

18At that hour the disciples came to Yeshua and asked, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? ²Yeshua called a little child to him and placed the child among them. ³And he said: Amen I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

—commentary—

18:1 At that hour – This was asked after the question of the two drachma in Kefar-Nahum, after he said the children are exempt from tax. In the Markan version the disciples had been wondering about this topic while on their way to Kefar-Nahum (*Mark 9:33-37*).

18:3 unless you change and become like little children – What does being like a child mean? Curiosity, sincerity and innocence. Firstly, children have genuine and humble curiosity towards what they learn. It is taught that “Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yitzhaq were walking through the town of Tzippori while a child followed after them” (*Zohar 3:39-41*). It happens that as the two Rabbis began discussing matters of the Torah, this child – called Yeisa – raised questions to them they had never thought about before. His genuine curiosity for a deeper understanding of Torah provided these sages new insights. They then kissed the boy and declared him a sage. What the children learn with their honest curiosity, with no bias or prejudice, is not easily forgotten, hence the saying: “One who learns as a child, to what can he be compared? To ink written on new paper” (*Avot 4:20*). Secondly, a child cries out with his entire soul, such is the sincerity in a child’s prayer. “When Israel is like a crying child, they awaken God’s mercy” (*Tiqunei Zohar 11 [26b]*). This is the secret in the verse: “Behold, a child נער was crying and she had mercy on him” (*Exodus 2:6*). Scripture calls this crying child נער naar. Naar (usually meaning youth, rather than a small child, yeled ילד) is an attribute of the sefirah of Yesod, alluding to Messiah ben Yosef’s soul (cf. *Qol haTor 2:94*). It causes a unification between above and below.

18:3 you will never enter the kingdom of heaven – Come and see: Repentance and good deeds are compared to being born again and becoming like a little child. A man who repents from his previous sinful life, such as the pagans who convert, “is like a newborn child” (*Yevamot 62a*). His previous life from the Other Side is considered dead, and he is born again from the Shekhina’s womb, which is called “the kingdom;” i.e., Malkhut. When there is this unification between the kingdom below and the King above through people’s repentance and their performance of good deeds, it is stated that the Divine Presence pleases the Blessed Holy one. The Shekhina – God’s divine immanence which is manifested through righteous people – prides herself in saying to the Creator: “See what a child I bring to you” (*Zohar 3:13a*).^a The prophet says: “Cast away your transgressions... and get yourselves a new heart” (*Ezekiel 18:31*). If he casts away all the transgressions he has done, he will make his heart like it was when he was born. This teaching is one of Yeshua’s well-preserved ones. The Thomas version mixes this teaching with Matt. 11:12, where it is taught that Yohanan the Immerser is the greatest among those born of women. Thomas reads: “Whoever becomes like a child will know the kingdom and become higher than Yohanan the Immerser” (*Thomas #46*). This parallels what our sages teach, that a baal teshuva (someone who does full repentance) stands in a higher position than a complete tzaddiq (*Berakhot 34a; Hilkhot teshuva 7:4*). Thomas implies that those who become like a child are born, not of women, but of the Shekhina; they are the “son of man” who transcends nature.

18:3 you will never enter the kingdom of heaven – Some gospels take this teaching further and turn it into an initiatic principle. In the Yohanine version Yeshua says to a sage: “Amen, amen I say to you, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (*Yohanan 3:3*). Because the kingdom is spiritual and can only be perceived by one who is born from the spirit. Somewhere else the disciples ask him: “When will you be revealed to us and when will we see you [i.e., the coming of the son of man]? Yeshua responded:

^a See also: *Liqutei Halakhot, Orakh Hayim, hashkamat haboqer 1:9:5*.

⁵And whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. ⁶Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, to him it would be better to have an ass' millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! For stumbling blocks must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!

