To the Sages of the Talmud: Is Wisdom Suffering?

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> ...Even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb by limb, with a two-handled saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be doing my bidding. Even then you should train yourselves: "Our minds will be unaffected... we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will." That's how you should train yourselves.
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> —Midlength Discourses of the Buddha, Sutta 21[1]

> When R. Aqiva was taken out for execution, it was the hour for the recital of the *Shema*, and while they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting upon himself the kingship of heaven. His students said to him: Our teacher, even to this point? He said to them: All my days I have been troubled by this verse, "With all your soul," [meaning] "Even if God takes your soul." I said: When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling this? Now that I have the opportunity, shall I not fulfill it?"
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> —BT *Berakhot* 61b

As R. Aha ben Ada said in the name of R. Hamnuna in the name of Rav, one must study even the ordinary conversation of the sages. Tree-like, the sap of wisdom feeds and secures every leaf of their conversation; it is not in their nature to let drop wholly irrelevant remarks.[2] This teaching returned to me when I came across a rough draft by a teacher of mine. It was its epigraph that caught my eye, a creative re-writing of a passage from Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*.[3] Where the original had the word "poet," my teacher had substituted the word "sage," so that it read like this:

> What is a [sage]? An unhappy man who hides deep anguish in his heart, but whose lips are so formed that when the sigh and cry pass through them, it sounds like lovely music.... And people flock around

the [sage] and say: “Sing again soon”—that is, “May new sufferings torment your soul but your lips be fashioned as before, for the cry would only frighten us, but the music, that is blissful.”

Here, in an unpublished, unelaborated prelude to a work that has since undergone substantial revision, now existing as far as I know only in a tattered folder wedged into my bookshelf, is a thought which cracks wide open an issue strangely neglected in the study of Talmud. I speak of the issue of pain.

Pain is an overwhelming theme in the lives of Haza”l. Examining aggadic material, one finds that the majority of prominent sages suffered intensely. Explicitly, they undergo chattel slavery,[4] public beatings,[5] the deaths or abductions of their children,[6] their own arrest, torture, and execution,[7] and the witnessing of the same happening to their teachers and parents.[8] They go mad with grief;[9] they seek death by locking themselves in rooms[10] or climbing into lit ovens.[11] To expand this list properly and so include the major categories of grief, madness, and trauma would be to halfway-write a talmudic encyclopedia. Implicitly, the reaches of this theme may be even further, as some sages bear classic behavioral marks of trauma in response to events about which the text creates a tender silence.[12] Pain itself is experienced by the sages as a force of supernatural strength, emerging from within them to reduce others to ash[13] or piles of bone.[14] They worry that it is powerful enough to consume the world:

?They banded together against [R. Eliezer] and banished him, and said, “Who will go to notify him?” R. Aqiva said, “I will go, lest an unsuitable person notify him, and in consequence the whole world will be laid waste.”[15]

The gentleness with which R. Aqiva breaks the news to R. Eliezer averts the end of the world, but nevertheless, at the moment that R. Eliezer begins to weep,

A third of the olives, a third of the wheat, and a third of the barley in the world were destroyed, and some say even the dough in women’s hands expanded. It is taught that a great tragedy happened on that day, as every place on which R. Eliezer rested his eyes was burnt up. Even Rabban Gamliel as he was traveling by ship was nearly drowned by a wave.[16]

This is not merely a stylistic way of speaking of intense feelings. In the Talmud, joy does not usually cause flowers to bloom or sickness to heal, although tellingly enough *aggadatha* records comparatively few instances of unbounded happiness anyway. Even an intimate encounter with the divine may only leave one as whole as one was prior to enlightenment.[17] We must ask ourselves what the Talmud means by presenting such overwhelming suffering. It does not suffice to say that lives back then were harder than they are today, since despite the fact that the sages had moments of great happiness, we are seldom invited to read of their weddings, births, and joyful reunions, but are redirected again and again to the site of their pain.

