

5 Seeing Yeshua the crowds, he went up on a mount, and when he had sat down his disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them. He said:

³ Blissful are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blissful are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blissful are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blissful are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ Blissful are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blissful are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹ Blissful are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blissful are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

commentary

5:1 he went up on a mount - The Aramaic and the Hebrew (עלה אל הר) do not show an article, so the mount is not generic, "up on the mount", but in the Greek is also not indefinite: i.e. "upon a mountain", ὄρος in the singular is always only a single hill, as in the classical writers. It must refer to a certain hill that was well known by the inhabitants of the land and referred to it as "the mount". We don't know which exact mount it was, but we know it was in Galilee, and according to a well known tradition, this mount - which is referred to as "Har haOsher", הר האושר, "the mount of beatitudes", is near the town of Safed (cf. *Robinson, Palestine*, III. p. 485; *Keim, Gesch. J. II. p. 236*).

Safed, in Hebrew Tzefat צפת, is the highest city in the Galilee; one of Judaism's 4 holy cities and a center of mysticism. Safed is well known as the capital of Kabbalah, where some of the greatest mystics of the 16th century resided after fleeing from the Spanish Inquisition (namely: Cordovero, Moshe Alsheikh, Yosef Caro and the Arizal). In the kabbalistic legends it is said that the Ari saw the soul of the greatest Kabbalists, i.e., the greatest spiritual masters of the ancient days, who were – whether literally or metaphorically – buried there (cf. *Shaar haGilgulim, beginning of chapter 37*); this includes important characters such as Shimon bar Yohai and his students Rabbi Khiya and Yitzhaq, Yehoshua the Tanna, Antigonus of Shokho or Nahum of Ganza. Of course in one of the legends Yeshu haNotzri is mentioned as buried in the north of Safed, by the way of a carob tree, together with all these righteous sages, and the text says at the end: "May their merits protect us" (cf. *Shaar haGilgulim 37*). Of course there must be something deeper about this, because Yeshu's literal burial place has no connection whatsoever with Safed. He taught in Galilee, but he died in Jerusalem and he was buried there. According to another Talmudic aggadah (which we must explain somewhere else) he was hanged in Lod (Lydda), but certainly not in Galilee. Now I'd like to recall that the greatest Kabbalists (including the Arizal) spoke in parables and forms, because (1) the spiritual world can only be explained with figures that we are familiar with, and (2) there's a complete taboo surrounding the character of Yeshua, and in the past it was not good for Judaism to talk openly about him. So this is the secret: the phrase "Sham Qabor Yeshu", שם קבור ישו, "There [is where] Yeshu is buried" has the numerical value of 964, which is the same as "Metatron" מטט-רון with the Nun Sofit. The mention of the Carob Tree (Kharov חרוב) is also interesting, since it's the same value – 216 – as the word: "Davir" דביר, Oracle, which is the name given to the Holy of Holies in the Temple (*1Kings 6:20*), and interestingly the 72 names of God are also made of 216 letters. Bar Yohai ate from a carob tree during the 13 years of his Zoharic revelation. What do we learn from all of the above? Why buried in Safed on the way to a carob tree? Why is he teaching here on a mount close to Safed? We learn that his character and his teachings are buried within mysticism and kabbalah and if someone bothers to raise them up they will find he was one of the righteous of Israel. His soul is buried here, in this sermon of the mount, waiting to be "kashered" through the lens of 1st century Judaism and not misinterpreted as it has been done for centuries. The carob takes 70 years to mature, so too the understanding of Yeshua's teachings has been harvested by the future generations. Here the author of the Gospel is pretending to create something similar to a Sinai event, the "soul" of the Torah is going to be opened through the wisdom that emanates from his Rabbi.

5:1 when he had sat down - sitting down is the usual position of a Jewish teacher. In the Talmud to "sit" is nearly synonymous with "to teach". We stand up to read the Torah, and we sit down to expound it.

5:3 Blissful are - In Hebrew: "Ashrei", blissful, happy. The language is taken from the first Psalm. On "the poor in spirit" it says "I live in the high and holy place.... together with him who is penitent and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble" (*Isa 57:15*) and: "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, you will not despise a broken and penitent heart" (*Psalms 51:19*). The kingdom is among us, within us, all around us. This is the recipe of how to attain it, how to feel it, how to be part of it: Humbleness, being aware that all we have comes from the king, from HaShem, so we have nothing of our own. Mourning for repentance when we fail. Starving for righteousness even if that causes us some troubles, being pure and showing mercy, being like Pinkhas, who was a peacemaker. With this we experience inner peace and felicity.

