

7 Do not judge, so that you will not be judged. ²For with the judgment that you judge, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³And why do you look at the splinter which is in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the beam in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the splinter out of your eye,' when there's a beam in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the beam out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye. ⁶Do not give the holy unto the dogs, and do not throw your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and rend you.

commentary

7:2 with the judgment that you judge, you will be judged - This is the principle known as 'middah k'negged middah' colloquially known as "Jewish Karma"; that God judges "measure for measure" (cf. *Nedarim* 32a). "A person is measured by the measure he uses" (*M. Sotah* 1:7). This concept is found in Isaiah (3:10-11): "...As his hands have dealt, so shall it be done to him". One saying attributed to Rabbi Hillel is: "Since you drowned others, others drowned you" (*Pirquei Avot* 2:6). The idea does not necessarily mean you must not judge at all, but rather, taking example of the sages, "Judge every person by the side of mercy" (*Shavuot* 30a; *Avot* 1:6). "The same way you judged me favorably, may the Omnipresent judge you favorably" (*Shabbat* 127b). The simple understanding of these passages indicates that, although not necessarily an obligation, judging people favorably is a meritorious practice for which one will be compensated.

7:3 why do you look at the splinter which is in your brother's eye - Because the world works in a system of retribution that makes us reap what we sow, we should not be so quick to point the finger at others without first having a time of introspection and correcting our own faults. The risk of hypocritically condemning others without taking into consideration our own behavior is that sooner or later the same judgment will befall us: "He who [continually] declares others unfit is himself unfit... as he is stigmatizing others with his own blemish" (*Qiddushin* 70a). The metaphor used by Yeshua reflects a pharisaic baraita (i.e., an oral tradition) from the first century that, additionally, intends to make us understand that a person with a flaw will not accept reproof from someone who does the same or even worse things: "R. Tarfon said, I wonder whether there is anyone in this generation who accepts reproof, for if one says to him: Remove the splinter from between your eyes, he would answer: You remove the beam from between your eyes!" (*Arakhin* 16b).

7:5 first take the beam out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly - The Talmud tells a story: "Rabbi Huna owned a forest by the river bank. Someone requested of him to make a clearing by the waters edge, to which he replied, Let the owners above and below me clear their portions first". The sages' first response to this behavior is: "Fix yourself up first, and then fix up others" (*Bava Metzia* 107b). The statement's basic meaning is that we shouldn't live hypocritically, telling others what to do when we haven't done it ourselves yet. Additionally, we should learn that improving ourselves on a spiritual level is our priority, so that we can help others improve properly. In fact, our own flaws blurry our vision and understanding of the world. We are taught, as derived from Rabbi Shmuel ben Nakhmani's words in the Talmud, that what people perceive is mostly what is suggested by their own thoughts (cf. *Berakhot* 55b), therefore, fixing ourselves is an essential part of fixing the world.

7:6 Do not give the holy unto the dogs - the imagery of feeding an unclean animal with something "holy" derives from the Levitical service, in which something consecrated to God can only be eaten by the priests, and not by the common man, let alone by an outsider of the community (cf. *Lev* 22:10, 16). Worse than the common man is the dog, which was a natural scavenger that roamed the streets in search of food, about which the Torah says "You shall be holy people to Me; flesh torn in the field you shall not eat; you shall throw it to the dogs" (*Ex* 22:30 [31]). This verse is understood metaphorically by Rashi as a referring to gentiles, although he offers also a possible alternative: "The goy is like a dog [in that the treifa - the food that a Jew has to abstain from - can be given to both them], or perhaps a dog is meant literally" (*Rashi on Shemot* 22:30). In the first part of this portion Yeshua made it clear that we should not offer correction to someone if we do not correct ourselves first. Now the case being made is that once we have worked on our middot; i.e, we have fixed ourselves and improved our discernment, we now know that not everyone is the same; there are those who refuse being corrected. We should not offer a Torah message - even if of correction - to those who behave like spiritual scavengers, those who are not ready to receive a holy message, and most certainly will desecrate it, as the Psalm says "the dog returns to its vomit", and so it will be with a holy message that has been given to this kind of people. In the words of the Talmud: "One should not rebuke those who will be unreceptive to his message. Rabbi Abba says: It is obligatory for him to refrain from speaking, as it is stated: Do not reprove a scorner lest he hate you" (*Yevamot* 65b). Despite Rashi's interpretation, the metaphor of the dog should not be necessarily understood as some kind of

