

## ***Part 5: The Evidence of the Mishnah***

### ***Chapter One. Introduction***

An exoteric book contains then two teachings: a popular teaching of an edifying character, which is in the foreground; and a philosophic teaching concerning the most important subject, which is indicated only between the lines.

*Leo Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing*

... the text can be shown to be a genuine artifact. This testifies to and presupposes a thorough literary training on the side of the writers or editors; so the least we can do to make for a competent response as interpreters is to analyse and describe their work on all levels, and to understand it better and reinterpret it on the basis of integrating the data and the links between these synchronic layers. We emulate the literary training of the authors by discovering and re-enacting the figures, the structures and the conventions present in the work of art. After having completed this course of discoveries, we have laid the basis for a responsible handling of the big questions: about the values and the truth of the text.

Jan P. Fokkelman

Leo Strauss argued that there are ancient texts which consist of two strata: one, exoteric, created for the broad public, and one, esoteric, for the initiated. Our analysis has demonstrated that the Torah is such a book. When read linearly, it contains “a popular teaching of an edifying character”, and when read as a weave it discloses the beauty of its “hidden treasures.” It would appear that we have discovered a technique, literary weaving,

employed to embed esoteric teachings within an ostensibly exoteric text. This discovery opens the Torah to new interpretations based on its structure. It also raises new questions. Why was it necessary to construct it in this complex format? Did other authors employ the woven-text technique? What teachings had to be hidden? I will address these questions in this section by examining another ancient text which was also woven, the *Mishnah*.

The Mishnah is a Hebrew legal compendium composed in the early part of the third century C. E. and forms the basis for the Talmud, which was redacted over the next three centuries. It contains over five-hundred chapters which were constructed according to the weave paradigm employed in the Torah. This shows that the knowledge of reading and writing woven text was maintained for centuries after the composition of the Torah. However, no other extensive example of woven text has as yet been discovered from the period between the composition of the Torah and the appearance of the Mishnah. This lacuna raises a question regarding Rabbi Judah the Prince, known simply as “Rabbi” and traditionally cited as the author of the Mishnah. Why did he format the Mishnah according to the weave paradigm? If we had other woven texts from the centuries that separated these two foundational books, then we could say that Rabbi was working within an established literary tradition or genre. Since no such books have been discovered, we must look elsewhere for an answer. Fortunately, Rabbi provided us with material that answers this question as well as our questions regarding the composition of the Torah as an esoteric text.

Not surprisingly, Rabbi embedded the information we need in order to answer our questions within the structure of his book. One section of one of the five-hundred-twenty-three chapters was constructed in order to be read in parallel with the five-consecutive-pair

reading of the Decalogue according to the scroll division. In order to fully appreciate the significance of Rabbi's ten-part document, let us review some of the points covered in Sections One and Three. We began by noting the emphasis placed on the Decalogue by it being the only example of divine writing in the Torah. We observed that the same text was inscribed twice, each time for a different audience. A close reading of the Decalogue revealed a possible arrangement of the Words written alternately on the two tablets. While this arrangement is not mentioned in ancient commentaries, it is consistent with a literal reading of Exodus 32:15. By reading the Words as consecutive pairs according to the scroll division, we were able to integrate them into a coherent composition. This led us to the hypothesis that author intended that the Decalogue be read in two ways, parallel to the two sets of tablets. The "broken" reading, in which each Word is considered independently, was intended for the public at large, while the coherent reading that integrated the ten Words was intended for individuals. This hypothesis was confirmed by our reading of Leviticus XII (19) in Part 3, which we determined to be analogous to the Ark of Testimony. We saw that it contained shattered remnants of the Decalogue as well as another decalogue organized according to the pattern of the five-pair reading developed in Part 1. This made it abundantly clear that the author did indeed plan the Decalogue and the whole Torah to be read in two different ways. Rabbi took the cue from the Torah and created a five-pair text that is based on the five-pair reading of the Decalogue.

In the centuries that separated the composition of the Torah from the composition of the Mishnah, there is no indication that the Torah, or the Decalogue, were read as we have seen them. For example, Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.E.-50 C.E.) uses virtually the same division of the Decalogue that appears several centuries later in the *Mekhilta*, and places the

first five Words on one tablet and the next five on the second tablet. So there was an ancient tradition regarding the division of the Decalogue which was not consistent with the scroll division. This tradition is the only non-Augustinian one that reached us in writing and was certainly current at the time of the composition of the Mishnah. Rabbi testifies, indirectly albeit, that he is familiar with the scroll division and the five-consecutive-pair reading, and that this reading is at the heart of an esoteric tradition. That may be why it does not appear in writing in generally accessible texts. Rabbi's brilliance as an author enabled him to construct a text within the Mishnah which contains "a popular teaching of an edifying character, which is in the foreground; and a philosophic teaching concerning the most important subject, which is indicated only between the lines." This text is the most popular of all rabbinic writings, *Pirke Avot*. The title can be read literally as "Chapters of the Fathers", but I prefer to understand it as "Paradigmatic Chapters", reading "Avot" as it is used in the legal sense as in Tractate Shabbat. I will refer to the tractate simply as "Avot."

### ***Tractate Avot***

Tractate *Avot* is *sui generis* amongst the sixty-odd tractates of the Mishnah because it contains no laws. The first four of its five chapters appear to be a loose collection of aphorisms quoted in the names of rabbis who lived in the centuries immediately preceding the publication of the Mishnah. It is probably the best known of all rabbinic writings. The first chapter of *Avot* is organized chronologically. It begins with Moses and ends with the father of the author of the Mishnah, a period of more than 1500 years according to biblical chronology. It begins by citing five periods that are parallel to divisions of the Bible: Moses, Joshua, The Elders (Judges), Prophets, and The Great Assembly (founded by the last of the prophets who returned from the Babylonian exile.) These are the words of the Mishnah;

“Moses received instruction (torah- not *the* Torah) at Sinai and handed it down to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets to the men of the Great Assembly.” We should note that whatever instruction was transmitted to these national/spiritual leaders, it was in addition to the written Torah, which was given to the priests and each of the tribes by Moses. So the stated subject of the chapter is the transmission of knowledge which originated at Sinai but was not written in the Torah and which was accessible only to the select few in each generation. If this description is accurate, then the subject of at least the first chapter of Avot is esoteric knowledge which Moses received at Sinai, at the same time he received the tablets of the Decalogue.