¹¹Blissful are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹³You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

alternative readings

5:11 evil against you because of me - This is according to most Byzantine manuscripts; the sense probably being that when you follow Yeshua you are going to have enemies. Although I might say that it would apply also to following Yeshua's teachings and his way of righteous life which will also cause enemies. After all, the topic being discussed is "righteousness" as a way of life and not the topic of following Yeshua as a leader. Obviously following Yeshua's leadership would be equal to following righteousness, so this brings me to the alternative readings: the Old Syriac says, "evil against you for my name's sake", the word "name" being a Semitic idiom for reputation, and the Codex Bezae together with some Latin manuscripts read: "evil against you because of righteousness", thus showing the actual meaning behind these words. And that's why it then speaks about the prophets that were persecuted in the past; not because they followed Yeshua – they didn't even know him – but because they stood for righteousness in a society where righteousness was not welcome. One can be persecuted and reviled for many reasons, the zealots were persecuted because they killed Romans, a criminal may be persecuted because of his crime, but be blissful when you are being slandered and insulted because you are standing for righteousness when everyone else is just worried about themselves. In a great number of manuscripts the word "falsely" is missing, but it's ok to have it in the text because anyway that's the intended meaning.

commentary

5:12 Rejoice and be glad - One will not be slandered only by atheists; those religious people who persecute the righteous ones, they think they are doing God's will, as it is written: "Your brethren who hate you, who cast you out for my name's sake, said, 'the Lord shall be glorified' but he shall see your joy and they shall be ashamed" (*Isaiah 66:5*). Since the author of the Gospel intends to recreate a similar experience to a Sinai event, which could be called "the Torah of Yeshua", he opens Yeshua's sermon with ten utterances that reflect the Sinai's Decalogue. These beatitudes in one way or another are derived from the Psalms and from the prophet Isaiah, so they are nothing new actually, Yeshua is expounding Torah, not deviating from it.

5:13 You are the salt - "with all your oblations thou shall offer salt" (*Lev 2:13*). An offering is not accepted without salt. It is called "the salt of the covenant of your God" (*ibid.*). What's so important about salt? "Salt was to be used because it softens bitterness, and so mankind cannot do without it. Salt is the covenant upon which the world is established: hence it is called 'the covenant of your God'" (*Zohar 1:241b*). Salt has additionally other characteristics such as preserving food, and giving it a better taste. The people of Israel are the salt of the covenant, softening bitterness to the world and keeping the Torah. When they don't fulfill this mission they are not really behaving as the people of God's covenant.

5:14 You are the light - The whole people of Israel is the light of the world. It is explicitly written: "I called you with righteousness and I will strengthen your hand, and I formed you and I gave you to a people, for a light to nations" (*Isaiah 42:6*). It can also be read as "for a light to gentiles". How to be a light? By Qiddush Hashem, glorifying God's name through good deeds, like Yeshua said: "they shall see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven". In a world of many philosophies, the Jewish people define "good deeds" as all the ethical and positive commands that are taught in the Torah. Yeshua here is talking to an audience of Jews, there are no gentiles in mind when this speech is given. It is the Torah of Moshe what shapes and defines their philosophies and moral standards. It is for this reason important what Yeshua is going to say after this: "Don't even think that I came to abolish the Torah".

¹⁷Do not think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfil. ¹⁸For amen I tell you, until heaven and earth pass, not one Yod or one apex will by any means pass from the Torah until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

commentary

5:17 Do not think - i.e. Do not even think about it. Do not suppose, do not hope for it, do not expect it, do not come into such conclusion and do not teach in such a manner; all deduced from the Aramaic word that is used: **לא תסברון** "La tasibrun", whose root **סבר** is similar in meaning to the Greek 'nomizo' **νομίζω** and the Hebrew verb **לחשוב** 'Lakhshub'.

