to the foundations of Jewish civil law—righteousness, justice, truth, and peace. Alternatively, they implemented those new concepts with the objective of promoting *dina de-malkhuta dina*—upholding the law of the state (but always emphasizing the law of the *state*, as opposed to the "law" of banditry).

Moreover, the sages studied alien rulings from non-Jewish sources, not for the sake of acquiring mere academic knowledge, but for understanding and rendering halakhic decisions based on that knowledge (*Shabbat* 78). When we read the two Talmuds and the Midrashim as elaborated by our sages generation after generation, covering in their investigative works and their responsa every aspect of the problems that arise in daily life, and all fields of knowledge in their manifold, variegated forms, we are must accept that internally the yeshivot taught all these branches of knowledge, received via the chain of tradition, and passed from master to disciple, generation after generation, but ultimately derived from the greatest of all books, namely, from God's Torah.

The Yeshivot in Our Times

The yeshivot of our day, ever since the destruction of the *metivtot* of Babylonia, share none of the latter's brilliance or grandeur, by which we mean not only their exemplary organization, which resembled nothing less than that of a monarchy, but also their rich and highly diversified constitution, and the authoritative prestige they enjoyed among the entire Jewish nation. This was inevitable: Since the yeshivot had splintered apart, becoming only isolated beacons of illumination throughout the dark corners of the Diaspora, it was natural that they would suffer that loss of prestige and authority with the people. The result was that the *metivtot* first split into two axes, generically familiar to us as the Sephardic and Ashkenazic yeshivot. This division refers not only to the primary geographic locations of the yeshivot, but also to their inner makeup, and—more significantly—to their respective methodologies.

For their part, the great Sephardic rabbis occupied themselves with elaborating the Talmud, and composed methods—per tractate or on the entire Talmud—whose purpose was to precisely clarify the *sugyot**[16]* in depth, showing how they are interconnected and intertwined with other *sugyot*, in order to arrive at conclusions of practical halakha. Contrarily, the rabbis of France, and later Germany, who studied the Talmud with the focus on its investigative interpretation, both in depth and breadth, uncovered with their commentaries gateways of illumination for the halakhic decisors who came after them. Practically determined halakha, with its precisely refined language, encompasses in a general sense, as it were, all those details that become intermingled with it in the course of the analytical give-and-take, such that one who knows all the details can refine and unify them, so as to derive from them a unified general principle, and other such principles that follow from it in turn. As Rabbi ?iyya said (*Bava Metzia* 85): "If the Torah were forgotten in Israel, I would restore it by my argumentative powers." Conversely, however, if one has a command of the general principles without knowing the details and how they fit together, then even the general principles will be to him of very limited value, or will lead him to err in his judgment. This explains the staunchly adamant opposition of the rabbis of France and Germany to the methodology of Rambam in his *Mishneh Torah*.

And so too can we explain the approach of Ravad,[17] who, for all his humility on the one hand, and all his extreme admiration for Rambam on the other, as we can discern from many of his *hassagot**[18]*, nonetheless also spouted words of provocation and abuse toward Rambam in many of those *hassagot*. It would be wrong to suggest that Ravad specifically intended to negate or weaken Rambam's rulings that were based on the latter's methodology; rather, he only wanted to point out the dangerous fallacy lying at the very foundation of that methodology. Thus, in order to negate the method itself, Ravad deemed it necessary to attack its originator, on the principle that by negating the cause one can negate its effects as well.

Moreover, when the Sephardic rabbis extended the curriculum of the yeshivot to include the study of philosophy, they did so in the spirit of the dictum, "Know how to respond to a heretic."[19] Likewise, when they studied other branches of knowledge from alien books, they did so with the recognition that all branches of knowledge have their origins in Jewish wisdom, but have been lost to the Jews because of their centuries of exile and the peripatetic fate that they have endured. Thus, the Sephardic rabbis endeavored to employ those branches of knowledge in the manner of a person who has lost all his possessions, but manages to purchase a candle for a pittance, to enable him to locate all the rest of his lost possessions. The French and German rabbis, on the other hand, drew a line in the sand, restricting themselves to the study of sacred texts exclusively—the Talmud and the Midrashim—motivated as they were by their fear that the influence of foreign literature might prove overwhelming, and lead to corruption of the words of the Torah or to perversion of the halakha. Indeed, their vehement opposition to Rambam's *Guide for the Perplexed* was similarly motivated.