### ***The Beginning of Hellenization***

After introducing its subject by means of chronology, the chapter quotes one aphorism in the name of each recipient of the esoteric teaching, beginning with the Great Assembly and Simon the Just who was its last surviving member. This is the same Simon the Just who reputedly had conversations with Alexander the Great as he passed through Palestine. Even without mentioning Alexander, the author of Avot has made it amply clear that this is the beginning of the Hellenistic period, because Simon the Just was followed by “Antigonos of Soco”, possibly named after Antigonos Monophtalmos, Alexander’s general. Like his Greek namesake, the Mishnah’s Antigonos is also a transitional figure who ushers in a new historical epoch based on a formal division of power. While the Hellenistic world realigned under the diadochs, the Jews of Palestine, according to Rabbi, instituted the dual leadership of the prince, or president (נשיא) and the chief justice (אב בית דין). Avot presents the individuals who held these two positions over the next three to four centuries as the

recipients of the esoteric tradition. There is no mention of kings or high priests. The author of the Mishnah was himself the last to carry the title “prince.”

### ***Pseudo-History and Pseudo-Aphorisms***

Avot introduces five consecutive pairs of leaders over a period that spans nearly four centuries, from the demise of the Great Assembly with the establishment of Hellenism, to the fall of the second Temple in the first century C. E. One aphorism is quoted in the name of each of the ten leaders who comprised the five pairs. These ten aphorisms form the literary structure we will examine. It should be clear that the author is not writing history as we understand it. The five pairs enumerated in Avot as consecutive generations could not have spanned the nearly four hundred year period they occupy in Avot’s chronology. It would appear then, that the author’s primary concern was to create the five-pair structure of aphorisms, rather than deliver an accurate history. This is similar to our conclusion regarding the signs in Egypt. There we saw that they were needed, not to convince Pharaoh, but to create a literary structure. In Avot, the literary structure that appears at first to be subservient to the chronology of the esoteric tradition is in fact more significant than the purported history.

Rabbi utilized a literary device, a pseudo-history, in order to place his composition within the framework of an esoteric tradition. It is also probable that the aphorisms themselves are pseudepigraphical, thereby pointing to a second literary device. It is most unlikely that the statements of the earlier pairs quoted here should be the entire corpus that has survived in their names. This point will become clearer in the detailed analysis of the sayings, where we will see to what degree the aphorisms were crafted to fit the author’s plan. What then was

so important that the author of Avot felt he could play freely with history and put words into the mouths of the leaders of previous generations?

### ***The Puzzle of Avot and The Maharal of Prague's Solution***

While it is not too difficult to see, despite appearances, that the author is not primarily concerned with history, it is not at all clear what his actual concerns are. One who looks for an answer in the content of the aphorisms quoted in the names of the ten leaders who received the esoteric Mosaic tradition will be disappointed. While the aphorisms do contain sound advice, such as “distance yourself from a bad neighbor,” they can hardly be seen as justifying their appearance as the sole surviving exemplars of the wisdom of those who inherited the esoteric tradition from Moses. The key to unlocking this conundrum is found in a little-read sixteenth century commentary on Avot. The Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Judah Loew, 1525-1609) viewed this section of the Mishnah as a composition rather than a collection. He did not use such terminology, of course, but this view is clearly implicit in his explanation of how the various parts of the text are related. In his unique commentary, *Derekh Hayyim*, he demonstrates that this passage must, in fact, be read as a literary and philosophical composition. Perhaps because of the obscurity of the Maharal's language and the complexity of his ideas, the implications of his reading have not yet been fully appreciated.

Most of this section is devoted to a close reading of the five pairs in Avot in light of the Maharal's commentary. In order to prepare for that reading and its implications we must do some preliminary work. First, we will begin by summarizing the points which indicate that he read this section of Avot as a weave. After getting acquainted with the Maharal's reading, we will examine the linguistic and formal links between Rabbi's composition and

the five-pair Decalogue. We will see that there is overwhelming evidence that Rabbi used the five-pair Decalogue as the structural paradigm for his composition as well the inspiration for the contents of the aphorisms. Many of them can be read as positive replies to the parallel prohibitions. For example, Rabbi responds to “You shall not covet your fellow man’s house” with “Let your house be a meeting place for the Sages.” Clearly, one who entertains the Sages in his house will have no reason to covet another’s house. After we have established the detailed connection between Avot and the Decalogue, we will begin the close reading of Avot.

We will see that it is possible to read Rabbi’s text as his commentary on the esoteric reading of the Decalogue. The importance of this reading is twofold. First it explains why Avot should be understood as the keystone to Rabbi’s Mishnah. But more important for our endeavor, it discloses fundamental content of the esoteric tradition. From Rabbi’s perspective it testifies that he was indeed the recipient of the oral tradition that he describes as having passed from Moses through Joshua. The authority vested in this tradition permitted Rabbi to take the revolutionary step of setting down in writing two sets of oral teachings: the laws expounded in the Mishnah as well as the esoteric knowledge of the Torah derived from its structure, which was mirrored in the structure of the Mishnah. The content of the esoteric tradition that is accessible from close reading Avot is consistent with our analogical analysis of Leviticus. We saw that the author of the Torah paralleled the careful reader to the High Priest and transformed an experience originally accessible only to a single individual one day of the year into a literary experience available at any time. Similarly, Avot empowers the careful reader. Specifically, the reader is activated to become



a participant in creating tradition. This is the revolutionary message hidden in the structure:  
in order to be maintained, tradition must be continually created.

## ***Chapter Two. The Maharal's Reading of Avot***

We begin the analysis with the Maharal's equivalent of what we have defined as a literary weave. He identified warp and weft without using these terms. The warp threads are defined by a distinction to be found between the aphorisms of each pair. Each of the five pairs relates to a given subject from two different perspectives. The Maharal identifies them as "love" and "fear." The first member of each pair speaks from love and the second from fear. This creates the headings of the warp threads. The weft threads are organized hierarchically. In the Maharal's words "The council of each pair adds to that of the previous pair." He also uses a spatial metaphor to explain the flow from Pair to Pair. We can envision it as "social" space, beginning in one's home in Pair one and spreading out to more distant contacts Pair-by-Pair. Here are the five Pairs from the first chapter of Avot arranged as a weave with a brief marginal description of each Pair from the Maharal's commentary. For the sake of clarity when comparing these Pairs to the Decalogue, they will be numerated by lower case Roman numerals and referred to as "Pairs" as opposed to the "pairs" of Words in the Decalogue which are numerated by Arabic numerals.