5:17 to abolish the Torah - the words used in the manuscripts cover a lot of different meanings: From merely weakening its power, to completely abolishing it. Either case Yeshua says that such a thing should not even be in our minds. Any follower of Yeshua should be aware of this: That Yeshua never intended to abolish the Torah or to even weakening its influence. Any interpretation that sooner or later comes into such a conclusion is erroneous, and there are so many interpretation of the New Testament that are completely based on this idea. This predominant view is summed up in the words of the 5th century Christian philosopher Socrates Scholasticus: "When Judaism was changed into Christianity, the obligation to observe the Mosaic Law... ceased" (*Scholasticus 5:22*). Some say that by fulfilling it, it came by itself into abolition. This is simply not so, this idea is what Yeshua is telling us not to even think about. The Christian version of Yeshua (aka Jesus) has done everything that the historical Yeshua told us not to do; He "changed the Torah for something else" and caused the rejection of the Jewish people (cf. *Rambam, Hilkhos Melakhim 11:4*).

5:17 not to abolish but to fulfil - to "fulfil" in the context of the Torah refers to obedience. To fulfil a Biblical verse means to make it happen, to fulfil a command means to put it into practice and/or to teach others to obey it. In other words, to fulfil the Torah is actually the completely opposite of abolishing it. Rabbi Yonathan taught: "Whoever fulfils the Torah in poverty, his end will be fulfil it in wealth" (*Avot 4:9*). The meaning is that someone who obeys the Torah in poverty will be greatly rewarded for it, and as you can see, here to "fulfil the Torah" is synonymous with living in obedience to it.

5:18 until heaven and earth pass - Yeshua teaches with these words that each Hebrew letter in the Torah is meaningful, which is actually a very orthodox approach to the divinity of the Torah; he could not speak of it higher than this. Notice his reference to the end times recorded in Isaiah 51:6, "The heavens shall vanish away like smoke and the earth shall rot away like a garment... and my righteousness shall not be abolished". To date this event hasn't happened yet. We are still living in a materialistic world ruled by chaos and paganism, the sky over our heads is still the same sky there was 2000 years ago and religious confusion is still happening. It doesn't matter if you want to interpret it literally or metaphorically, this verse hasn't been fulfilled yet, and so the Torah still stands in all its strength. Our Hassidic masters teach that in the World to Come the world will turn divine, we will experience the Torah in a completely new level of divinity, it will be the same Torah but in a completely different level; we will experience the Divine (cf. *Liqutei Halakhot, Eiruvei Tekhumim 5:22*) and so "all the commandments of the Torah will be obeyed in a totally different manner" (cf. *Hemsekh vKakha 5637, ch 18, 19, 21*). But we haven't arrived to that day yet, we are yet to obey the Torah in light of how the sages told us to obey it.

5:19 anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands - Here Yeshua is still talking about the Torah. Anyone who disregards or breaks a command of the Torah will be called the least, and anyone obeying them all will be called great. Our sages taught in the same manner (*Sanhedrin 99a*): "Whoever thinks that the Torah is heavenly except for one verse, because they think that verse was added by Moshe, of that person is written (*Num 15:31*): he has despised the word of the Lord".

5:20 you will not enter the kingdom - Here to enter the kingdom of heaven is not about going to heaven after death. He's talking of experiencing God's sovereignty here on earth. The Hassidim teach that a Jew is expected to go beyond the letter of the Torah (to do more than the Scribes) in order to bring the Messianic era. This is not about obeying laws, it's about inner transformation. With these words Yeshua sides with the Hassidim, who were a more mystical branch of Judaism and who were also part of the Pharisees and Essenes. We owe the idea of correcting the world (Tiqun Olam) to the Hassidim. Yeshua is also talking to common people - many of them sinners - he was calling for repentance (cf. *Lk 15:10-32*). About this our sages teach that the righteousness of a repentant sinner (a Baal Tshuva) is way bigger than the one of a man who in general has never sinned (cf. *Hilkhos Teshuva 7:4*).