⁷Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.

commentary

contempt against the gentiles. The usage of dogs is multifaceted in Jewish literature, just as it is in general, with both positive and negative examples. For instance, in Jewish tradition a dog is called in Hebrew כּלֵב Kelev because "Kulo Lev" "all in it is heart"; in other words, the animal is full of good emotions. In the case of the Tanakh, a dog is used metaphorically for a sinner (*Psalm 22:17 [16]*), a fool (*Prov 26:11*), a rival (cf. *Psalm 22:21 [20]*), or someone despicable (*1Sam 17:43; 2Sam 3:8*) regardless of whether he is a gentile or an Israelite.

7:6 do not throw your pearls before the swine - It is written in a midrash that God said to Noah: "Put jewels and pearls in the ark, that they may give Light, bright as the noon day" (*Sanhedrin 108b*). The pearls, then, have the quality of illuminating that which is dark. In this metaphor, the pearls refer to deeper secrets of the Torah, the most precious pieces of wisdom; that which goes beyond a simple "holy" message. The sages taught that "A treasure must not be revealed to everyone, so also with the precious words of Torah. One must not go into the deeper meaning of them, except in the presence of those individuals who are suitably trained" (*Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah 2:7*). Dogs, even though wild in the East, would not "trample down" the food; the swine would, in ignorance of their real worth and in disappointment that they do not afford them satisfaction. The pig is a symbol of abomination for the people of Israel, and in its wild state, is violent and potentially dangerous. Not only will they "twist" the teaching, but they will also destroy you for it. Rabbi Levi said: "God made Israel swear that they should not reveal... the secrets [of the Torah] to the idolators." (*Ketuvot 111a*).

7:7 Ask and it will be given - שאלו ויתנתן לכם Yeshua now emphasizes the importance of persistence in prayer. What should we ask for? It doesn't say, so this universal principle can be applied in every aspect of life (As it is used in *Luke 11:9+*), but in the case of this author the immediate context is the wisdom of the Torah. The Rabbi Daniel Tzion paraphrases the verse this way: " 'If we seek we will find, if we ask it will be given to us, and if we knock upon the doors of mercy He will open for us the doors of truth. I speak of the one truth, that will unite the whole world in one faith" (*Daniel Tzion, haEmet al Ishut Yeshua*).

7:7 seek and you will find - Illumination and forgiveness are to be sought. "You will seek HaShem your God and you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and all your soul" (*Deut 4:29*). The pearls in the Torah are to be sought as well: "If a man tells you, I have labored יגעתי but I have not found, do not believe him... that is; concerning words of the Torah" (*Megillah 6b*).

7:7 knock and it will be opened to you - דפקו ויפתחו לכם "The son of Qish... [Mordechai] knocked at the gates of mercy and they were opened for him" (*Megillah 12b*). "You will call, and HaShem will answer; You will cry and he will say, Here I am" (*Isaiah 58:9*). "The answer to a prayer is connected to the calling, and the calling is connected to the answer" (*Yerushalmi Taanit 3 [67a]*).

textual variants

7:7 seek and you will find דרוש ותמצאו Most Hebrew manuscripts render "seek" as 'baqshu' בקשו; the verb used in Deuteronomy 4:29. The Aramaic uses 'baw' בעו (seek, enquire, do research); being the Greek 'zeteite' ζητείτε a somehow close match. The best equivalent in Hebrew is 'drosh' דרוש, which is actually used by Delitzsch in his translation. A similar expression is often used in the Talmud: "seek and you will receive reward" "drosh veQabel sakhar" דרוש בקבל שכר with the meaning that we should do careful research in the Torah, and by carefully studying those portions of the Torah which don't depend on us to be fulfilled, we gain the reward of them, and also we may learn their spiritual lesson (cf. *Sanhedrin 71a*). "Solomon in his wisdom declared (*Prov 24:27*), 'Put your external affairs in order, get ready what you have in the field, then build yourself a home'. ... R. Eliezer ben R. Yose haGelili, said: 'Put your external affairs in order' means study Scripture, Mishnah and Gemarah; 'get ready what you have in the field,' means do good deeds; and 'then build yourself a home,' means 'drosh veQabel sakhar' i.e., seek and you shall receive reward" (*Sotah 44a*).