Ultimately, we will see that pain in the Talmud, as in the human nervous system, operates as a warning, not as a blessing; Haza”l not only deny that pain brings insight, but show how it functions as a barrier to insight. But first, the filial obligation of long-time students bids me to take up the proposition of my teacher’s epigraph, using a seriousness and generosity that will read it best. What would it mean to say that the sage is not merely characterized by their learning, but by the depth, refinement, and expressiveness of their suffering? How would this characterization situate the sages in their communities as teachers and deciders of law? What would the decisions of a sage rooted in suffering look like? We might venture that to dwell primarily in the world of pain is to cultivate despair in response to the social environment. This in turn precludes the mindset that legislation can fix human behavior, rather than address human beings; in other words, it inoculates against dangerous, utopian-minded overreach. This agrees with what the poet said:

Let judges secretly despair of justice: their verdicts will
be more acute. Let generals secretly despair of triumph;
killing will be defamed. Let priests secretly despair of faith:
their compassion will be true.[18]

Precisely such an approach can be seen in the way Haza"l deal with sexual violence. In one piece of *agadatha*, the rape of women and girls is described as inevitable,[19] and we see that the sages made no attempt to engineer a perfectly rape-free society. We may contrast this with many attempts to do just that, which are inevitably supposedly achieved by restricting women's freedom and visibility in the name of their protection.[20] The very isolation of women that is said to protect them then prevents them from publicizing their actual experiences with sexual violence, lending the venture a public image of success. The sages resisted gender segregation as a solution, as we can see in BT *Gitin* 57a:

It happened that a certain person was planning to divorce his wife, but her *ketubah* [divorce-payment] was high. What did he do? He went and invited his good friends over, and gave them food and drink until they became intoxicated, and lay them down on one bed, and took an egg white and sprinkled it around them. He set witnesses on them and came [to prosecute his case] before the Bet Din. There was an old man there who had belonged to the inner circle of Shamai the Elder, [who informed the Bet Din that] "Egg white contracts in fire, whereas semen evaporates in fire." They tested it and found that he was correct, and brought [the husband] before the Bet Din, and whipped him, and collected her *ketubah* from him.[21]

The lack of rabbinic condemnation of a mixed-gender drinking party, even in the face of sexual disaster, is striking. When blame is assigned, the problem identified by the rabbis is not a lack of chastity, nor an overabundance of freedom, but rather the lack of remembrance of pain. Hearing of the incident an unspecified time later,

Abayye said to Rav Yosef, "But since these people were all righteous, what is the reason they were punished [i.e. divinely, by undergoing such an incident in the first place]?" He replied, "Because they were not mourning for Jerusalem."

The true danger of revelry, as identified by Rav Yosef, is that it precludes an admixture of mourning into one's emotional palette. Yet there is something too in this conversation that gives us pause in our investigation of the value of suffering, as we see that the text portrays its lack as a failure in virtue that impairs one's relationship with God, rather than as an impairment to one's ethical sensibilities or ability to deal wisely with others. It is for this reason that when the text seeks for a detail which illustrates the value of pain, it selects the wife and guests, doing so as an exercise in theodicy. It does not attribute the insight of the Bet Din to their relationship with suffering, nor does it critique the machinating husband for lacking pain; indeed, we may suspect that if anything, its surfeit is what impedes him.

This brings us to a sticking point. Pain courses through the lives of the sages, and its overwhelming presence in the Talmud is clearly a communication, but I contend that the nature of that communication is not an equation between wisdom and suffering. One strain of thought denies that there is even an alliance between wisdom and suffering. An aggadic text in which suffering rises perhaps most rawly to the surface shows antipathy not only to suffering but to any benefits said to arise from it:

R. Eliezer fell ill, and R. Yohanan came in to visit him. He saw that he was in a dark house, so he bared his arm and light shone from it. He saw that R. Eliezer was crying. He said to him, "Why are you crying? Is it because you did not learn enough Torah? We have taught: The one who does much and

the one who does little are equal, if both act for the sake of heaven! Is it because of [the lack of] food? Not everyone has the privilege to eat at two tables! Is it because of [the lack or death] of children? This is the bone of my tenth child!" He replied, "Because this beauty will be swallowed up by the earth." He joined in weeping, and said to him, "This is indeed reason to cry," and both of them cried together. After a time, he asked, "Are your sufferings dear to you?" He answered, "Neither them nor their reward." He said to him, "Give me your hand." He gave it to him, and he raised him up.[22]