## The Five Pairs According to The Maharal of Prague

### The Maharal's Commentary

The counsel (mussar) of each Pair adds to that of the previous Pair.

The Maharal's Dyad: One based his admonition on love and the other on fear.

**A**  
**Love**

**B**  
**Fear**

**i**

For the first Pair ordained correct behavior in regard to those members of one's household to whom he is most closely related.

Yose ben Yoezer of Zereda and Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem received tradition from them.

Yose ben Yoezer of Zereda said:  
Let your house be a meeting place for the Sages; sit in the dust of their feet, and drink in their words thirstily.

Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem said:  
Let your house be open wide; let the needy be part of your household. Do not speak too much with women. They said this of one's own wife; how much more is it true of another man's wife. Hence the Sages said: When a man speaks too much with women he brings evil upon himself, neglects the study of the Law and in the end will come to perdition.

**ii**

After this, the second Pair ordained behavior toward one's teacher, friends and neighbors, who are more distant but still close to one.

Joshua ben Perahia and Nittai the Arbelite received tradition from them.

Joshua ben Perahia said:  
Get yourself a teacher, acquire a comrade, and give the benefit of the doubt.

Nittai the Arbelite said:  
Stay away from an evil neighbor, do not associate with the wicked, and do not despair of retribution.

**iii**

Then the third Pair ordained behavior toward those one judges and leads, for they are yet more distant.

Judah ben Tabbai and Simon ben Shetah received tradition from them.

Judah ben Tabbai said:  
Act not the part of counsel; while the litigants stand before you, regard them as guilty, but as they leave, regard them as innocent, for they have accepted the verdict.

Simon ben Shetah said:  
Examine the witnesses thoroughly, and watch your words, lest they learn from them to lie.

**iv**

And after that, the fourth Pair spoke of the behavior of one who gives orders, who is even further removed, for being

Shemaia and Avtalion received tradition from them.

Shemaia said:  
Love labor, hate domination, and do not make yourself known to the ruling powers.

Avtalion said:  
Sages, watch your words, lest you incur the penalty of exile, and be banished to a place of evil waters, and the disciples that follow you drink

*over the others he is  
set apart from  
them....* ||

and die, and the Heavenly Name be  
profaned. ||

v

*Finally, the fifth Pair ordained correct behavior in regard to all men, that the bond of peace be not broken; for there is no greater order than that of the world as a whole.*

Hillel and Shammai received tradition from them.	
Hillel said: Be of the students of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving one's fellowmen and drawing them close to the Torah. He also said: He who invokes the Name will lose his name; he who adds not will be taken away; he who studies not deserves death; and he who makes use of the Crown will soon be gone. He also said: If I am not for myself, who will be for me; and if I am only for myself, what am I; and if not now, when?	Shammai said: Make regular your [study of the] Torah; say little and do much; and greet everyone cheerfully.

### ***Reading the Pairs as a Sequence***

The Pairs passage comprises a literary unit with clear principles of organization. The most obvious is that the Pairs are presented in chronological order: each Pair "received tradition" from the previous one. This simple observation permits two different approaches to the text. On the one hand, it could be maintained that the contents of the statements are not related to the fact that they are part of a sequence. This is the way the text is usually read. Each aphorism is examined for its own merit. On the other hand, one could take the approach of the Maharal, looking for the connection between the content of each statement and its place in the sequence. The Maharal's reading implies that the text was arranged so as to reflect a meaningful rather than chance relationship among the aphorisms. The Maharal's comprehensive, or contextual, reading does not necessarily conflict with the more narrowly focused reading that takes each statement on its own terms. He, too, is certainly concerned with the spiritual and philosophical views of each of the speakers. But he adds two levels of possible signification. First, he relates the content of a given statement to a specific historical stage. Second, he gives a broader overview which adds its own level of meaning: the "forest" rather than just the "trees". The Maharal demonstrates two interrelated principles of organization in the structure of the Pairs passage. One is dynamic and found in the weft, and the other static in the warp. The first relates to the flow from Pair to Pair and parallels the historical progression defined by Rabbi. I refer to this as a dynamic principle because it defines the movement from one Pair to the next. The static principle points to a fixed relationship between the members of each Pair, the warp threads.

## ***The Warp: Love and Fear***

We know from the Mishnah itself (*Hagiga 2*) that each of the Pairs was comprised of the two highest officials of its generation, those who bore the titles *nasi*, President, and *av beit din*, Chief Justice. The order of the appearance of the two is consistent: in each of the five Pairs, the President precedes the Chief Justice. The first of the conceptual principles described by the Maharal relates to a uniform distinction between the content of the statements of the Presidents and those of the Chief Justices.

You must know that the first, Yose ben Yoezer, was the President and [the second,] Yose ben Yohanan, was the Chief Justice. Now the presidency is exalted, and one whom the Lord has exalted and glorified will love the Lord for the exaltation bestowed upon him and will serve Him out of love, for he must be thankful for the goodness done to him, and therefore his instruction concerns the love of the Lord. The Chief Justice, as is implied by his title, is responsible for justice, and his instruction is connected with fear. For insofar as his characteristic quality is justice, it is based on fear. For it is stated of Isaac, whose chief attribute was justice, "The fear of Isaac filled me" (Gen. 31). For litigants are afraid of seeming to show insufficient respect [for the court]. And so the Chief Justice's admonitions concern fear.

Each of the Pairs has a common frame of reference, with positive and negative aspects. Within this frame, the first statement emphasizes the positive and the second the negative. In the Maharal's terms, the President speaks from the viewpoint of love (אהבה) and the Chief Justice from the viewpoint of fear or awe (יראה). This is consistent with the traditionally cited difference in character between Hillel and Shammai, the fifth Pair. Hillel, the President, is considered to have been lenient and forthcoming, as opposed to Shammai, the Chief Justice, who is known to have been strict and aloof. As the Maharal points out, the text implies that this

difference may have been one of role rather than of personality. In each of the five cases, the President, as we would expect from Hillel, is more positive and lenient than the Chief Justice, who like Shammai, comes across as stricter or more preoccupied with the negative. In some of the Pairs this distinction is quite obvious. For example, it is the President who asserts in positive terms, "Acquire a comrade," whereas the Chief Justice confines himself to the negative injunction, "Do not associate with the wicked." In the following table I have selected the elements in each Pair that illustrate the distinction made by the Maharal.