⁹What man among you, if his son asks for bread, will hand him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹Therefore, if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him? ¹²Therefore, everything you wish men to do to you, do likewise also for them; for this is the Torah and the Prophets.

commentary

7:9 if his son asks for bread - Although the meaning of these words is evident enough, it is worth noting that fish and bread are symbols of daily meals, something a Galilean father would give to his child almost every day. The stone looks like a loaf of bread, yet it doesn't satisfy, a small snake can have some similarity with a fish at first sight but is not only not kosher but also dangerous. Both would kill the child if we were heartless enough to give him these things to eat.

7:11 if you who are evil - Yeshua is using a Rabbinic method of logical deduction called "Kal vaKhome" (light and heavy); a principle that states that what applies in a light case, will also apply in a more important one, granted that the final conclusion is not 'dayo' or absurd (cf. *Avot D'Rabbi Nathan* 37). It's the first rule of hermeneutics collected by Rabbi Hillel (30 BCE - 10 CE) as well as by Rabbi Ishmael (90 CE).

7:12 Therefore - The 'therefore' here implies a conclusion to the two topics mentioned up to this point: God's "measure for measure", judging others without hypocrisy, and insistently seeking and praying to the Creator.

7:12 everything you wish men to do to you, do likewise also for them - The often called "golden rule", derived from Leviticus (19:18) "Love your fellow as yourself", is first heard within Judaism in the book of Tobit (4:15), "What you hate, do not do to any man". As this is a basic universal principle, similar statements are found in many other religions, such as Hinduism (cf. *Mahabharata*) or Zoroastrism (cf. *Shayast-na-Shayast* 13:29), and even in Greek philosophy (cf. *Isocrates* 3:61, *Thales of Miletus*). But Yeshua's words, with the addendum "for this is the Torah and the prophets" reflect one of the most famous sayings of Rabbi Hillel, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow; this is the entire Torah, the rest is {the} commentary; go and study it" (*Shabbat* 31a). While in English the expression "the rest is commentary" means "the rest is trivial", Hillel ends the sentence with "go and study it"; which actually means that while this principle sums up the Torah, it's not a free pass to relativize everything and ignore the commandments. The "love" for people is the great principle summed up here. "Love your fellow as yourself — Rabbi Aqiva says this is a great principle of the Torah" (*Yerushalmi Nedarim* 9:4). The whole purpose of the Torah is a means to reveal the essence of the Jew. Since a Jew's essence is revealed by the command to love his fellow, it can be said that it is the entire Torah and the rest is explanation; that is, that the rest of the Torah is the vehicle through which the essence of the Jew is revealed. All the laws between man and man, such as theft, robbery, adultery... etc, are summed up in "loving your fellow", because love does not wrong its fellow, and in the same way, the duties between man and God are summed up in this way: "Just as you do not wish that a friend would disobey your orders, do not disobey the commands of HaShem" (*Rashi on Shabbat* 31a). In this light one may easily understand why this is the entire Torah and the Prophets, and the rest is explanation. The main difference between Hillel's statement and that of Yeshua is that Hillel's is worded in prohibitive form, "do not do" (because the context required so, since he was indirectly rebuking Shamai and a heathen for their intransigent and provocative behavior) and Yeshua's statement is in directive form, "do", demanding to be actually active in this task; not only "not stealing things", but also "helping someone in need". Yeshua's brother, Yaaqov the Just, calls the golden rule "the law of the King" (*Jms* 2:8).

relevant quotes

"A certain heathen came before Shamai and said to him, Convert me, on the condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot [i.e., in a very short period of time]. Thereupon he chased him away with the builder's cubit that was in his hand. When he came before Hillel with the same request, Hillel converted him by saying, 'What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary; go and study it.'"