We see here that suffering imparts something, but it is not wisdom, and though R. Eliezer seems to concede that there is a "reward," it is not welcome. Yet complexity blooms around this perspective. Above on the same *daf*, it is stated that learning will stick fast in the memory of one who suffers—but only if the suffering is accepted with love.[23] Perhaps this is to say that while we often seem to remember well those teachings which were close to us in times of distress, higher thinking is derailed by deep internal disorder. Pain sharpens memory, but the memory of Torah must not be made so sharp that consciousness shrinks to touch it. Without equanimity, pain threatens wisdom.

Further, while we have seen that the sages set realistic rather than utopian expectations for human behavior, can it really be said in general that their approach is characterized by despair? On many points, their work with Torah is characterized by an attentive, cautious optimism, revealed in halakhic institutions that reflect an understanding that human nature is neither immutable nor, as a matter of course, demonic. Examples include their emphasis on restorative justice[24] and their push for mediation between parties in conflict,[25] both of which reflect a stance that communities can and should work to re-incorporate destructive individuals. One of the central halakhic projects of the sages is also perhaps their most aspirational: Shabbat, with its high expectations of ethical behavior, its weekly undercutting of both class[26] and gender[27] divisions, and its creation of space for all to participate in study and contemplation. With the institution of Shabbat, the sages express that human nature at its very root is responsive and changeable, that it can and must grow into accountability. This thought is most poetically formulated in the idea that people gain a second soul on Shabbat, and that it is the observance itself of rest that makes the second soul possible.[28] In this way, human efforts at self-transformation are understood to be desired and assisted by the divine, and so flow with the momentum of creation, rather than counter to a harsh and unyielding reality.

We can see this at work not only in halakhic institutions, but in the process of crafting halakha:

Rav Yosef said, "Originally, I thought, whenever someone tells me the halakha is like R. Yehudah, who said that a blind person is exempt from commandments, I will throw a party for the rabbis, since I am exempt but still perform them. Now that I hear from R. Hanina that the one who is obligated in them and performs them is greater than the one who is not obligates them but still performs them, it's the opposite – whenever someone tells me the halakha is not like R. Yehudah, I throw a party for the rabbis."[29]

Is this text cynical about rabbinic motives for endorsing this or that ruling? On the contrary, it is presented in an approving manner which forces the reader to re-think what it means to be self-serving. To Rav Yosef, a ruling is intuitively suspect when it causes in its subject a feeling of dread and loss of place in the world—marks, perhaps, that one has not been truly understood by the ruling's author. Conversely, a good interpretation of Torah can at least partly be recognized by a feeling of delight. The specific outcome of the ruling and its hermeneutic justifications are secondary to this first response, which encodes a lifetime of conscious and unconscious knowledge of oneself and one's place.[30]

It is time to step through these texts and examine the problem from its other side: What does wisdom itself mean to the sages? For such a complex concept, one finds a remarkable unity in descriptions of wisdom in the Talmud. In contrast to their vision of the world and their own troubled existence in it, the sages describe their relationship with Torah as warm, nurturing, and maternal. In fact, the transmission of Torah is classically imagined as breastfeeding:

“Her breasts will satisfy you at all times” (Mishlei 5:19): Why are words of Torah compared to a breast? Just as a baby will find milk in a breast as long as he nurses, so is it with words of Torah: As long as a person recites them, they will find flavor in them.[31]

The details of this metaphor are developed throughout Talmud. In *Masekhet Pesahim*, we see a refinement in the assignation of roles. Now the breasts are the sages themselves, or perhaps the location of Torah learning, while milk is the wisdom that comes through Torah:

“I am a wall, and my breasts are towers” (*Shir haShirim* 8): R. Yohanan said: “I am a wall”—that refers to Torah; “And my breasts are towers”—that refers to the sages. Rava said, “I am a wall”—that refers to the congregation of Israel; “And my breasts are towers”—that refers to the synagogues and study halls.[32]

Similarly, R. Aqiva compares himself to a cow, and his student to a nursing calf. At the moment he chooses such a language to describe the transmission of his Torah, he is awaiting torture and execution in a Roman prison. Although one might have thought such a context would make suffering-based models of wisdom more vivid for him, the only pain he alludes to is that of swollen mammary glands.[33]

This use of nursing imagery is so well-entrenched in talmudic culture that it also works in reverse, that is, human breasts remind the sages of wisdom,[34] just as today the heart may remind one of love. And it is not a simple symbolism: metonymic bonds tie breastfeeding to wisdom almost as closely as a map is bound to its territory. The mechanism of nursing is itself a guide to how wisdom is best acquired, namely, through a closeness to the human source of one’s learning, and with loving appetite for the material itself:

[R. Ahadvoi bar Ami] answered [Rav Shesheth] mockingly. R. Sheseth felt wounded. R. Ahadvoi bar Ami lost his power of speech, and his learning left him. [R. Shesheth’s] mother came and, crying, stood before him and commanded him [to forgive R. Ahadvoi]. He paid her no attention. She said, “Look at these breasts from which you suckled.” He then asked for mercy for [R. Ahadvoi], and he was healed.[35]

Here we see clearly that the sages did not consider pain the path to wisdom; it is rather the paralyzing by-product of ineffective learning, depicted here as a combative style of debate. Here is an echo to the tragedy of R. Eliezer of the nearly world-destroying pain, at odds with all his colleagues, whose exile also deprives him of the power of speech. The breasts of R. Shesheth’s mother, and her recollection of him nursing when he was young, embody the paradigm of learning which Haza”l depict as leading to the return and reflowering of wisdom.

That suffering can cripple moral intellect, aside from one’s emotional soundness, in fact can be found in my teacher’s Kierkegaard passage, once we examine it in its original context. In *Either/Or*, it is not presented as the thought of the philosopher himself, but of the persona A. A is an aesthete whose greatest conscious fear is the inexorable dulling of pleasure by boredom.[36] He is unable to form any relationship other than the most fleeting and predatory, nor can he put down roots in any moral framework, since he is unable to evaluate ethical perspectives except in the aesthetic sense. This is because he is not alive to the realities of others, which would feed an ethical perspective. The second persona of *Either/Or*, Judge Wilhelm, puts his finger on what is behind A’s ideological and emotional detachment:

...alone in one’s boat, alone with one’s care, alone with one’s despair, which one prefers cowardly to retain rather than to suffer the pain of being healed. Permit me now to bring to light the sickly aspect of your life—not as though I wanted to terrify you, for I am not posing as a bugaboo, and you are too knowing to be affected by that sort of thing. But I beg you to reflect how painful, how sad, how

humiliating it is to be in this sense a stranger and a pilgrim in this world.[37]

In contrast:

> It is only responsibility that bestows a blessing and true joy.[38]

Responsibility here is understood as a non-disposable, in fact indispensable, relationship with one's surroundings and the object of one's activity. This quality exists in opposition with detachment, described as follows:

The intellectual agility you possess is very becoming to youth and diverts the eye for a time. We are astonished to see a clown whose joints are so loose that all the restraints of man's gait and posture are annulled. You are like that in an intellectual sense; you can just as well stand on your head as on your feet. Everything is possible for you, and you can surprise yourself and others with this possibility, but it is unhealthy…. Any man who has a conviction cannot at his pleasure turn himself and everything topsy-turvy in this way. Therefore I do not warn you against the world but against yourself and the world against you.[39]

Perhaps, prior to his admonition by the Judge, A is already in some sense aware that his philosophy is propelled by his pain; at any rate, he appears to feel its effects. Let us look again at the epigram:

What is a [sage]? An unhappy man who hides deep anguish in his heart, but whose lips are so formed that when the sigh and cry pass through them, it sounds like lovely music....