### **Distinctions Between Love and Fear In the Aphorisms of the President and Chief Justice**

Pair	Love-President	Fear-Chief Justice
i	drink in their words thirstily	do not speak too much with women
ii	acquire a comrade	do not associate with the wicked
iii	regard them as innocent	watch...lest they learn to lie
iv	love labor	watch...lest... the Heavenly Name be profaned
v	loving peace... loving fellow men	say little

### ***The Weft, התפשטות, Spreading Out***

The Maharal points out that each succeeding Pair "adds" to the previous one and expands on its statements. By "adds" he means that the social framework widens from Pair to Pair. While the first Pair confines itself to actions within the home, the second Pair expands the circle, going out of the home to deal with close personal contacts such as friends, neighbors and teachers. While the second Pair, like the first, deals with private, individual matters, the third Pair moves into a more formal area, the court of law. The Maharal describes this as yet "further" from the initial privacy of the home. The fourth Pair addresses itself to men of power, the leaders of society. The progression from the home to the halls of power is quite clear and convincing through the first four Pairs. The fifth Pair, the Maharal emphasizes, is the most

inclusive of all in the reach of its statements. Hillel refers to Aaron the Peacemaker, who as high priest embodied an all-embracing social consciousness. Shammai, too, speaks of relating to humanity as a whole: "Greet everyone cheerfully." There is thus a complete progression: from the total privacy of the individual home to an overview of society. The Maharal refers to this movement from Pair to Pair as "spreading out", התפשטות.

What does the Maharal's description of the flow from Pair to Pair add to our understanding of the text? On the aesthetic level, his analysis is striking in its elegance. He has made one of the many, a whole of the parts. He has found a progression in the inner meaning of the text which runs parallel to the outward historical progression it describes (the transmission of torah from generation to generation). We are now confronted with two parallel processes which share only the sense of progression: the transfer of knowledge from the leaders of one generation to those of the next, and circles of social concern that expand steadily outward. It is clear that we are dealing with an extraordinarily complex *composition*. In light of the clear rules of organization which we have seen so far, it is impossible to view our text as a chance collection or historical accretion. Rabbi put a great deal of effort into constructing this literary document. Just how much is emphasized by examining the names of the sages quoted.



## *The Progression of Names*

<b>Pair</b>	<b>The Names of The Pairs</b>
i	Yose ben Yoezer of Zeredah and Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem
ii	Joshua ben Perahia and Nittai the Arbelite
iii	Judah ben Tabbai and Simon ben Shetah
iv	Shemaia and Avtalion
v	Hillel and Shammai

There is a dynamic flow in the names of the Pairs which runs parallel to the chronological and conceptual flow. Through the five generations, the names undergo a process of simplification. In the first Pair, both of the names have a three-part form: first name, father's name, place of origin. Both start with the same first name, Yose, just as their statements begin with the same words. Both have a place delimiter, as does the content of the statements, the home. In the third Pair, the names are in the standard form of "A ben (the son of) B." In terms of the structure of their statements, the second Pair is closer to the first than the third. However, the form of the names indicates an intermediate position between the other Pairs. Like the third Pair, one, Joshua ben Perahia, is in the standard form. Like the first Pair one has a place delimiter, "the Arbelite." We will see in the next chapter that Rabbi applied the same technique in the content of the second Pair to link it to the contents of the first and third Pairs and that he apparently derived it from the parallel Decalogue pair. Looking forward to the fourth and fifth Pairs, we see that they are introduced only by their first names. Since the names of the fifth Pair are shorter than those of the fourth Pair, we can infer a process of "simplification" from generation to generation. This makes a total of three unrelated organizing principles employed in parallel in the Pairs: 1) chronological ordering; 2) conceptual ordering of "social circles"; 3) length of names. We will return to the structure of the names in the following chapter.

### ***The Pairs Draw Apart***

The Maharal repeatedly refers to the principles of organization when speaking of the relationship between the members of each Pair and the flow from pair to pair, the warp and the weft. There is evidently yet another organizing principle which he found but only hints at, one which differs in kind from the first two. The Maharal alludes to the third rule when he speaks of a gap between the President and the Chief Justice that develops during the period of the second temple. The members of the first Pair start out "close" to each other. "The succeeding Pairs draw farther away from each other." The process culminates in the establishment of the separate schools of Hillel and Shammai.

The Maharal, uncharacteristically, does not explain in detail what he means. It sounds as if he were superimposing the first two rules upon each other. From the rule of the warp we learned that the President and the Chief Justice have a fixed relationship stemming from the difference in their roles. But over the course of five generations, as the common subject area broadens, the relationship between the members of each Pair also "broadens" in the sense that they grow apart, polarize. It could be that the matters with which they must deal become increasingly more substantial, thereby heightening the differences between their positions. Alternatively, we could speculate that as the roles became more clearly defined over the generations, the individuals who occupy them became more entrenched in their respective role orientations. This line of speculation fits well with the chronological sequence in which the Pairs are presented and may be appropriate for an idealized history of the Second Temple period. Unfortunately, as we shall see, this theory is at best only marginally relevant to the composition before us.

The Maharal's understanding of the progressive distancing between the members of the Pairs is probably a function of the well-known chasm between the members of the ultimate Pair, Hillel and Shammai. These two scholars established competing schools near the time of the destruction of the second temple. The disputes between these schools provided much of the foundation for the soon-to-emerge rabbinic period, which was crowned by Rabbi's Mishnah two centuries later. It is totally understandable that these historical facts may have colored the Maharal's interpretation of the literary structure which he discovered. We will explore a different, ahistorical, approach to understand the function of the Pairs weave. This approach will lead us to see Avot as the key to the esoteric non-linear reading of the Torah which we have developed in the preceding Parts. The first step is to establish the connection between Rabbi's composition and the five-consecutive-pair reading of the Decalogue.