—commentary—

When you take off your clothing without being ashamed and take your clothes and put them under your feet like little children, and tread on them, then you will see the son of the Living One and will not fear" (*Thomas #37*)^b. A little child before the Creator "removes his clothing" without shame, in reference to the status of Adam and Hava before the fall. The second Adam is purified from sin, he sees with purity the world from heaven's perspective, and the garden of Eden (the world to come) surrounds him.

18:5 whoever receives one such child in my name receives me – This is because a son is an extension of his father (*Eirubin 70b*) and like Rashi says, a disciple is like a son to his Rabbi (cf. *Rashi on Eccl. 4:8*). This is based on the principle that "Whoever teaches Torah to his friend's son, it is as if he was his own son" (*Sanhedrin 19b*). This is parallel to Matt. 10:40, which in the Markan version reads: "Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, he welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me" (*Mark 9:37*). This is in agreement with the Talmudic statement that "an emissary in an extension of the one who sent him" (*Qiddushin 41b*). Come and see: The "nasi" or leader of the generation comprises the souls of all his followers. The Tanya says: "The soul of Yisrael Sava (i.e., Israel the patriarch) is compounded of all the souls" (*Iggeret HaQodesh, ch. 7*). "The leader of the generation is equal to the entire generation, because the leader is everything" (*Rashi on Num. 21:21; Bamidbar Rabbah 19:28; Midrash Tanhuma Huqat 23*). In reference to the leader, the sages say: "Who rules over me? The tzaddiq does" (*Moed qatan 16b*). The tzaddiq is "the encompassing root of all the souls of Israel, and they are the extensions that receive from him" (*Liqutei Moharan 34:2*).

18:6 Whoever causes... who believes in me to stumble – He calls them "little ones" not only because they are his followers, but also because they are repenting and learning the ways of teshuva. It is not an easy path for most; it requires so much effort, emunah and rising again after falling. But the reward is great, as the sages teach: Great is penitence, because it transforms one's deliberate sins into merits (*Yoma 86b*). However, these new repentants can be easily deceived and discouraged from authentic faith. For instance, they came to do complete teshuva because of Rabbi ploni, but someone comes and says "Rabbi ploni is evil." Or "Do not say hallakha from your teacher." To such person, who prevents new students to learn Torah from a tzaddiq, "even the embryos in their mother's womb curse him" (*Sanhedrin 91b*). "One who causes his friend to desist from his learning [of Torah], it is certain that he has deviated from the way of Hashem" (*Sefer haMiddot, Talmud Torah part 1, #5*). This on the Biblical basis that it is forbidden to place a "stumbling block before the blind" (*Lev. 19:14*). It does not matter if a person is coming under the wings of the Shekhina because of Rabbi Yishmael, because of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai or because of Yeshua the Nazarene, as long as they come to Torah and mitzvot and the knowledge of the one true God, for "It is a mitzvah to respect every Torah sage, even if he is not one's own teacher, as stated (*Lev. 19:32*): Stand up before a white-haired [man] and respect a zakein. Zakein refers to a sage" (*Rambam, Madda, Talmud Torah 6:1*) and "he who disgraces the wise even after his demise... is to be ostracized" (*ibid. 6:14*).

^b This saying is not unique of Thomas. It also appears in the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 655:9 and is quoted by Clement of Alexandria as part of the gospel of the Egyptians (*Stromata 3:12:92*).

⁸If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the fire of eternity. ⁹And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and fall into the Gehenna of fire. ¹⁰See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in all time are beholding the face of my Father in heaven. ¹¹ -