²¹You have heard that it was said to those who were before, You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. ²²But I say to you that whoever becomes angry with his brother rashly will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, Raqa, is answerable to the Sanhedrin. And anyone who says, Lella! will be in danger of the fire of Gehenna. ²³Therefore, if you are bringing your qorban at the altar and there remember that your brother has some grievance against you,²⁴leave your qorban there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your qorban.

commentary

5:21 You have heard.... but I say - After stressing that Torah must be followed, Yeshua draws moral principles from it. He makes use of a homiletic method called "Antithesis" (In fact this portion is known by scholars as the "Antithesis in the Sermon of the Mount"). In an antithesis, an orator offers other people's point of view in order to contrast them with his own. Antithetic sermons were common in the Qumran community (cf. *4QMMT B55, 65, 68, 73*), where we can find the rules of different schools juxtaposed with the expression "But we say" (**אנחנו אומרים**). One will misunderstand the purpose and meaning of this section if they think of it as a set binding unquestionable laws that are replacing others. This section is not questioning or setting apart the Torah, this section is not contradicting the legal decrees of the sages, and certainly this section is not a radical new interpretation of the Torah, as we shall see; everything in this section has to do with ethics – in other words, this is a Mussar speech, not Hallakhic decrees. The morals and ethics expressed in this sermon reflect those of the first century Pharisaic Hassidim, and represent the ideal moral standards by which humanity should live in the Kingdom of Heaven (and in the Messianic era), since they boost humility and spirituality.

5:21 You shall not murder - "You shall not murder" (*Ex 20:13*). Yeshua teaches that Heaven regards someone guilty of murder, not only for literally killing a human being, but also for insulting, humiliating and enraging against their brother, and such person deserves punishment either by the Sanhedrin or by the fire of Gehenna (*Matt 5:22-25*). The statement is rooted in the ethical principles of the Torah (cf. *Lev 19:17*).

5:22 whoever becomes angry with his brother rashly - He "who becomes rashly angry" in Aramaic is "D'nirgaz iqi" (**דנרגז איקא**), which means that he becomes enraged (literally, burns) with no reason or in vain. The word **Raqa** (**רקא**) is Galilean Aramaic, corresponding to the Hebrew Reiqā (**ריקא**), a scornful word for vile, empty or worthless people (comp. "For it is not a worthless thing", *Deut 32:47*). Mikhal, the daughter of Shaul insulted David by saying "the king of Israel... exposed himself... as one of the Reqim" (*2Sam 6:20*). **Lella** (**ללא**) means fool or idiot, someone morally or mentally blocked (The Greek uses the word "moros" (**μωρός**) from where the English word "moron" derives). Obviously there are fool people in the world as Proverbs says "He who follows Reqim is void of sense" (*Prov 12:11*), but malicious slanders come out of pride and/or hatred; the complete opposite of what the Kingdom of God should be. Therefore we see this same principle in the words of our sages, who taught: 'he who embarrasses his neighbor openly, it's as if he spilled blood' (*Bava Metzia 58b*) and also: "An evil eye... and hatred of men put one out of the world" (*Avot 2:16*).

5:23 - If you are bringing your qorban - Yeshua is bringing a scene which was common to every observant Jew, that of approaching the altar and offering a qorban. A qorban is a gift, offering or sacrifice that is offered at the Temple. There are five basic types of qorbanot (**קרבנות**): 1.The ascending – or burnt – offering (cf. *Lev 1*), 2.The grain offering (cf. *Lev 2*), 3.The peace offering (cf. *Lev 3*), 4.The purification – or sin – offering (cf. *Lev 4*), 5.The guilt offering (cf. *Lev 5*). These offerings provide a proxy to bring a person closer to HaShem. In fact, the word "qorban" means approaching or bringing near. The whole ritual involves a meditative atmosphere: the offering, the smell of incense, the clothes of the priests, the music or chanting, the blessings, the sense of solemnity... etc which served as a means to bring the person into the right mental state of spirituality. Obviously none of this could be achieved if the person doesn't come with a sincere intention of the heart (which is called Kavanah). That's why the prophet says: "Do not bring more vain oblations... put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes... come then and let us reason" (*Isa 1:13-16*). When a person approaches the altar, it's a time for introspection, and Yeshua is saying that one should not focus only on themselves and God, but one must also consider whether they have injured their neighbor. The sacrifices per se don't forgive you, you must repent, and the way to repent is to try to repair your connection with those you have aggravated. Repairing the damage is found in Leviticus 5:20 (chapter 6 in Christian Bibles), which begins with: "If a soul sins and betrays HaShem and lies to his neighbor.... he shall restore" (*Lev 5:21-23[6:2-4]*). "He shall then bring his guilt offering" (*Lev 5:25 [6:6]*).