### ***Chapter Three. The Avot Pairs and the Decalogue***

In chapters four and five we will explore the meaning embedded deep within the Pairs structure in Avot. But before doing so, in this chapter we will establish its connection with the Decalogue. By examining the linguistic and formal links between these compositions, we will see that Rabbi planned the Avot text as an expansion and interpretation of the esoteric woven Decalogue. This step is critical before going more deeply into Avot. I have accepted some of the limitations placed upon one dealing with the esoteric aspects of the Torah, as exemplified by Rabbi who wrote "They do not expound upon the laws of prohibited relationships [Lev. 18] before three persons, the works of creation [Gen. 1] before two, or the Chariot [Ezek. 1] before one, unless he was a sage and understands of his own knowledge, [Hagigah 2:1]." Rather than directly presenting an esoteric exegesis of the Decalogue, I will present it indirectly through the

analysis of the Pairs weave. Consequently, the goal of this chapter is to justify seeing the reading of the Avot weave which I will present as equivalent to an exegesis of the Decalogue. We will begin by examining the basis for comparison.

### ***The Links between the Avot Pairs and the Decalogue***

The two structures share five gross characteristics. First, they both have a contextual link to Sinai. Avot begins “Moses received torah from Sinai and handed it on to Joshua.” The Decalogue was given at Sinai through the smoke and flame of the theophany. Later it was inscribed by divine hand on two stone tablets which were given to Moses at Sinai. Second, the structures are both organized hierarchically. The Decalogue is arranged from the top down, from God in pair 1 to the subjective individual in 5. Avot is ordered from the bottom up, according to the Maharal, from the individual household in the first Pair, to a universal overview of the fifth Pair, Hillel and Shammai. Third, they both consist of five pairs. Fourth, they can be read as collections as well as integrated compositions. Fifth, they are woven compositions consisting of warp and weft. This last similarity would, in itself, be sufficient to warrant a close comparison of the two structures. Both of them exhibit a virtually unknown paradigm, the literary weave. Each of the ten elements of both structures is in some manner a function of two independent planning lines, or principles of organization. One line, the division into pairs, is expressed through the two threads of the warp. The other planning line, the five part progression, is indicated by the five threads of the weft. Each individual element is the function of a unique intersection of these two planning lines. These five similarities, taken together, demand a closer comparison of the two structures.

### ***The Problem of Pair by Pair Comparison***

There are many linguistic parallels between the two structures. These parallels are revealed by means of a one-to-one comparison between the pairs in each structure. But before we can begin this comparison, it is necessary to solve a technical problem. The problem that must be solved before comparing the Avot Pairs to the Decalogue pairs is “where should we begin.”

There are two options. The first is to begin the comparison with the beginnings of both structures. This is such an obvious choice, that it will take a bit of clarification to explain why the second option is better. The second option requires inverting one of the structures, so that the first pair in one is compared with the fifth pair in the other. As we will see, one could choose the second option for purely heuristic reasons since it works so well. But there are other reasons based on the preceding analyses.

The two texts are structured according to oppositely organized hierarchies. The Decalogue begins from the top with God’s first-person speech. The Avot text, on the other hand, begins at the bottom of its hierarchy with the private individual (householder). In order to compare the two texts level by level, it would seem that one of them must be inverted. A formal parallel between the texts may substantiate this supposition. Both aphorisms in the first Avot Pair begin with the identical phrase “Let your house be”, and both Words in the fifth Decalogue pair begin with the identical phrase “Do not covet.” I have interpreted this information as indicating that the first Avot Pair, which is at the bottom of the Avot hierarchy, should be read as parallel to the fifth Decalogue pair, which is also at the bottom of the Decalogue hierarchy. Consequently, I chose the inverted comparison, in which the two structures are compared according to

parallel hierarchies. The following table of equivalencies demonstrates how the comparison is made.

***Table of Equivalencies***

Set	Avot Pair	Decalogue Pair
I	i Householder/Layman	5 Subjective Individual
II	ii Student/Neighbor	4 Actions based on human will
III	iii Judge	3 Physical human life
IV	iv Sage/ People of power	2 Actions based on divine will
V	v Universal	1 God

I have termed the pairs to be compared “sets” and numbered the sets I-V. The general descriptions that we developed for the pairs of each structure in the previous sections appear in the above table. In the “table of equivalencies”, the order of the Decalogue pairs has been inverted so that the pairs of Words appear in descending order, 5, 4, etc. In this way, we compare the structures according to their internal hierarchies, rather than according to the order of their appearances. Once the two texts are laid out side-by-side according to the order in this table, an extensive array of linguistic and formal parallels appears. We will note these parallels as we examine the sets.

The parallels which Rabbi created serve at least two different functions. On one level they verify that Rabbi was indeed working with the five-consecutive-pair version of the Decalogue which we examined in Part 1. Establishing that he read the Decalogue in this way is fundamental to the thesis being developed: that the woven character of the Torah was

considered esoteric knowledge and consequently was not mentioned overtly in rabbinic literature. The second function of the parallels is more substantive. They open a window to Rabbi's interpretation of the esoteric five-consecutive-pair Decalogue. He sees the five pairs of Words as describing a bridge or ladder from the self to the transcendent: pair 5) self; 4) connections between self and others; 3) others; 2) others as a connection to the transcendent; 1) the transcendent. He apparently recognizes the "divine dyad" in terms of "intrinsic-extrinsic". These points are clarified in the following reading of the five sets.

***Set I: Self***

5A You shall not covet your fellow man's house;	5B You shall not covet your fellow man's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your fellow man's
iA Yose ben Yoezer of Zereda said: Let your house be a meeting place for the Sages; sit in the dust of their feet, and drink in their words thirstily.	iB Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem said: Let your house be open wide; let the needy be part of your household. Do not speak too much with women. They said this of one's own wife; how much more is it true of another man's wife. Hence the Sages said: When a man speaks too much with women he brings evil upon himself, neglects the study of the Law and in the end will come to perdition.

***Rabbi and Bidirectional Reading***

While analyzing the Decalogue, we observed that the five-pair arrangement allowed for the possibility that the five pairs of Words were conceptually bidirectional. It appeared that stealing could be seen as a consequence of coveting, thereby allowing a "bottom up" reading. So we might interpret the fact that Rabbi starts from the bottom of the hierarchy as an indicator that he too considered that the five-pair Decalogue is a bidirectional text and constructed the Avot text according to the "bottom to top" reading. Consequently, the interpretation which I present in chapter five also reflects the "bottom up" reading of the Decalogue.