(Shabbat 31a)

¹³Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to perdition, and there are many who go therein. ¹⁴How small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and few are those who find it.

textual variants

7:13 for wide is the gate - The second and third appearance of the word "gate" in these two verses are not present in some of the most ancient manuscripts and in quotes from the first church fathers, thus making all the text about the "path" or "road" that leads to a gate. So the original text probably was: "Enter through the narrow gate, for wide and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and there are many who go therein. How narrow and restricted is the road that leads to life! Few are those who find it" (cf. *Diatessaron, Hippolytus, Clement, Origen, Cyprian, Eusebius*). The second "gate" has been included, though, in the family of Semitic manuscripts.

commentary

7:13 Enter through the narrow gate - The imagery probably comes from the narrow paths leading to Safed, the city on the hill, whose city-gate was also narrow. "The prophet Jeremiah (6:16) said **עמדו על דרכים וראו, ושאלו לנתיבות עולם**, 'Stand by the roads and see; and inquire about ancient paths.' The prophet uses the word **ראו** 'reu' to encourage exploration of the broad way, **דרך** derekh, while concerning the narrow path, **נתיב** he speaks only of 'inquire', knowing that it is so much more difficult to obtain accurate information about where a narrow path leads to. This is what the Sefer Yetzirah has in mind when it talks about 32 'paths' **נתיבות** of wisdom; seeing that attaining the true understanding of Wisdom is beyond most people" (*Rabbeinu Bahyah on Shemot 35:35*). The road is the way of obedience and holiness, and the gate is to be reached not without pain and effort. The Hassidic Rebbe Nahman of Breslev taught us that in order to serve HaShem, "[you must] know that the man has to walk through a very narrow and dangerous bridge **גשר צר מאד**, and it is essential not to allow oneself to be afraid" (*Likutei Moharan 2:48*). There's real struggle in walking the holy life, and there are so many fears to face in this world; fear of sin, of failure, of pain, of being rejected, of misery, of being killed... etc, and for most people it is easier to avoid these fears and walk "without God" so to speak, through an easier path. Rav Arush of Breslev enumerates three levels of authentic faith (i.e., emunah), that help us get rid of all these fears, once a person starts really trying to live by them. The first level of faith is: 1) Yesh raq haQadosh Barukh Hu - There is only God. He's running everything in the world, including your life. Understand that everything is Him. The second level is: 2) Everything is ultimately for the good - Even the suffering. God sees the whole picture, we only see a piece in the puzzle. We must trust in his decisions, although we don't understand them all. The third is: 3) What does the Creator want me to learn from this? (cf. *Garden of Emunah, chapter 2*).

7:14 narrow the road that leads to life - "Life" is a Semitic synonym with salvation, which is why it is contrasted with "perdition". Perdition requires deliverance. Perdition (in Hebrew 'Avadon'), is one of the seven names of Gehenna, according to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (*Eiruvim 19a*), and more precisely, it is the lowest compartment where the most severe punishment is applied to the soul, to the point that is not purged anymore, but destroyed (cf. *Zohar Noah 1:62b; Sotah 10b*). If you can read between the lines, Even in Jerusalem there's a "gate" of Gehenna (cf. *Eiruvim 19a*), even in the religious world we can end up wasting our lives, getting astray with our selfish desires, but we have to strive to find the city-gate of the Life in the World to Come, the "Holy Land". He who has ears to hear let him hear.

¹⁵Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits. Do they gather grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire. ²⁰Thus, by their fruit you will know them.