commentary

18:8 If your hand or foot causes you to stumble – After warning about those who cause a child to stumble, Yeshua brings the teaching of “if your own hand causes you to stumble,” which was previously taught in Matt. 5:30 in the context of lust and adultery – for adultery can be committed with one’s own hand (cf. *Niddah 13b*). He also mentions here the feet, which serve to walk the path. The school of Rabbi Ishmael similarly taught: “There shall not be adultery among you, whether by hand or whether with one’s foot” (*ibid.*). Since this passage repeats Matt 5:30 within the topic of despising little ones, one is tempted to question whether this teaching is out of place. In the manner of the Talmud, which does constant parenthetical remarks, this passage comes into play because of the previous statement, “Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! For stumbling blocks must come” (*Matt. 18:7*). Mattai’s author, perhaps drawing from Mark’s version, is using this statement to put two individual teachings together in order to make this magnificent point: Woe to him who causes a child to stumble, but be careful, because you can cause yourself to stumble by your very own hand! For there is no greater stumbling block than the inclination to evil which resides in us. The context also allows for a secondary interpretation: it is better for a man to sew up his mouth than using it as a stumbling block for little ones.

18:8 It is better... maimed... than... be thrown in the fire of eternity – As Rabbi Tarfon said: “It is preferable for the belly to be split [in order to avoid sin] than going down to the pit of destruction [with the entire body]” (*Nidda 13b*).

18:9 And if your eye causes you to stumble – “We found with regard to the primeval serpent who seduced Hava, that he placed his eyes on that which was unfit for him [i.e., Adam’s wife]. What he desired was not given to him, and that which was in his possession was taken from him” (*Sotah 9b*). “Samson rebelled with his eyes, as he said to his father: Get her for me, for she is pleasant in my eyes. Therefore, the Philistines gouged out his eyes [measure for measure]” (*ibid.*). Only after this Samson’s spirit returned, as it is written right afterwards: “And the hair of his head began to grow... and Samson called to Hashem and said, Adonai Hashem, remember me... that I may be avenged the vengeance for one of my two eyes” (*Judges 16:22, 28*).

18:9 Gehenna of fire – “This is the fire of the west, which every setting sun receives. I came to a fiery river, whose fire flows like water, and which empties into a large sea in the west” (*Enoch 17:4-6*). The fire of Gehenna never goes out (*Tosefta Berakhot 6:7*). The west refers to the Shekhina and the fire refers to judgment. “He who separates himself from the way of the Torah falls into Gehenna. As it is stated (*Prov. 21:16*), The man who strays out of the way of understanding shall rest in the congregation of the spirits” (*Bava Bathra 79a*). the spirits in this verse refers to those who “are in the depths of Sheol” (*Prov. 9:18*).

18:10 do not despise one of these little ones – One of these who are coming to Torah and mitzvot, maybe for the first time in their lives, and are still making mistakes.

18:10 their angels in all time are beholding the face of my Father in heaven – Their guardian angels who serve through the yetzer hatov (inclination to do good), and their angelical counterparts who cannot be contaminated by the yetzer hara. The Talmud states about those who come to observe Torah: “Even though they themselves were not present [at the giving of the Torah], their guardian angels were” (*Shabbat 146a*). For the Creator says about repentants: “You are beautiful, my beloved, as Tirzah, as lovely are Jerusalem, as terrible as [angelic] hosts” (*Song of songs 6:4; cf. Rashi*). Tirzah comes from the root *retzuah* רִצְיָה, desirable (cf. *Tanhuma Bamidbar 12*). The meaning is: you are beautiful, my beloved, when you are reconciled to me

¹²What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the mountains and go to look for the one that strayed? ¹³And if he finds it, amen I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not stray. ¹⁴In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

textual variants

18:11 – Some manuscripts include here the words of Luke 19:10, “For the son of man has come to save to that which was lost.” In this context the son of man refers to every son of man, for it is everybody’s duty to protect the little ones who come into repentance.

commentary

[through repentance and prayer] (cf. *Rashi*). It implies that those who repent and become baalei teshuva become as angelic hosts. The midrash similarly says: “If Israel is abolished from the world, what need is there for [ministering angels] in the world, as it is stated (*Isaiah 33:7*), Behold, their angels cry out outside, the messengers of peace weep bitterly” (*Esther Rabbah 7*).