It's important to notice that the "**fire of Gehenna**" is God's anger (cf. *Isa 66:16, 24*). Gehenna is the Rabbinic name of the place where the imperfect soul gets purged (*Pesakhim 54a*). The 'fire of Gehenna' can refer to judgment in the afterlife as well as in this world, which is shown in the Great Flood and in Sodom (cf. *Midrash Eduyot 2:10; Jud 1:7; Zohar 1:62b*).

²⁵Settle matters quickly with your accuser while you are on the road with him, or the accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may fall into the prison house. ²⁶Amen I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last little coin.

—commentary—

5:25 settle matters - From a literal point of view, someone who injures his neighbor is likely to be sued for his wrongdoing. A wise person will try to settle matters before arriving to the court, where a lawyer, in order to win the case, is going to bring to the judge even the smallest things that the person didn't even remember or think about. The person will be only free again after paying the imposed penalty; that's how usually a trial procedure works.

5:26 the last little coin - The Aramaic "Shamuna" refers to a small copper coin, which can be compared to the British "penny" in that it's the smaller. The Greek manuscripts use "kodrantes" - i.e. a quadrans; the fourth part of an assarius, which was the Roman coin.

5:26 you will not get out - All of this imagery comes from the previous verses where Yeshua says that wrongdoing has consequences either with the Sanhedrin or in Gehenna. The plain interpretation of this paragraph deals with someone who has been brought to the Sanhedrin, but there's an allegorical interpretation to it, since the rewards and punishments that Yeshua is talking about in this sermon come from "Heaven" (cf. *verses 5:19, 5:46, 6:1, 6:19*). "Settle matters while you are on the road"; the road here represents your day-to-day interaction with the world, as it is written: "Your word is... a light into my path" (*Psalms 119:105*), and also: "You shall talk [of the Torah] when you walk on the road, and when you lie down and when you rise up" (*Deut 6:7*). In other words, settle matter now, make peace with your brother now that you can, while you are still alive. The word "accuser" is repeated twice, the first one being obviously the person you have aggravated. The second time it refers to the Satan (whose name means adversary or accuser). Basically, your wrongdoing against another person has caused the Satan to bring their cause into the heavenly court, so technically speaking, the aggrieved person has become your prosecutor in heaven - as the sages say, one can "call upon divine judgment on his fellow man" (*Rosh haShana 16b*). It is therefore written in the Mishna: "One who fulfills one commandment acquires himself a single defending angel. One who commits one transgression acquires one accusing angel. Repentance and good deeds serve as a shield before retribution" (*Pirkei Avot 4:13*). In this allegory God is the True Judge – Dayan haEmet (cf. *Berachot 54b*) – and the "officer" is the angel in charge of your retribution. The "prison-house" is the retribution itself. You may suffer a retribution for your behavior here on earth or in the worse scenery, after death, in what Judaism calls: 'Gehenna'. If at the end of our life we leave the world without fixing our sins (and this doesn't necessarily mean that we have been wicked people), our soul finds itself in dissonance with the peaceful Light of the Divine, therefore the spiritual consciousness must go through a process of purge and cleansing (which is described as a period of suffering). The retribution (also called: Judgment) will not end until you have paid everything, i.e. until you have been properly purged. The sages and mystics explain it this way (*Zohar Noah I:62b*): There are in Gehenna "abodes upon abodes: second, third, until seven (cf. *Sotah 10b*)... Upon passing unto that world, whoever has defiled himself descends to Gehinnom, where he is sunk to the lower abode. There are two abodes close to each other: Sheol and Avadon (cf. *Yov 26:6*). He who falls to Sheol is judged and retributed and is raised to another, higher abode; and so on – level after level – until he's released. But he who descends to Avadon is never raised; that's why it's called 'avadon' – lost אבדן – for he is totally 'avid' – lost אביד". The purging process is based on the idea that you have to "return your soul to HaShem as pure as when he gave it to you" (*Shabbat 122b; cf. Baba Metzia 58b*).

—relevant quotes—

The house of Shammai taught: "The thoroughly righteous will be definitively inscribed as entitled to eternal life; The thoroughly wicked will be definitively ascribed to Gehenna, as it says (*Dan 12:2*): And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to reproaches and everlasting abhorrence. The intermediate will go down to Gehenna, and struggle, and rise again, as it says (*Zech 13:9*), And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried. They will call on my name and I will answer them. Of them, too, Hannah said (*2Sam 2:6*), The Lord kills and makes alive, he brings down to the grave and brings up".