—commentary—

7:15 Beware of false prophets - The imagery of a 'Navi Sheqer' נביא שקר or 'false prophet' comes from the many false prophets in the Tanakh that caused many troubles to Israel; many who said: "I am a prophet like you, and an angel spoke to me" (*1Kings 13:18*). The true prophets warned: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They are filling you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of HaShem" (*Jer. 23:16*). A person may establish his credibility as a prophet through either performing a wonder or through consistently, successfully predicting future events while asserting to come from the true God. But regardless of how wondrous miracles the man will perform, or of how accurate his visions are, he exposes himself as a charlatan the moment he directs the people to adopt any form of idolatrous practices that violate the Torah (cf. *Sanhedrin 89a, 67a*). It is therefore written: "Do not listen to that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for HaShem your God tests you, to know whether you love HaShem your God with your entire hearts and your entire souls" (*Deut. 13:4*). The Rashbam says that the false prophet poses a real test for the people and that by choosing not to resort to the knowledge and powers of such people, we accumulate merits in God's books (cf. *Rashbam on Devarim 13:4*). Sometimes we don't know the true nature of such individuals, they look legit, right until the point in which they invite us to walk roads that go against the Torah, to "push us out of the way" (*Deut 13:6*); only then we are able to recognize them. This is what Yeshua means with "You will recognize them by their fruits". The miracles and the accurate foresights are not the "fruits", according to the Torah; many trees look the same on the surface, but it is their personal life and the path that they lead people to, what we have to be aware of. Moshe is immutable and there can never be a new Moshe with a new torah that contradicts the former (*Devarim Rabbah 8:6; cf. Shabbat 104a*), so if someone claims to have a "new revelation", he's a false prophet. If a prophet refuses to correct sinners, he's a false prophet. If he invites you to worship someone or something other than HaShem, he's a false prophet. He must be brought and tried by the Great Sanhedrin under charges that could be paid with capital punishment (*Sanhedrin 1:5, cf. Deut 13:6*). Torah believing Jews, for many, represent the word of God in the world, and even though not in the level of false prophets, when we act in a way contrary to Torah and lead people astray—a profanation of the Name of God—we misrepresent truth to the world. This is in fact a huge responsibility.

7:18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit - The Torah is called a "tree of life to those who take hold of it" (*Avot 6:7b; Prov 3:18*). and "man is a tree of the field" (*Deut. 20:19*). The fruits are always the end results; not the first impression; the fruits represent our good deeds and our impact in this world. "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree... they will still germinate in old age" (*Psalms 92:13-15*). "The praises of a man are that he did not follow the counsel of the wicked... He shall be as a tree planted beside rivulets of water, which brings forth its fruit in its season" (*Psalms 1:1-3*).

²¹Not everyone who says to me, My master, my master, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, Master, master, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many wonders? ²³Then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Away from me, you workers of injustice!

²⁴Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on a rock. ²⁵The rain descended, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because its foundations were laid on a rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain descended, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and the ruin of it was great.

commentary

7:21 Not everyone who says to me, my master, my master - The previous message about the false leaders who cause people to walk in "roads to perdition" is concluded with a warning. In Aramaic they would say **מרי מרי** "Mari, mari" (my master, my master) to their Rebbe, yet, this is not evidence enough they actually follow him. It is very simple to claim "Yeshua is my master" or "Rebbe Nahman is my master". But all these claims are pointless if we don't live according to their teachings. The whole preaching in the Sermon of the mount began with the statement that the Torah hasn't been abolished, that every detail in it is important, and that those who teach otherwise will be the "least in the kingdom", adding that we should strive to live a Hassidic life in order to enter the kingdom (*Matt. 5:17-20*). These are those who do the "will of his Father" (i.e. those who obey the Torah, in which the will of HaShem is written down). There are many out there claiming to be followers of Yeshua who actually misrepresent him and his teachings, even more are those who not only claim to be followers of Yeshua, but also perform miracles in his name, and yet, the tradition in which they were raised has disregarded the truth of his teachings and portrayed him in a way that is contrary to Torah and the true worship of HaShem. They are desecrating God's Name and leading people astray. Yeshua's answer to these leaders and false prophets is that he doesn't want anything to do with them: "I never knew you".

7:23 Away from me, you workers of injustice - [Heb. **עושי עול**; Ar. **פלאחי עולא**] 'Avla' **עולא**, with the sense of "pervert" or "wrong-doer" is shown in the Targum Mishlei (29:27) as the opposite of a Tzaddiq - a righteous person. The Hebrew 'avel' is usually used in the Tanakh with the sense of injustice or unrighteousness. "A judge who corrupts the decree is called 'avel' **עול** unjust; hated and disgusting, fit to be destroyed, and an abomination, because an unjust person is called an abomination, as the verse says, 'For whoever does these things, whoever perpetrates such injustice, is an abomination to HaShem' (*Deut. 25: 16*); and an abomination is called a kherem [something doomed to destruction], and a disgusting thing, as the verse says (*Deut. 7:26*), 'Nor should you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be destroyed (kherem) like it, but you shall utterly detest it'" (*Rashi on Lev. 19:15*). Such is the person that twists the teachings of a sage and turns people away from Torah.