18:12 If a man owns a hundred sheep – It is worth noting that this parable is found in other Nazarene texts under different contexts (cf. *Thomas #107*), which means that probably Yeshua spoke this parable without a concluding explanation, because, certainly, a parable can carry different meanings for different audiences. Therefore, the conclusion offered by Mattai in verse 14 or that of Luke (in 15:7) might probably be the authors’ take on the parable. Certainly there is joy in Heaven for a man who repents, as “the Creator does not rejoice in the downfall of the wicked” (*Megillah 10b*). Rabbi Abbahu said: “In the place where penitents stand, even the complete righteous do not stand, as it is stated, Peace, peace upon him who is far and him who is near. First it says peace to him who is far, and only thereafter him who is near” (*Berakhot 34a*). Because the Father knows he who is near will be safe. “The penitent is drawn to God with greater power than he who has never failed” (*Zohar I:129b*). But he who is far has to undergo so much in order get closer. “He [the guardian of the community] shall love them [the congregation] as a father loves his children, and shall carry them in their distress like a shepherd a sheep” (*Qumran, Damascus Document*).

18:13 will he not leave the ninety-nine...? – Although Luke opens and closes the parable with a similar context as that of Mattai’s, the way he narrates it implies a totally different morale than that of Mattai. He tells three consecutive parables about wealthy people who have lost something: a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son (*Luke 15:3-32*). In Mattai the sheep goes astray, but in Luke it is the shepherd who loses it (*Luke 15:4*). While Mattai ends with the shepherd being joyful to have found it, in Luke “When he finds the lost sheep, he puts it on his shoulders and returns home” (*Luke 15:5*). One is tempted to simply agree with the authors personal conclusions and overlook these small details, but we should also consider how these parables impacted on the people’s audience had Yeshua told them that way. For instance, contrary to popular opinion, the Jewish audience would not blame the sheep for getting lost, nor they would blame a coin. They would rather blame the owner of the sheep and the owner of the coin for having lost them. In the story the sheep did not come into its senses, do teshuva and return home by itself. She was being carried because she would not return on her own. Similarly it was not the coin’s fault to have been lost, it was the woman’s fault. The meaning of the two allegories, therefore, is as follows: If a wealthy person experiences

relevant quotes

“When Moshe was tending Yitro's flock in the desert, a lamb scampered off and Moshe followed it until it approached a shelter under a rock. As the lamb reached the shelter, it came upon a pool of water and stopped to drink. When he caught up with it, he said, I did not know that you ran away because you were thirsty, now you must be tired. The Holy One said, Because you showed such compassion in tending the flock of a mortal, as you live, you will become the shepherd of Israel, the flock that is mine”. (*Shemot Rabbah on Exodus 3:1*)

¹⁵Now then, if your brother sins, go and rebuke him alone, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won him over. ¹⁶But if he does not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If he still refuses to listen, tell it to the community; and if he refuses to listen even to the community, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

—textual variants—

18:15 if your brother sins – some manuscripts read: “if your brother sins against you,” making the context more specific.

—commentary—

such a joy in finding something that is important to him, what joy would we experience if we find the salvation we have lost? The story of the “prodigal son” is quite more complex than the previous two. Luke narrates it after the other two and in the context of saving sinners, as if the father of the story is the Creator, and the later son represents the tzaddiqim. But if we isolate it, the father seems to be a man who irresponsibly gave money to a selfish son. When he returns, his father invites everyone to a party celebrating the return of his favorite lost son. He invites everyone; except his elder son, who “was in the field” and was suddenly told about the party when he arrived home. The father was so occupied with his younger son that he had totally forgotten about his elder son. This son cannot feel any joy because he has been ignored both by his younger brother and his own father and carries with him years of resentment. At this point the father is in the same position as the shepherd and the woman of the two previous parables, but restoring a family proves to be more complicated than restoring a sheep or a coin. This interpretation for the third parable is more in line with the Qumran scrolls than with the common mainstream interpretation. As the Damascus Document says, It is the community leader’s job to take care of his community as if they were his children or his sheep. And if members of the community abandon Torah or become resentful, he must take full responsibility and try to fix it.