Elided here is a revealing elaboration by A:

His fate is like that of the unfortunate victims whom the tyrant Phalaris imprisoned in a brazen bull, and slowly tortured over a steady fire; their cries could not reach the tyrant's ears so as to strike terror into his heart; when they reached his ears they sounded like sweet music.

One imprisoned in a brazen bull is unable to see anything or anyone outside of the bull. Articulate response of any sort is impossible. The only possibility is an involuntary expression of pain, which contaminates the destiny of its audience with its savagery—the classical Greek understanding of consequence demands that those who delight in the bull must also burn in it. Not only is this a poor recipe for a sage, it is a poor recipe for a poet, or else we would prefer above all artists the exquisitely insensible pain of the guitar-fumbling high school bard. No, the task of poets is not to weep prettily about their own inner torment; their place is outside the bull, in radical attentiveness to everyone and everything around them. This quality is named by Keats as negative capability. He writes:

A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body—The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none; no identity... When I am in a room... the identity of everyone in the room begins to [*for so*] to press on me that I am in a very little time an[ni]hilated—not only among Men; it would be the same in a Nursery of children...[40]

Negative capability involves more even than this; it demands a complexity of vision and articulation that can only be governed by intuition rather than attendance on formal paradigm, and it demands comfort in uncertainty. Keats saw both of these as benevolent characteristics,[41] famously

describing them in a language of love: “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination.”[42] Here is a description of an art which I believe the sages of the Talmud would happily recognize as their own.

To use the words of Judge Vilhelm, the Talmudic sage must be able to “suffer the pain of being healed” before attending to the needs of others. As Elaine Scarry explains in her work *The Body in Pain*,

To witness the moment when pain causes a reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans is to witness the destruction of language; but conversely, to be present when a person moves up out of that pre-language and projects the facts of sentience into speech is almost to have been permitted to be present at the birth of language itself.[43]

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the well-known tale of R. Shimon bar Yohai, who escapes arrest and execution by fleeing with his son to a cave, where they dwell in complete isolation for 13 years, learning Torah. When the danger passes and they are able at last to emerge, father and son are unable to respond even to the ordinary people of their own community except by the reflexive, indiscriminate unleashing of their pain:

They left [the cave]. They saw people ploughing and sowing. [R. Shimon] said, “They abandon eternal life to busy themselves with life in the moment!” Everything they placed their eyes upon was immediately burnt up.[44]

By divine command, they are re-imprisoned in their cave for another year. After this, while his son continues to wound others, R. Shimon is able to heal them. In a less magical but not less marvelous fashion, he is able to move past an initial judgment of others’ behavior as transgressive by asking the reason for their actions, and listening carefully to their responses.[45] But his process of healing has only just begun, and it is here, where popular interest in the story begins to decline, that it is worth paying close attention.

R. Pinhas ben Yair, his son-in-law, heard about it and went out to meet him. He took him to the bathhouse. When he was tending to his flesh, he saw cuts, and began to cry. Tears fell from his eyes into [the cuts], and [R. Shimon] screamed [from the pain of the salt].

I am curious about these fresh cuts, and wonder if they might indicate something about R. Shimon’s response to his imprisonment, or to the world he found outside the prison. Rash”i posits that they are the result of sand abrasion.[46] It is also significant that R. Shimon is accepting treatment in a bathhouse, an institution he condemned at the beginning of the story, saying that they were built by the Roman occupiers in order to indulge themselves.[47] A door has opened in R. Shimon’s thinking, first regarding his own community, and now, perhaps, those outside it as well.

[R. Pinhas] said to him, “Woe is me, that I see you like this!” He responded, “Fortunate are you to see me like this, for if you did not see me like this, you would not have found me as I am.” [He meant] that before [his exile], R. Shimon ben Yohai would ask a question, and R. Pinhas ben Yair could give him 13 answers, whereas now, R. Pinhas ben Yair could ask a question, and R. Shimon ben Yohai could give him 24 answers.

