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## AN EXPLANATION OF ABOT VI. 3

IN the issue of *The Jewish Quarterly Review* for January, 1920, vol. X, pp. 199ff.), Dr. Joseph H. Hertz suggests a very interesting emendation of Abot VI. 3. He reads **שֶׁנֶדְבָרִים** in place of **שְׁנֵי דְבָרִים** and therefore translates the Baraita as follows: 'He who learns from his fellow a single chapter, a single verse, a single expression, or even a single letter ought to pay him honour, for so we find with David, King of Israel, *who learnt nothing from Ahitophel but merely conversed with him* and yet regarded him as his master, his guide, and his familiar friend; as it is said: But it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide and my familiar friend (Ps. 55. 14). Now, is it not an argument from minor to major? If David, the King of Israel, *who learnt nothing from Ahitophel but merely conversed with him*, regarded him as his master, guide, and familiar friend, how much more ought one who does learn from his fellow a chapter, rule, verse, expression, or even a single letter to pay him honour?' The purpose of the emendation, as Dr. Hertz points out, is to give force to the **קל וחומר** which otherwise is decidedly lame, in view of the fact that two words or expressions are undoubtedly more than one.

It has been my privilege in connexion with certain studies in Abot, in which I have recently been engaged, to examine several old editions and manuscripts in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary containing the Baraita **קנין תורה**, and I am convinced that the emendation is not necessary to save the force of the syllogism, if the proper reading be reconstituted according to the manuscripts. The words **דבר אחד** and **אות אחת** are not well authenticated. Out of the sixteen editions and manuscripts on my list, I find that six omit **דבר אחד**, four omit **אות אחת**, and two omit them both. These latter are a French prayer-book

and a copy of the Machzor Vitry, both dating from the thirteenth century. The dubiousness of these readings, evidenced by all the manuscripts, and their omission from the two very valuable texts just mentioned make it very likely that they did not form part of the original Baraita. A careful scrutiny of the printed text of Kalla, to which Dr. Hertz makes reference, will lead to the same conclusion. Not only is **דבר אחד** omitted, but the reading **ואפילו דבר אחד ואפילו אות אחת** gives the impression that the second **ואפילו** introduces a later addition to the original statement.

According to the best textual evidence, the Baraita reads as follows: **הלומד מחברו פרק אחד או הלכה אחת או פסוק אחד צריך לנהג בו כבוד. שכן מצינו בדוד מלך ישראל שלא למד מאחיתפל אלא שני דברים בלבד ועשאו רבו ואלופו שני ואתה אנוש כערכי אלופי ומידיעי. והלא דברים קל וחמר דוד מלך ישראל שלא למד מאחיתפל אלא שני דברים בלבד עשאו רבו ואלופו הלומד מחברו פרק אחד או הלכה אחת או אפילו פסוק אחד על אחת כמה וכמה שצריך לנהג בו כבוד.** and since 'two words' or 'expressions' may be less than a whole Scriptural verse, the **קל וחמר** remains in force.

Dr. Hertz is of course correct in assuming that the verse immediately following that quoted in our Baraita is required to explain the allusion. Raba in Kalla and most of the commentaries take for granted that the teachings of Ahitophel are summed up in the two phrases **בית אלהים** and **יחדיו נמתיק סוד** respectively. Now these two expressions taken together constitute no less than one whole passage and therefore it may well be puzzling that the peculiarly emphatic form **שני דברים בלבד**, as Dr. Hertz points out, should be used.

As a matter of fact, the Baraita was not guided by the division into verses now current, and it is very likely that the word **אשר** did not introduce a new passage (see verse 20 in the same Psalm). If we assume this to be the case, we see at once that the two expressions which sum up the teachings of Ahitophel constitute together considerably less than one whole passage, and the emphatic form **שני דברים בלבד** would therefore not be unjustified.

A careful examination of the manuscript reading, quoted above, shows that  $\text{מִי־יָדַע}$  is not among the titles which David is said to have applied to Ahitophel. It is possible that, for purposes of the homily, our Baraita read  $\text{וְיָמִידַעִי}$  instead of  $\text{מִי־יָדַעִי}$  which would make the relation of the proof-text to the Baraita much clearer. The passage could then be freely rendered as follows: 'Thou, a man mine equal, my guide and *he who teaches me*, that we should take sweet counsel together and that we should walk to the house of God with the throng.'

If there is no real need for accepting the proposed emendation, interesting and suggestive as it undoubtedly is, we need not of course assume an exceptional 'process of transmission' in the case of our Baraita, an assumption to which we would otherwise be compelled.

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