### ***Identical Openings***

The critical difference between the scroll and rabbinic divisions of the Decalogue devolves on whether or not we read the two “covets” as one or two Words. This is where Rabbi makes a very powerful statement by starting two aphorisms with “Your house should be.” I take this to be his unequivocal testimony that the two “covets” should be read as two Words. By beginning his structure with aphorisms that have identical openings, he acknowledges that this is the key to the reading he offers: the two “covets” are two separate Words. The identical openings are paralleled by the identical parts of the names of the speakers “Yose ben ... of.” The correspondence formed by identical openings is reinforced by a literal reflection of the central subjects from both Decalogue Words. The first Word prohibits coveting a “house”. The common beginning of the Avot aphorisms includes “house.” The second Word prohibits coveting “your fellow man’s wife.” The second Avot aphorism contains “his friend’s wife.” So not only do the Avot aphorisms begin with identical phrases, like the Words, but they both contain the subjects which appear in the parallel Words. The element of artifice in Rabbi’s construct is emphasized by the fact that the “neighbor’s wife” is introduced in what appears to be an editorial gloss, “They said this of one’s own wife; how much more is it true of another man’s wife.” The effect of this gloss is to inform us that regardless of what Yose ben Yohanan may or may not have said, this parallel with the Decalogue was created by Rabbi. It is his signature.

### ***The Inner Realm***

The parallels we have noted so far in set I go a long way in verifying that Rabbi based his structure on the five-pair Decalogue, but they do not necessarily add to our understanding of



the Decalogue. Placing the Decalogue and Avot Pairs side by side reveals what may be a common theme. We originally identified the theme of this Decalogue pair as “the subjective individual.” The Pair from Avot echoes the theme of subjectivity by focusing on what should happen within the confines of one’s home. Both the Decalogue pair and its parallel from Avot focus on an inner realm: in the Decalogue in terms of subjective emotion; in Avot in terms of what is inside the private domicile. We could describe both as dealing with “inner life”. Rabbi’s imagery of what takes place *within* can then be understood as confirmation of our reading of the Decalogue which grasped the pair of “covets” as pointing to subjective experience. The comparative reading of the two texts thus leads to a better understanding of the Decalogue.

### ***Rabbi and the Divine Dyad: Intrinsic and Extrinsic***

We can also see in Avot how Rabbi’s views of the “divine dyad” can influence our understanding of Dec pair 5. Rabbi’s reading will force us to consider a new binary: “intrinsic and extrinsic”. Rabbi has crafted an element in his Pair of aphorisms which captures this binary with an uncharacteristic lack of literary subtlety. Ben Yohanan’s speech (iB) ends with “Do not speak too much with women.” Everything that follows is a self-declared appendix. The addition itself has two components. The first begins “They said this” and the second “Hence the Sages said.” The two editorial additions to the aphorism direct us to an additional distinction between the themes of the two Avot speakers based on the appearances of the Sages. The Sages are intrinsic to iA, inseparable from the meaning of Yose ben Yoezer’s aphorism. In iB, however, they are brought in third-hand and are clearly not part of what is to be read as the original aphorism. The fact that Rabbi made this distinction through an obviously heavy-handed editorial addition may emphasize the importance he attached to it as a device to grab the

reader's attention. By sensitizing us to the distinction between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" in the first Pair, Rabbi forces us to consider whether this dyad can be applied to other Pairs in Avot, as well as to the Dec.

Reading Dec 5 in light of this dyad leads to reconsidering the distinction between בית (house) (Dec 5A) and everything else that belongs to another (Dec 5B). As evidenced in Dec 1A, "the house of slaves", בית (house) can mean much more than a physical structure. It is used to identify Egypt as a place of slavery. It is also used to refer to family, as in בית דוד (the house of David.) So Dec 5A could refer to that which is intrinsically part of our fellow, family-based identity. The chattels in Dec 5B would then be understood as indicating that which is extrinsic to the individual's identity.

The most fascinating aspect of reading Rabbi's composition in parallel with the Decalogue is what appears to be Rabbi's response to the content of each of the Decalogue Words, what we may try to see as a type of exegesis. It seems that Rabbi responds to "You shall not covet your fellow man's house" with "Let your house be a meeting place for the Sages." He seems to be saying that if you make your house a meeting place for sages, then you will not "covet your fellow man's house." After all, what could there be to covet under such circumstances. Similarly, "let the needy be part of your household" can be understood as an antidote to coveting "anything that your fellow man has." The extensive exposure to the impoverished should create the sense of "there but for the grace of God go I" and negate coveting another's property. We will see many of the aphorisms can be read as containing responses to the parallel Words, revealing an ongoing dialogue between Rabbi and the Decalogue.

## Set II: Between Self and Other

4A You shall not steal.	4B You shall not bear false witness against your fellow man
iiA Joshua ben Perahia said: Get yourself a teacher, acquire a comrade, and give the benefit of the doubt.	iiB Nittai the Arbelite said: Stay away from an evil neighbor, do not associate with the wicked, and do not despair of retribution.

### The “Flow” Technique

In order to fully appreciate the links between Pair ii and the Words of pair 4, let us briefly review what we observed regarding the names of this Pair. We saw that the name “Joshua ben Perahia” is formatted like the names in Pair iii while “the Arbelite” connotes a place, like the names in Pair i. The literary effect is to create a flow through the names of the first three Pairs, and I will refer to this specific technique as “the flow technique.” It provides the formal “glue” that holds together the three pairs of Words as well as the three Avot Pairs in sets I-III. It is utilized also to create a sense of movement. This is a case where we can see how Rabbi took one of the characteristics that he found in the biblical text, the flow technique, and amplified it in Avot. The application of the flow technique in the Decalogue is both obvious and subtle.

### The Flow Technique in Decalogue pairs 3-5

5A You shall not covet your <u>fellow man's</u> house;	5B You shall not covet your <u>fellow man's</u> wife...
לא תחמד בית רעך	לא תחמד אשת רעך...
4A You shall not steal.	4B You shall not bear false witness against your <u>fellow man</u>
לא תגנב	לא תענה ברעך עד שקר
3A You shall not murder.	3B You shall not commit adultery.
לא תרצח	לא תנאף

Before examining the appearance of this technique in the Decalogue, we should note that there is a natural distinction to be made between the first two pairs of Words and the last

three. The four Words in the first two pairs all mention the Lord while none of the remaining six do. This effectively divides off the first two pairs of Words. The remaining three are in fact grouped as a sub-structure by the flow technique. In pair 4 it involves incorporating a characteristic of each of the surrounding pairs of Words, 5 and 3. Both Words in pair 5 contain the expression “your fellow man.” That expression appears in 4B. Both Words in pair 3 consist of two words, “לא”, (You shall not) followed by a single intransitive verb. This is also the format of 4A. So Decalogue pair 4 contains one Word (4B) formulated like pair 5 in content, and one Word (4A) formulated like pair 3 in form. Once we see these similarities, we can view the Words of Decalogue pair 4 as a link between Dec pair 5 and Dec pair 3. Rabbi must have devoted quite a bit of attention to amplifying this “link” in the parallel Avot Pairs. As we will see now, Rabbi intensified the biblical use of “the flow technique” by applying it not only to the names of the speakers in set II, but to the content of their speeches as well. He also utilized it in order to leave us a very clear idea of how he understood the significance of the flow technique in general, and what it can teach us about the Decalogue.