(*Rosh haShana 16b-17a*)

²⁷You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. ²⁸But I say to you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into Gehenna. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into Gehenna.

³¹It has been said, If a man puts away his wife he must give her a certificate of divorce. ³²But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her to commit adultery, and anyone who takes the woman who is sent away commits adultery.

commentary

5:25 You shall not commit adultery - "You shall not commit adultery" (*Ex 20:14*). Yeshua says that lusting after women is also adultery. It is equally taught by the sages that "Adultery can be committed with the eyes" (*Vayiqra Rabba 23*). "A man must not have sexual thoughts during the day, so that he would not become unclean wasting his seed at night" (*Avoda Zara 20b*).

5:30 it is better for you to lose one part of your body - Here Yeshua is addressing sins committed with the eyes and with the hands, in the context of lustful thoughts and sexual immorality. The language is very strong, and it refers to male masturbation, which is considered a sin in Judaism. It is written: "The hand that constantly touches [the genitals]... in the case of a man should be cut off" (*Mishna Nidda 2:1*). "In the case of a man, the hand that reaches below the navel should be chopped off" (*Nidda 13a*). When asked about losing a part of the body, Rabbi Tarfon answered: "it is preferable for the belly to be split than going down to the pit of destruction" (*Nidda 13b*). Obviously we should not go everywhere chopping hands off, because this is not literal, the sages are making use of hyperbolic language, which was needed in order to emphasize the seriousness of this sin, which is called: Sh'khatat Zera, destruction of the seed. The sexual organ represents the Kabbalistic sefirah of Yesod - foundation, which is the sefirah of righteousness that bestows goodness to the female Malkhut (cf. *Zohar Vayiqra 110b*). Yosef became a Tzaddiq (a righteous person) because he overcame the sexual temptation with Potiphar's wife (cf. *Gen 39:10-11, Amos 2:6*), it is therefore written that the Tzaddiq is the Yesod of the world (*Prov 10:25*). The Mishna and Kabbalah regard the forbidden sexual relations as an esoteric subject together with Maasei Bereshit and Maasei Merkavah, and a Rabbi can teach about them only to two students at the same time. this subject receives the name of "Sitrei Arayot" , 'the secrets of the forbidden sexual relations' (cf. *Hagigah 11b, Mishna Hagigah 2:1; cf. Rambam's commentary on it*).

5:31 certificate of divorce - "When a man takes a wife and is intimate with her, and it happens that she does not find favor in his eyes because he discovers in her 'ervat davar' ערות דבר, he will write for her a bill of divorce and place it into her hand, and send her away from his house" (*Deut 24:1*). The 1st century schools of Shammai and Hillel had different opinions on the meaning of the expression 'Ervat Davar'. Ervah ערוה means nudity or pudenda, but it also means shame or disgrace. The school of Shammai understood here that a man should not divorce his wife unless he has found some unseemly thing in her, while the school of Hillel says that anything that causes shame or disgrace to her husband is a reason for divorcement. They go as far as saying: "even if she burnt his meal" (*Mishna, Gittin 90a*). Rashi seems to interpret here that Ervat Davar means 'an unseemly moral matter'. In the Torah, uncovering the 'ervah' of a woman is an idiom for cohabiting with her (cf. *Lev 18:6*), so it is proper for Yeshua to deduce that 'ervat davar' means "a matter of fornication" or sexual immorality. Yeshua is making use of his Hassidic standards to discourage divorcement by saying that a man should not divorce his wife except in the case of sexual immorality, and any other reason makes the certificate of divorce invalid, therefore causing both the woman and the man who marries her to fall in adultery. God doesn't want divorcement for his children, but he had to provide this measure in the Torah because of human weakness (cf. *Matt 19:7-9*). Yeshua refers to the ideal standards in which the kingdom of heaven should be working on earth, which is called 'midat Hassidut', the way of the pious. Someone who lives according to the Hassidim must be careful with matters that cause damage and with ethical principles (cf. *Bava Kama 30a*). We must take into consideration that Yeshua's rules here are Mussar (ethical principles) for his disciples, but the Jewish Law follows Hillel's lenient approach on this subject, and therefore divorcement is still a sad but legally permitted reality in most cases. It also must be taken into consideration that the Torah provides other reasons for divorcement, for instance, it allows a woman to divorce her husband when he fails to provide her with food, raiment or proper cohabitation (*Ex 21:10-11*).