When his suffering was raw and unprocessed, his learning in the isolation of the cave was indistinguishable from illiterate violence. Equanimity to suffering—both his own and that of his community—is given space to grow in a place of safety, with the loving ministrations of a family member. A sense of wholeness, rather than a sense of injury, is what allows him finally to make use of

the Torah he acquired:

He said, Since a miracle happened for me, I will go fix something, as it says (Bereishith 33:18) “And Yaaqov departed whole”: Rav said, whole in is body, whole in his possessions, whole in his Torah... He asked, Is there anything that needs fixing?

R. Shimon hears that there is a nearby field containing unmarked graves. The inability of *kohanim* to cross this field without contracting potential *tum’ah* causes them difficulty. We must pay attention to the role of asking, as it is his means of identifying a worthy problem, as well as his means of identifying a solution; R. Shimon begins work by interviewing the elderly to see what information can be excavated. Finally, he enters the field himself, marking loose soil as potential grave sites, releasing hard soil from suspicion, and forming footpaths across the field. Having once been a prisoner of earth, R. Shimon is able to return to that element in full possession of himself, in the name of usefulness to others. This being *aggadatha*, nothing is wholly tidy, and shortly afterward, his gaze incinerates the man who originally informed on him to the government.[48] Apparently, one does not need to be a saint to be a sage, and equanimity is not the same virtue as obliviousness.

If it is not to teach us that the truest sage is the most exquisite sufferer, what is the meaning of all the pain in the Talmud? It is not a simple question, and the richness of this portrait of the sages’ life is not reducible to a single function. The stories work at multiple levels of consciousness in the listener or reader, with different details emerging to attention at different points in one’s life. As is characteristic of oral literature, the mess of human lives depicted is itself a teaching tool: It communicates an expectation of similar complexity in the way the listener responds to life, as opposed to parable, which communicates an expectation of simplicity. But it is possible to suggest some reasons for the unusual prominence of pain. I think that Haza”l expected that their students, and their great-great-great-grandstudents, would have difficult lives. When life is at its most difficult, it is impossible for the student of Talmud to think to themselves that they are experiencing a pain that, by virtue of the brokenness it forces on the sufferer, expels them from the world of worthy people. Rather, worthy people bear the same wounds that we do, although they bear them best when they respond with discipline and a reorientation to the nurturing mindset that characterizes effective wisdom.

In turn, such a gentle, continuous return to a maternal model of wisdom is not only a recommendation, but a warning. Any education is replete with those who urge their students to discard their ethical sensitivities in favor of what are termed the hard truths of human nature. More often than not, this approach conceals a fear of truly facing what trouble one’s hard truth is causing others, and goes hand-in-hand with limitations in one’s ability to help others wisely. According to the sages, information may well hurt, but Torah, that is, a wise response to such information, can be recognised by its nourishing quality. There is no good student of rabbinic literature who has not encountered a text which wounds, perhaps even a text that horrifies. There is blood in the milk. In a nursing model of Torah, an informed reaction of woundedness should act like one of R. Shimon’s markers of loose soil, which say, do not enter here: Find a path on the sturdier earth that is nonetheless connected to it. May all of us students of Torah find such paths; may we open the doors of the brazen bull and help one another to solid ground.

[1] I include this text as a parallel to the martyrdom of R. Aqiva, which is so familiar to religious Jews that we often do not register what R. Aqiva is rejecting when he responds to torture with the recitation of the *Shema`*.

[2] BT *Sukah* 21a.

[3] Kierkegaard, Søren, *Either/Or 1*, “Diapsalmata.” David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson, translators. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974, p.19 (hereafter EO1). *Either/Or* is structured in three parts: an aesthetic philosophy written by the persona A, a synchretic aesthetic-ethical response by the persona B (also known as Judge Wilhelm), and the editor’s note in the persona of Victor Eremita. The epigraph comes from the first section written by A, “Diapsalmata,” which is a collection of aphorisms and short-form musings.