18:15 if your brother sins – The author is still tackling the topic of not wanting the little ones to perish. He does not want anybody to be a stumbling block for them. No matter if the one who sins is one of the little children or someone who could influence them; the matter must be addressed before it is too late, in order to keep the community in sanctity.

18:16 by the mouth of two or three witnesses – This is a citation from the Torah: One witness **עד** shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity or any sin that he sins; by the mouth of two witnesses or by the mouth of three witnesses shall a matter be established” (cf. *Deut. 19:15*). Alternatively: “shall a word be confirmed.” The Semitic usage of “mouth” (in Aramaic ‘pum’ **פומ**) refers in this context to narrating one’s own testimony. It is a common expression to say: lepi **לפי**, which means “according to...”. This Torah verse is commonly used in religious court cases. However, Yeshua’s intention is to do the reproof privately whenever possible, based on the verse which says: “You shall not hate your fellow in your heart. Reprove your fellow but incur no guilt on their account” (*Lev. 19:17*). The obligation to reprove applies only to those who categorize as a fellow; that is: someone with whom one has a close relationship (*Sefer Hassidim #413*). Also, only if they sin occasionally. “Those who have completely forsaken the Torah, such as those who... eat treif even when kosher food is easily obtainable, are not categorized as a ‘fellow’ and one is not obligated to reprove them” (*Beur Halachah 608 s.v. Aval*).

18:17 tell it to the community – It is written: “Do not reprove the scoffer, lest he hates you” (*Prov. 9:8*). There are those within the community who will reject reproof and our words will certainly not be accepted. Men such as these readily return to their folly and very likely come to sin again. “If so, it is better if they tell it to

¹⁸Amen I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, amen I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

—commentary—

the [religious] judges of the city [or the leaders of their community], so that they chastise him for his sin and keep him from future transgression. And it would seem that the same holds true for the relatives of the sinner if [we know that] their words [of reproof] will be accepted by him" (*Hofetz Hayim, Lashon haRa, principle 4, seif 5*).

18:17 treat him as... a pagan – As said above, those who constantly reject words of reproof do not categorize anymore as your “fellow” (*as per Lev. 19:17*), so they can be treated as foreigners to the community, because they indeed behave in a way that is foreign to its ethics. Similarly says the Talmud, “everybody [i.e., the entire community] should hate [a fellow Israelite who transgresses the Torah and is found in indecency]” (*Pesakhim 113b*). In this context the word “hatred” refers to an open rejection of that person’s lifestyle to provoke him to repentance (*cf. Rashi on Arakhin 16b*). The Rambam wrote: “He who beholds his fellow stooping to sin or following an unrighteous path, is obliged to return him toward the good, and to let him know that he is actually sinning against himself... ..He who rebukes his fellow, whether it be regarding a sin committed between man and man, or whether it be regarding matters between man and God, it is essential that the rebuke be administered only between them both; and he shall speak to him calmly, employing soft language, telling him that he does not speak of it to him, save for his own good, to bring him to a life in the world to come... he should rebuke him a second, even a third time.... When does the above apply? In regard to matters between one man and another. However, in regard to spiritual matters, if [a transgressor] does not repent [after being admonished] in private, he may be put to shame in public and his sin may be publicized. He may be subjected to abuse, scorn, and curses until he repents, as was the practice of all the prophets of Israel.” (*Mishneh Torah, De’ot 6:7-8*).

18:18 whatever you bind on earth – Since the previous verse talks about a sin that must be dealt with by the entire community, he now proceeds to say that whatever our decision will be on that matter, it will be accepted by heaven, because the common soul of all Israel is the Shekhina. ‘Binding and loosing’ is a legal term that refers to the *posqim*; those who decide on the course of action their community must take: “The words of those who declare pure and the words of those who declare impure, the words of those who bind and the words of those who loose” (*cf. Hagiga 3b*). Even when the schools of Hillel and Shammai took opposite approaches as to how to observe certain command, the heavenly voice decreed for both of them “this is the word of God” (*Eiruvim 13b*). The *posqim* of the community will decide whether a sinner requires to be excommunicated or simply treated as a foreigner (*cf. Bava Metzia 59b*). This is because, as the sages taught: The “Torah is not in heaven” (*ibid.*), which means it is up to the earthly *posqim* to interpret it.