³³Again, you have heard that it was said, Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made. ³⁴But I say to you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷All you need to say is simply Yes, yes or no, no; anything beyond this comes from evil.

³⁸You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. ³⁹But I say to you, do not raise against evil. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

—textual variants—

5:33 Again, you have heard that it was said - Most Greek manuscripts say: "you have heard that it was said to the ancients". The word for "ancient" is 'archaios' (ἀρχαῖος), which means primeval or ancient-in-time. The Peshitta uses le'qadmaya (לקדמא); meaning: to those of old time. The Peshitta on this section may be however influenced by the Byzantine Greek manuscripts. Other manuscripts such as the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae, the Old Syriac or the quotes registered by Irenaeus do not include "to the ancients" in the text. Nevertheless, in the context of the sentence, "the ancients" or "those of old time" mentioned here would be the sons of Israel at Sinai, since the command comes from the Torah.

—commentary—

5:33 Do not break your oath - The Torah allows to swear oaths, in fact it is one of the requirements in the investigation of an adulterous woman (*Num 5:19*), but the words of an oath are not taken lightly by God. Whatever a man expresses in an oath must be fulfilled or he will be guilty by his own words (cf. *Lev 5:4*). It is specifically written: "You shall not swear falsely by my Name, thereby profaning the name of your God" (*Lev 19:12*). A man must "do everything that came out of his mouth" (*Num 30:3*). So if a man says to his neighbor, I am 'bevowed' from you that I not eat from you, he's then forbidden by his own oath to eat food from that person (*Mishna Nedarim 1:1*). Even though a person is bound to their own words, the Mishna explains that only the wicked take oaths; the righteous refrain from taking oaths (cf. *ibid*). This parallels Yeshua's words: "Anything beyond this comes from evil". Yeshua taught not to swear at all, but rather "let your Yes be yes and your No be no". Yaaqov haTzaddiq, the brother of Yeshua also taught the very same thing: "Never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Simply let your Yes be yes, and your No be no, so that you will not sin and be condemned" (*Jms 5:12*). One who breaks his oath profanes God's name whether he took it in God's name or not, because even if you don't swear in the name of God directly, God is included in every oath – as Yeshua reasons (*Matt 5:34-37*) – and it's a grave sin not to keep an oath. Our sages of blessed memory also taught to be careful with oaths: "Do not swear at all, not even if it's true" (*Tanhuma Vayikra*). They also taught: "the characteristic of a righteous person is that his Yes is yes and his No is no" (*Bava Bathra 49b*).

5:38 An eye for an eye - The verse 'an eye for an eye' (*Exo 21:24; Lev 24:19*) was one of those laws of retaliation that existed in the Hammurabi laws way before the Torah of Moses. While one may be tempted to interpret those words out of context claiming that one can avenge himself, the context is completely the opposite. The Hebrew: "Ayin takhat Ayin" (עין תחת עין) means "An eye instead of an eye". According to our sages this command can only be applied in a judicial court context, because the Torah does not allow personal revenge (cf. *Deut 19:16-21; Prov 20:22; 24:29*), and they reason here: "What if a blind man takes the eye of another person? How would we take the eye of someone who doesn't even have eyes?". Therefore, the verse actually refers to a reasonable monetary compensation in the court (*Bava Kama 83b-84a*). Personal revenge stems from hatred and holding grudges, which are not part of a Torah based 'loving' relation (cf. *Lev 19:18*); it is therefore written in Lamentations (3:25-30): "HaShem is good to those who wait for him... It is good that one should wait quietly... let him offer his cheek to the one who smites him". Divine justice is measure-for-measure (midah kneged midah), and in these interpersonal cases, the Torah expects the person to go to the court and trust God's judgment. This does not deny though self-defense, whether to protect one's house, one's life or one's country (cf. *Bava Bathra 99b*). "Do not raise against evil" is also a Pharisaic teaching (*Yoma 23a*) which is reflected in the words of Rebbe Nahman: "The true sign of a person who has returned to God is the ability to hear himself insulted and remain silent... Repentance essentially depends on humility. One must make oneself into nothing... pay no attention whatsoever to opposition or abuse from others" (*Likutei Moharan I, 6*).