The Sephardic rabbis were strong-minded in their resolve to abolish those customs which they saw as having no basis in halakha, as opposed to the Ashkenazic rabbis, who upheld *minhag* (custom) and sought to find support for it even when it seemed to them strange or unfounded. See, for example, regarding the custom of *kapparot**[20]* in *Shul?an Arukh O.H.* §605, also *Hilkhot Tereifot* 33:9 and 39:13. Many of the glosses of ReMA[21] to the *Shul?an Arukh* derive from *minhag* collections or received customs. ReMA will write, "Some have the custom," or "Such is the custom in these lands," or "It has become customary," or "One should conduct himself accordingly," or "Such is our custom," or "We should uphold the custom," or "One must not veer from the accepted custom," or "One must not veer from the accepted custom, venerated as it is."

Such differences between the Sephardic and Ashkenazic authorities were the basis for a certain attitude of disrespect among the rabbis of France and Germany toward the Sephardic rabbinate and its halakhic approach. But the Sephardic rabbis themselves found there an opportunity for accentuating their own sense of pride by often appending to their names the word "*haSefaradi*," which they viewed as a kind of honorific title, and an adjective suggesting a particularly distinguished pedigree.

The result of all the foregoing is that our Torah has become more like two different Torahs, and the Jewish people like two distinct tribes, a situation that will persist until such time as (*Yeshayah* 32:15) "a spirit from on high shall be poured out on us," and we shall behold with our own eyes the fulfillment of God's promise, His sacred words from the mouth of the prophet (*Ye?ezkel* 37:22): "And I will make them one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all."

The Yeshivot of Eretz Yisrael

In the recent period, the grand yeshivot of the Diaspora, one after the next, are either going completely to ruin, or experiencing gradual but steady decline. This is the result of the dispersive effect of our exile that only gets worse with the passage of time, and of anti-Semitic decrees that brutally eradicate ancient Jewish communities and scatter them in every direction. The institution of the rabbinate therefore likewise continues to decline in stature, in many Jewish communities growing weaker and weaker in its influence. Rabbinical positions are filled not by men who have sacrificed their lives entirely to Torah study, but by individuals whose education has given them schoolbook familiarity

with aggadic material, while their Talmudic knowledge is exceedingly weak.

Those yeshivot that still exist according to the original, ancient model are now teetering on the brink of death. Nonetheless, our faith in the Holy Rock of Israel, who through Moses gave us His guarantee (*Devarim* 31:21) that the Torah would never be forgotten in Israel, remains sturdy and sound. But a different biblical prophecy now passes before our eyes, that prophecy which states that the Torah *will* be forgotten in Israel, as it is written (Amos 8:12): "And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of God, and shall not find it." This is interpreted (*Shabbat* 138b) to mean that there will be no clear halakha or clear Mishna to be had anywhere. A vision so menacing and horrific makes our blood run cold, and obligates us to head off this calamity by assuring the survival of yeshivot in Israel in their authentic character and stature. Only our yeshivot can guarantee the eternity of the Jewish people in their grandest form, as Scripture states: "For I God have set you apart from the nations, that you should be Mine." The sole anchor and life preserver for escaping total annihilation—a "living death" where the soul is already dead and only the body lives on—is Eretz Yisrael.

This was foreseen by one of our ancients, Ramban, who, after moving to Eretz Yisrael at the end of his life, founded there a yeshiva for Torah study in the fullest sense, and took pains to assure its continued existence. He did so by making it an institution that would be supported by the entire nation, who would uphold its foundations with their perpetual contributions in the form of the Ramban Fund, in a manner resembling the enactment of Rabban Yo?anan be Zakkai in his time, who petitioned Vespasian, destroyer of our Temple, to be given Yavneh and its sages and the family dynasty of the *Nasi* **(***Gittin* 56)—that is, he was asking for nothing less than the means to perpetuate the yeshiva as a place of Torah learning and the center of halakhic decision-making in Israel, and the authority of its president. In his lucid vision Rabban Yo?anan ben Zakkai perceived that the memory of the physical Temple that had been destroyed could be perpetuated through the performance of symbolic acts, whereas the *lishkat haGazit* in the Temple, that had served as a source of guidance for all of Judaism, could not be perpetuated with a mere remembrance. Rather, for that it would have to survive in its original, living form, uniting within it the wellsprings of living waters that guarantee the nation's eternal survival, and demonstrating the essential royal nature that preserves the character of the nation. In this manner Rabban Yo?anan ben Zakkai gave the yeshiva at Yavneh the full force of the *lishkat haGazit*, whence Torah and halakhic decision-making emanate to all of Israel, and in which the entire nation is concentrated even in its state of dispersion, because it is a *talpiyyot*[22]—that place to which all mouths and eyes are lifted, to hear its decisions that illuminate the darkness of the exile.