7:24 hears these words of mine and puts them into practice - The previous statement and the whole sermon makes it clear that following Yeshua's words has to do with the way, the heart, in which we follow Torah (his Father's will); it's not a new law or a new set of commands (this would immediately disqualify Him as being the Messiah). Only the false prophets will teach such thing, according to Yeshua's own words. Attaching oneself to a Rebbe is a Jewish principle commanded in 'cleave unto God' (cf. *Deut.11:22*): "How is it possible to say that? What it means is: cleave to the disciples and the sages and it will be accounted to you as though you cleave to Me" (*Sifrei, Ekev sect.49; Rashi on Deut 11:22*). We should attach ourselves to a role-model Tzaddiq, a sage who is like an angel of God (cf. *Moed qatan 17a; Hagigah 15b*).

7:25 winds blew and beat against that house - "It is very good to attach yourself to a true tzaddiq. In the upheavals at the time of the coming of the Messiah, God will 'grasp the ends of the earth and shake the wicked from it' (*Yov 38:13*). But one who is attached to a true tzaddiq will be able to cling to him so as not to be cast off with the wicked. By holding onto the Tzaddiq he will remain firm" (*Rebbe Nahman, Sikkhot Haran #22*).

7:26 built his house on sand - His words about the house falling, mirror those of Elazar ben Azariah (*Avot 3:17*): "One who studies Torah but has few deeds is likened to a tree whose branches are many but whose roots are few; and the wind comes and uproots it and turns it upside down (cf. *Jer. 17:6*)... But one whose deeds exceed his wisdom is likened to a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are many; since even if all the winds of the world come and blow upon it, they do not move it from its place (cf. *Jer 17:8*).

²⁸And so it was, that when Yeshua had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

commentary

7:28 when Yeshua had finished saying these things - Despite the fact that these same teachings are scattered throughout different parts of the other Gospels, the words of this author suggest that he really intended to record a continuous discourse that began in chapter 5, thus forming a unit.

7:29 as one who had authority - The exact same verse is found in Mark 1:22, but in the context of Yeshua teaching in a Synagogue in Kefar-Nahum. This points out to the oral nature of these stories and how they were used in written form. The word used for "authority" **משלטא**, can be found in the Talmud, not only in the sense of giving orders, but also in reference to having self-control or dominion over a subject, as they say: "[them] who have control over their inclinations" **המושלים ביצורם** (*Bava Bathra 78b*).

7:29 not as their scribes - The scribes (or sofrim **סופרים**) were the body of teachers who interpreted the Torah to the common people in the synagogue (cf. *Neh. 8:8, Megillah 3a*). Ezra was called "a ready scribe in the Torah of Moshe" (*Ezra 7:6*). Apart from interpretation, the scribes classified the contents of the Torah, counted its letters, and recounted the number of laws with all their details, whether minor or major. Because they devoted so much time to Scripture, they would know that the letter vav in the word 'gakhon' **גחון** belly (*Lev. 11:42*) is the midpoint of the letters in a Torah scroll, and the ayin in the word 'yaar' **יער** wood (*Psalms 80:14*) is the midpoint of letters in the book of the Psalms (*Qiddushin 30a*). Rav Yosef even said that he and his group were not able to do the same thing, even if he wanted to, as the ancient scribes were experts in the matter. They would question and debate every point of view before reaching any conclusion. It is said that some of the scribes were so deeply removed from reality that would teach "three hundred hallakhot (laws) concerning a tower flying in the sky", and yet would end up going astray (*Hagiga 15b*), as it is written "where is the scribe, where is he who weighed, where is he who counted the towers?" (*Isa. 33:18*). Therefore, the scribes would not teach with the authority or determination of a prophet or a king, as their mission was to pass down and debate the teachings they had received. The idea can be grasped with this haggadic principle: "Doeg and Ahitophel [who are considered scribes in the Talmud] raised 400 dilemmas concerning a tower flying in the air and they did not resolve not even one" (*Sanhedrin 196b*).