18:20 For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them – In the context of community decisions. This sentence, which begins with the word “for,” is a conclusion for the previous statements. Two or three is the required number of witnesses. If a community takes a decision in the name of their Rabbi, their Rabbi is part of such decision. The Rabbi here is the head of the Shekhina, which is the communal soul of the assembly. As it has been taught: “Cling to a Torah scholar and it will be considered as if you cling to the Shekhina” (*Rashi on Deut. 11:22; cf. Ketuvot 111b*). The sages similarly teach: “Where do we learn that if two sit and learn Torah, the Shekhina sits with them? In the verse (*Malachi 3:16*): Then spoke those who fear Hashem one to another [and Hashem heard it]” (*Berakhot 6a*).

18:20 there I am with them – The fourth gospel combines verses 19 and 20 to form a unique statement about prayer, giving it a mystical twist. “Whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you” (*John 16:24; 14:13-14*). What is the meaning of these words? Can we receive anything we pray for in his name?

²¹Then Keifa came to Yeshua and asked, Master, how many times shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up to seven times? ²²Yeshua answered, I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.

—commentary—

Rebbe Nahman taught that “Whenever you pray, you should have in mind that you are binding yourself to the tzaddiqim of the generation. They alone know how to elevate each prayer to its proper place” (*Liqutei Moharan 1:2:6*). “The tzaddiqim pray to God and God has mercy on the world because of them” (*Tanya, Igeret haQodesh ch. 27; cf. Zohar 2:16b*). Just like Moshe Rabbeinu brought the cases of Israel to Hashem, the tzaddiqim do the same. But asking the tzaddiqim to pray for us does not make us exempt from our own personal prayers. Still, the influence of a tzaddiq makes our prayers lean more towards the side of mercy. Hassidut teaches, “Mentioning the names of the tzaddiqim has the power to bring about a change in the act of creation, altering nature. This is a remez on the verses (*Gen. 2:4*): These are the generations of heaven and earth and (*Exod. 1:1*): These are the names of the sons of Israel” (*Sefer haMiddot, tzaddiq part 2*). Furthermore, the Zohar teaches that “a tzaddiq who departs from the world is present in all the worlds more than during his lifetime” (*Zohar 3:71b*). The Lubavitcher Rebbe taught: “During the lifetime of the tzaddiq when his spirit is encloded in his soul, and his soul attached to his body, his students and Israel as a whole can receive [his influence] through his holy words and thoughts. When, however, the spirit is separated from the nefesh, it can shine forth to every one of his students according to the individual level ... It can be understood that any one of [the tzaddiq’s] students can receive their portion and their teachings from the spirit of their master in any place” (*Schneerson, Whispers between Worlds, 29–32*).

18:21 How many times shall I forgive my brother – This question stems from Yeshua’s words in verse 15, “If your brother sins...” etc. We have learnt you must privately rebuke your brother who sins against you, and if he repents, you have won him over. The Torah states: “When a man or woman commits any of the sins against man... they shall confess... and make restitution” (*Num. 5:6-7*). “Anyone who suppresses his honor [and forgives an offender], God pardons all his sins” (*Yoma 87b*), as it is written, “Love covers all transgressions” (*Prov. 10:12*). The question arises, what if after repenting he sins again? How many times should we forgive them?