***The Flow Technique in the Content of Avot Pair ii***

Avot Pair ii	
iiA	iiB
Joshua ben Perahia said: a. Get yourself a teacher, b. acquire a comrade, c. and give the benefit of the doubt.	Nittai the Arbelite said: a. Stay away from an evil neighbor, b. do not associate with the wicked, c. and do not despair of retribution.
יהושע בן פרחיה אומר a. עשה לך רב b. וקנה לך חבר c. והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות	נתאי הארבלי אומר a. הרחק משכן רע b. ואל תתחבר לרשע c. ואל תתיאש מן הפרענות

Pair ii is a micro version of the first three Pairs. The micro structure was created by using the same technique as we found in the flow of names, as well as in the parallel Dec pair, 4. Both

speeches have three elements, marked a-c. They have been constructed so that in each speech the first element (a) reflects the aphorisms of the first Pair and the third element (c) reflects the aphorisms of the third Pair. The linguistic constituent which links the two speeches of the second Pair to each other is found in the second element (b) of each. The three elements of the speeches are thus ordered in parallel to the first three Pairs: a,b,c=i,ii,iii. Here are the details. In iiAa, ben Perahia recommends getting a teacher. This is directly connected with Yose ben Yoezer of Zereda's advice in iA to fill your home with the wise and to "drink in their words thirstily." In iiBa, Nittai the Arbelite says "Stay away from an evil neighbor." The exact word translated "evil", רע, appears in iA in "he brings evil upon himself." So we see that the first element (a) in both speeches of Pair 2 reflects the parallel member of the previous Pair. The third element (c) in each speech refers to judgment, and Pair 3 is addressed to judges. Specifically, the phrase translated idiomatically "give the benefit of the doubt" in iiAc, could be translated more literally "judge (הוי דן) everyone favorably." The fact that Pair ii is connected both to Pairs i and iii, emphasizes the significance of the shared root in iiAb and iiBb, חבר, translated here "comrade" and "associate", but also meaning "connect." Pair ii "connects" Pairs i and iii. So we see that Rabbi has used the same literary tool to connect Pairs i-iii both through the content of the three-part aphorisms and through the formats of the names. He has thereby amplified the subtle usage of the flow technique we noted in Dec 4. Rabbi must have considered demonstrating the flow technique to be of great significance in order to reproduce it both in the names and in the content of Pair ii, as well as the chronological flow of the Pairs who "received" from one to the next. We can conclude that exactly the same literary technique was used in the Decalogue and in Avot to create the sense of flow in sets I-III. We have now

seen that Rabbi used two different literary techniques, copied from the Decalogue, to create links between it and his Pairs, linguistic parallels in set I and a structural parallel, “flow”, in set II.

Now that we have identified elements “b” as the ones which define the specific content unique to the speeches of Pair ii, we can see how Rabbi responds to the parallel Decalogue Words in them. As in set I, he provides the means to prevent the sins mentioned in the Decalogue. The antidote to stealing in 4A is “acquire”, literally “buy” in iiAb. In order to understand his similar response to the prohibition against false testimony, it is necessary to keep in mind that witnessing was done in pairs. False testimony requires the collusion of two witnesses. Therefore, “do not associate with the wicked” can be read as the preventative for false testimony. Rabbi’s formulation of the parallel elements in 2Ab and 2Bb may also shed light on his understanding of a distinction to be made between stealing in Word 4A and false testimony in 4B. While the thief expects to benefit by stealing, the false witness attempts to cause damage to another, not necessarily for self-benefit. Rabbi’s parallel to stealing, “acquire”, benefits the person who “acquires”, while his recommendation to avoid the wicked prevents potential damage. We can now see how Rabbi has led us to an interpretation of the significance of set II.

The common root in Avot Pair 2, חבר, can be understood as “connect”. This can serve as a description of the function of the Pair in the broader structure; it connects 1 and 3. If we are to read Avot as a commentary on the Decalogue, we must then say that the function of the parallel Dec pair 4 is to connect Dec pair 3 with Dec pair 5. We now have the means by which to begin verifying our theory that the five-Pair Avot structure can be read as a commentary on the five-pair reading of the Decalogue. The test will be the efficacy of reading Dec pair 4 as the

connector between 5 and 3. This point is addressed after the following discussion of set III. The aspect of connection is directly connected with one of the binaries I suggested for the “divine dyad”, “connected and disconnected.” In iiA there are recommendations for “connections” and in iiB for “non-connections”, thus reflecting the “divine dyad”.

**Set III: The Other**

3A You shall not murder.	3B You shall not commit adultery.
iiiA Judah ben Tabbai said: Act not the part of counsel; while the litigants stand before you, regard them as guilty, but as they leave, regard them as innocent, for they have accepted the verdict.	iiiB Simon ben Shetah said: Examine the witnesses thoroughly, and watch your words, lest they learn from them to lie.

It would appear that Exodus 23:7 "מדבר שקר תרחק ונקי וצדיק אל תהרג" (distance yourself from deceit (lying) and do not kill the blameless and innocent) played a significant role in Rabbi’s response to Dec 3. Like Rabbi’s aphorisms the verse is addressed to a sitting judge. Its second clause warns the judge not to kill the innocent, thus paralleling Dec 3A. Its first clause “distance yourself from deceit (lying)” is echoed in Rabbi’s “and watch your words, lest they learn from them to lie” in iiiB. So the verse forms a bridge between the Decalogue and the Mishnah which is reinforced by the addressee, a judge. The bridge is clarified in the following visualization.