⁴³You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the gentiles do that? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

textual variants

5:44 Love your enemies and pray - The Peshitta and the Byzantine manuscripts add: "Do good to those who hate you". This phrase doesn't appear in earlier manuscripts and seems to have started as a marginal note.

5:47 Do not even the gentiles do that? - The Peshitta and a great number of manuscripts repeat "tax collectors" as in the previous verse. However it actually reads: "gentiles" הגויים in the Hebrew Matthew DuTillet, in the Old Syriac and in many of the earliest readings (including the Codex Vaticanus and Sinaiticus). Yeshua was giving this speech to a Jewish audience which for the most part saw in 'gentiles' a synonymous with paganism, so there's no any surprise here, although it's understandable why later scribes would want to replace 'gentiles' with 'tax collectors'. The meaning, nevertheless, is still the same: It refers to sinful people.

commentary

5:43 Love you neighbor and hate your enemy - This phrase isn't found anywhere in the Torah. Hating the enemy is not a Torah principle. Any biblical verse that talks about defeating the enemies is merely in a nationalistic sense, and it never refers to interpersonal relations (see for example *Ex 23:22*, *Lev 26:7*, *Judges 5:31*, *1Sal 14:24*...etc). In matters of interpersonal relations the Torah says: "If you see your foe's donkey lying under its load... you shall help him to release it" (*Ex 23:5*). "If your enemy is hungry give him bread" (*Prov 25:21*). "Hillel said: Be among the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving creatures and bringing them closer to the Torah" (*Pirkei Avot 1:12*). Where then can we find this weird teaching, to "Love your neighbor but hate your enemy?". Rashi reflects this opinion in his commentary on Proverbs (3:30), "Do not quarrel with anyone without cause, if he did you no harm". "i.e., unless he transgressed a commandment written in the Torah. The Torah states (*Lev 19:18*): And you shall love your fellow as yourself, but one who is wicked, you may hate" (*Rashi on Prov 3:30*). Hating the "children of darkness" was in fact an Essene teaching, but the source for Rashi's logic is the Talmud. Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhaq was expounding on the verse "If you see your foe's donkey..." (*Ex 23:5*), and connected it with Proverbs 8:13 "Fear of HaShem is to hate evil". He then inferred that "it is a command to hate whoever commits a transgression [and was found in indecency]" (*Pesakhim 113b*). Somewhere else it is also written: "One may call every impudent person a scoundrel and hate him" (*Taanit 7b*). While on the surface it seems that the Talmud is really teaching what Yeshua is in disagreement with, the commentators are careful to explain that in this case 'hatred' does not refer to the feeling of hatred itself, but to a rejection and separation in order to cause the sinner to repent (*Rashi on Arakhin 16b*. *Rambam on Hilkhoh Rotzeiakh 13:14*). Ibn Ezra stresses that in the Exodus verse, the literal meaning is 'one who hates you' and not 'one whom you hate'. Concerning King David, who wrote: "Did I not hate your enemies?... I hate them with utmost hatred; they have become my enemies" (*Psalms 139:21-22*), he wrote it in a nationalistic sense, in the context of his wars against the pagans and his persecutions. However, when we examine David's interpersonal relations, one of his most notorious characteristics was precisely his love for his enemies (*2Sam 1:17*, *19:4*, *6*), so Rabbi Nahman of Breslev taught that "when reciting Psalms one should imagine that King David's battles are one's own personal battles against his Evil Tendency" (*Liqutei Moharan II:125*). Mar Zutra used to pray when climbed into his bed: "I forgive those who have vexed me" (*Megillah 28a*). After all, "If you hate any man, you hate God who made man in his image" (*Midrash Tanhuma*).

relevant quotes

"There were once some thugs in the neighborhood of Rabbi Meir who caused him a great deal of trouble. Rabbi Meir therefore prayed that they should die. His wife Beruria said to him: What, do you think that it says: Let sinners cease? (*Psal 104:35*) Is it indeed written sinners? It is written 'sins'! – Khataim! חטאים! Further, look at the end of the verse: 'And then the wicked will be no more.' Once the sins cease, then the wicked will be no more! Rather pray for them that they should repent, and the wicked will be no more. He did pray for them, and they repented".

(*Berakhot 10a*)