18:22 seventy times seven – It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and refuse to be appeased. Rather, he should be easily pacified, but hard to anger. When the person who wronged him asks for forgiveness, he should forgive him with a complete heart and a willing spirit. Even if he aggravated and wronged him severely, he should not seek revenge or bear a grudge (*Hilkhot teshuva 2:10*). If one’s brother refuses to forgive him, one should bring along three of this man’s friends and they should ask him to forgive him. If the wronged party still refuses to grant his brother forgiveness, one should bring a second set of three of this man’s friends and then a third in order to convince him to forgive. If, after all of this, he still refuses to forgive, he should leave him alone and the one who refuses to forgive is considered the sinner (*ibid. 2:9*). “From where do we derive that if the victim does not forgive him that he is cruel? As it is stated (*Gen. 20:17*), And Avraham prayed to God; and God healed Avimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bore children” (*Bava Qama 92a*). Every year on Yom Kippur we forgive our brother who has sinned against us and repent from every offense we might have done to our neighbor during the year. This is a prayer explicitly recorded in the Yom Kippur prayer book.^c

18:22 seventy times seven – Among certain theologians it was not clear what was the intended number in the manuscripts.^d In the plain interpretation it does not really matter, as the number is hyperbolic, but it is believed Yeshua’s response derives from Lamekh’s words, “If Kayin is avenged seven times, then Lamekh seventy-seven times” (*Gen. 4:24*), where the Septuagint reads “Seventy times seven.” 70 times 7 seems to be more plausible as Yeshua is responding to Keifa’s question and multiplying his own number: “Not seven, but seventy times the number you said.” This parallels the giving of the Torah, as God spoke with one voice which “was split into seven voices and they were divided into seventy voices” (*Shemot Rabbah 28*). Just like Hashem welcomes into his family to every repentant in this world of correction, we should also receive our

^c Cf. Makhzor Yom Kippur.

^d Jerome, Erasmus and others say “seventy times seven,” while Origen and a few others imply that the correct reading should have been “seventy-seven times.”

²³Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a human king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴When he began to receive, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵Since he was not able to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, together with his wife and his children and all that he had so that he could pay. ²⁶And that servant fell down and prostrated before him, saying, Be patient with me, and I will pay back everything. ²⁷The servant's lord had compassion on him, set him free and forgave him his debt. ²⁸But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him, saying, Pay back what you owe me! ²⁹His fellow servant fell at his feet and begged him, Be patient with me, and I will pay it back. ³⁰But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay what he owed him. ³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their lord everything that had happened. ³²Then his lord called him and told him, You wicked servant, I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³Was it not right for you to have mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you? ³⁴And his lord was angry and handed him over to the torturers, until he should pay back all he owed him. ³⁵Thus will my Father in heaven deal with you unless you forgive each his brother's fault from your heart.

—commentary—

brother's apology as long as we are in the world. For 50 represents the gates of transcendence, the ten sefirot of the five worlds, and 49 is the closer we get to it, being $7 \times 7 = 49$.

18:25 so that he could pay – When a fellow Israelite is found guilty of theft and there is no way to repair his crime, it is written: “[the thief] must make restitution, but if he owns nothing, he himself must be sold to pay for his theft” (*Exodus 22:3*). “If your brother falls into poverty and is sold to you, do not make him work as a slave, let him stay with you as an employee or a resident worker, and he will work with you until Yovel” (*Lev. 25:39-40*).

18:33 torturers – The point the parable is trying to make is already explained by Yeshua himself and we should not fall into taking the details at face value as if the story was real. However, some interpreters consider the “torturers” to be a metaphor for the avenging angels or the punishment in Gehinom. He who is cruel in life with his fellows will be purged in Gehenna “until he should pay all he owed.” As the sages put it: “The judgment of the wicked in Gehenna lasts for twelve months” (*Shabbat 33b; cf. Rosh haShana 17a*). Twelve months means a whole purging cycle, for in truth the concepts of time and space are irrelevant in the netherworld.

18:35 unless you forgive each his brother's fault from your heart – It is written: “He bears sin and forgives transgression” (*Micah 7:18*). “Whose sins does he bear? The sins of one who forgoes his reckonings [with others for injustices committed against him]” (*Rosh haShana 17a*).