Rabban Yo?anan ben Zakkai's successes in the period of the destruction of the Second Temple must guide us in our own building process.

In Jerusalem and in other cities and localities of Eretz Yisrael there do exist yeshivot for Torah study that either have been founded anew, or have been uprooted and relocated from the Diaspora. These are institutions created by individuals whose faithful dedication, along with that of the personnel who manage these yeshivot, I value and revere. But these institutions, which differ markedly one from another, both in the manner that they are managed, and in their scholastic approaches, are hemorrhaging because of their external condition which gives them the appearance of paupers begging for alms. Moreover, they lack the high-level authority that would oversee and direct, unite and organize, so as to give each such yeshiva its unique imprint and form, and to make those yeshivot national institutions for whose continued existence the entire nation would bear responsibility. For the people would see in those yeshivot a kind of supreme institution whence Torah and halakhic decisions emanate to the entire population, and which all gaze upon with the distinguished honor of which such yeshivot are worthy, being the image of the ancient yeshivot in the Land of Israel, and the *metivtot* of Babylonia.

Our duty at this time, the fulfillment of which will determine the ultimate success of our future in Eretz Yisrael, is to first restore the supreme institution of the yeshiva on the model of the *lishkat haGazit* of ancient Israel. And that yeshiva will then further subdivide, creating yet other yeshivot for Torah learning in its broadest and fullest sense, united in their methodology and curriculum, and centralized under the ownership and influence of the supreme yeshiva, which will be like an aqueduct that channels water to its tributaries, the yeshivot, by which we mean their means for material upkeep and,

more important, their internal makeup.
Realizing this vision will require a great deal of deliberation and effort, in all their ramifications and details that are too numerous to be specified here. But I see in that realization a renewal of the character of our nation, and the fulfillment of the mission of our Redemption (*Yeshayah* 1:26): "And I will restore your magistrates as of old, and your counselors as of yore; after that you shall be called City of Righteousness, Faithful City."

[1] "Yeshiva"—lit., sitting, or seat—is the Hebrew word for a traditional talmudic academy. "*Metivta*" is the essentially equivalent Aramaic term.
[2] *Sanhedrin, ibid*.
[3] The president of the Sanhedrin.
[4] Mishnah *Avot* 1:10–12.
[5] *Bereishith* 15:2.
[6] An assembly at which the law is expounded to Torah scholars, esp. the twice-yearly gatherings that were held for this purpose at the Babylonian academies.
[7] These were known as the *tarbitza uvnei tarbitza.* Although the precise meaning of *tarbitza* (in this context, at least) is somewhat uncertain, the sense as we have translated it is fairly well established. See also Yitz?ak Isaac Halévy Rabinowitz, *Dorot Harishonim*, (Pressburg, 1897), vol. VI, pp. 225–229.
[8] *Shir haShirim* 1:14; *Yoma* 54a.
[9] Lit., contracting or constricting, a Kabbalistic doctrine about the Creation, which maintains that God in some sense first reduced His Own infinite presence in the universe to make room for the existence of a finite world.
[10] See *Ye?ezkel* chap. 1 and 10.
[11] Associated most notably with Rabbi Akiva in a famous passage in *Mena?ot* 29b.
[12] This is an allusion to a well-known statement of *Maimonides* in which he refers to the superiority of the Torah over the "external sciences" in terms of a queen *vis à vis* her servants, *apothecaries*, *cooks* and bakers.
[13] See *Erubin, Mishnah* 5:7 and BT 60a–61a.
[14] See Mishna *Kilayim*, ch. 3, ff.
[15] See note 7.
[16] A *sugya* (pl. *sugyot*) is a section of the Talmud covering a (more-or-less) single self-contained topic.
[17] Rabbi Abraham ben David (d. 1198), known, *inter alia*, for his harsh criticisms of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah.*
[18] Critical glosses.
[19] Mishna *Avot* 2:14.
[20] A symbolic ceremony practiced by some observant Jews on the eve of Yom Kippur in which typically a cock, hen, or coin is swung around the head and offered in atonement or as ransom for one's sins
[21] Rabbi Moses Isserles (1530–1572), who wrote glosses to Joseph Karo's *Shul?an Arukh*, indicating where Sephardic and Ashkenazic customs differ, and how Ashkenazim should conduct themselves in those situations
[22] *Shir haShirim* 4:4; *Berakhot* 30a.