[4] JT *Horayot* 3:4, BT *Gitin* 47a.

[5] BT *Berakhot* 10a.
[6] BT *Berakhot* 5b, BT *Ketubot* 23a.
[7] BT *Avodah Zarah* 17b–18a, BT *Berakhot* 61a.
[8] BT *Pesahim* 112a, BT Sanhedrin 71a.
[9] BT *Baba Metsia* 84a.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] BT *Qidushin* 81b.
[12] BT *Nedarim* 20b.
[13] BT *Shabbat* 33b, BT *Baba Metsia* 59b.
[14] BT *Berakhot* 58a.
[15] BT *Baba Metsia* 59b.
[16] *Ibid*.
[17] JT *Hagigah* 2:1.
[18] Leonard Cohen, "Lines from my Grandfather's Journal," The Spice-Box of Earth. (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1973), 89–90.
[19] BT *Gitin* 57b.
[20] As a brief illustration of this, it can be noted that Golda Meir's famous response to a proposed protective curfew on women ("On the contrary, the curfew should be on men," http://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/114247) has never been considered seriously as anything other than a *bon mot* or thought experiment. Meanwhile, evidence suggests that gender segregation increases male violence against women, perhaps because the inability to interact with women in a meaningful way and to observe them engaged in acts of skill and worth leads men to devalue women. See Eric Anderson, '"I Used to Think Women Were Weak'": Orthodox Masculinity, Gender Segregation, and Sport," in *Sociological Forum*, vol. 23 no. 2, (June 2008): pp. 257–280. This sensibility is reflected in talmudic discussions about *yihud*, which consider a mixed-gender gathering of many people to be morally unsuspicious, but gender-segregated gathering to be at risk of immoral behavior unless physical barriers are erected; see BT *Qidushin* 81a.
[21] The husband in this tale is attempting to avoid having to pay his wife for the divorce by orchestrating the appearance of infidelity, which would disentitle her to any support.
[22] BT *Berakhot* 5b.
[23] BT *Berakhot* 5a.
[24] M. *Baba Qama* Chapter 8.
[25] BT *Sanhedrin* 32b.
[26] By e.g. prohibiting signs of one's profession, as in M. *Shabbat* 1:2.
[27] Three examples in which gender divisions are undercut are the prohibition public self-presentations in an overly masculine or feminine mode, as in M. *Shabbat* Chapter 6, by prohibiting labor both in and out of the home, as in M. *Shabbat* 7:2, and as reflected in the decisions of communities where only men wore *tefilin* to prohibit them on Shabbat (M. *Shabbat* 6:3), whereas communities where both men and women wore *tefilin* also wore them on Shabbat (BT *Shabbat* 62a).
[28] BT *Taanith* 27b.
[29] BT *Qidushin* 31a.
[30] The same method is employed by Yaltha in BT *Nidah* 20a.
[31] BT *Eruvin* 54b.
[32] BT *Pesahim* 87a.
[33] BT *Pesahim* 112a.
[34] BT *Berakhot* 10a.
[35] BT *Baba Batra* 9b.
[36] EO1, "Crop Rotation." New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974.
[37] EO2, "Aesthetic Validity of Marriage." 86.
[38] *Ibid*., 87.
[39] *Ibid*., 16.
[40] Keats, John. "To Richard Woodhouse." 27 Oct. 1818. *Selected Poems and Letters of Keats*. Ed. Sandra Anstey. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1995. 119.
[41] Del Serra, Maura. Introduction. *Negative Capability: The Intuitive Approach in Keats* by Walter Jackson Bate. New York: Contra Mundum Press, 2012. v–vi.
[42] Keats, ibid. "To Benjamin Bailey." 22 Nov. 1817. 26.
[43] Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. 6.
[44] BT *Shabbat* 33b.
[45] *Ibid*., reacting to the man carrying myrtle close to sundown on Friday.
[46] Rashi to BT *Shabbat* 33b, DH "Pili."
[47] I thank my colleague and friend R. Eiran Davies for this insight.
[48] BT *Shabbat* 34a.