Decalogue	3A <i>You shall not murder.</i>	3B You shall not commit adultery.
Bridge (for judges)	<i>distance yourself from deceit (lying)</i>	<i>and do not kill the blameless and innocent</i>
Avot (for judges)	iiiA Judah ben Tabbai said: Act not the part of counsel; while the litigants stand before you, regard them as guilty, but as they leave, regard them as innocent, for they have accepted the verdict.	iiiB Simon ben Shetah said: Examine the witnesses thoroughly, and watch your words, <i>lest they learn from them to lie.</i>

Since Rabbi addresses the aphorisms to judges, it is likely that his audience, judges, would be aware of the Torah's instructions for judges and, consequently, would read Rabbi's added instructions in light of the Torah, as we have done. In other words, there is every reason to believe that Rabbi had this verse in mind when composing the third Pair. But this connection is not the only basis for linking pair 3 and Pair iii. Here too Rabbi has responded to the parallel Dec pair. He has responded to the capital crimes of Dec 3 by bringing them into a court replete with judges, litigants and witnesses! The persona of the judge enables us to once again read Rabbi's text as a type of commentary. In Part 1, we saw that the middle pair of the Dec as a meeting point between the human and the divine. The meeting point is captured in one of the words for judges in Hebrew. It is identical to the appellation of the divinity: אלהים (God). This fits extremely well with our earlier observation that in Dec 3 physical human life is the meeting point between the human and the divine. In Rabbi's parallel the middle Pair is characterized by a human who shares the divine name and has the power over life and death. This would seem to indicate that Rabbi agrees that the central Decalogue pair is a meeting point not unlike that which we saw. This argument will be reinforced when we look at sets IV and V and see that Rabbi refers to the transcendent in them.

There are no linguistic or formal links between the two aphorisms addressed to judges, since judges are expected to listen to the testimony of the witnesses without recourse to extraneous matters such as form. Nevertheless, we had no difficulty identifying the common subject. This is also the only set in which there is no linguistic or formal link between the Avot Pair and the Decalogue parallel. While this may make it more difficult for us to see how Rabbi connects this specific Pair to the Decalogue, it reinforces our view that his overall plan is



consistent. He connects each of his first three Pairs to the Decalogue by means of the same technique he uses to demonstrate that the aphorisms of each Pair are connected with each other. We have already seen that set I is characterized by identical opening words as well as sharp linguistic links. Set II is characterized by a structural parallel, the “flow” technique. The link between the aphorisms and the Words of set III are derived as Rabbi suggested, by “thoroughly examining the witnesses”, the two members of each pair.

While both aphorisms are addressed to a judge, they each refer to a different set of people who appear before the judge. Ben Tabbai speaks of litigants while ben Shetah speaks of witnesses. The litigants are the parties who will be directly affected by the judge’s decision; the witnesses will not. A similar relationship pertains to the persons involved in the crimes mentioned in the parallel Words. Murder directly connects the criminal and the victim of the crime. This connection between the act and the victim parallels the direct connection between the judge and the judged, as indicated by Ex 23:7 above. The “victim” of adultery, however, is not a participant in the crime. Since adultery is defined as intercourse with a married woman, the “victim” is the husband of the woman who participates in the adulterous act. Like the witnesses in the parallel aphorism, the husband is indirectly connected to the crime.

Since we have already seen how Rabbi emphasized the aspects of “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” in the first set and “connected” and “not connected” in set II, we can now see how the same, or similar, concepts can be applied to the set III. The crime of murder is inherent in the act itself. Adultery, on the other hand, is not a function of intercourse, but rather of the fact that the woman is married to a different man. If, for example, unknown to the participants, the

woman's husband had died before the act of intercourse, there would be no adultery.

Therefore, the determining factor is extrinsic to the act. This distinction can also be seen in the parallel aphorisms. Ben Tabbai's advice regards the judge himself and is intrinsic to his character as a judge, "*Act not* the part of counsel; while the litigants stand before you, *regard them* as guilty, but as they leave, *regard them* as innocent." The actions are intransient and affect only the judge. Ben Shetah, on the other hand, says: "Examine the witnesses thoroughly, and watch your words, lest they learn from them to lie." He warns the judge to consider how he will affect the witnesses by words that are extrinsic to the needs of examination.

### ***Integrating Sets I-III***

Since we have clearly identified the pair of "covets" in set I as referring to "subjective" experience, and identified II as a link between I and III, we must still determine whether or not "objective" applies to III. We can begin the reanalysis of the Words of III, "You shall not murder" and "You shall not commit adultery" by noting that both prohibited acts involve direct contact with another. Objective reality is the sphere of the "other". The prohibitions in the Dec guarantee the continuity of the other. Perhaps the dyad "self and other" more successfully characterizes the distinction between sets I and III. That would lend itself to a reading of the theme of the Words in II as "linking the self and the other." Property, "You shall not steal", and a legal system, "You shall not bear false witness against your fellow man", seem like very good choices to express that which binds the self to the other, as well as separates them. Private property and the legal system define a sphere within which "self" and "other" meet and interact while regulating the interaction. So, by means of comparing first three Avot Pairs, with the parallel Decalogue pairs, Rabbi has led us to his understanding of the flow of subjects in

Decalogue pairs 3-5: 3) the other, 4) the interface between the self and the other, 5) the self.

Sets I-III make a lot of sense as a self-sufficient triad based on these subjects.

“Self” and “other” seem to set the limits of our experience of the world. That prepares us to speculate a bit about what might be the subjects of sets IV and V, and how they attach to the subjects we have already identified. Since we know that both texts are hierarchical, and that we are moving up, it is not difficult to see that we must find a subject which in some way transcends the “otherness” of the other. We already know that Dec 4 and 5 are connected with the Lord. In fact we can utilize the extreme symmetry that we noted in the Decalogue earlier to create a new set of subjects for the five pairs of Words, from the bottom up: 5) self, 4) connection between self and other, 3) other, 4) connection between the other and the transcendent, 5) the transcendent. We will now see how Rabbi has connected Pairs iv and v to dec pairs 2 and 1.

***Set IV: Responsibility for Others as Link to the Transcendent***

<p>2A Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God:     you shall not do any work-you, your son, or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.</p>	<p>2B Honor your father and thy mother, that you may long endure (lit. lengthen your days) on the land which the Lord your God is giving you.</p>
<p>ivA Shemaia said: Love labor, hate domination, and do not make yourself known to the ruling powers.</p>	<p>ivB Avtalion said: Sages, watch your words, lest you incur the penalty of exile, and be banished to a place of evil waters, and the disciples that follow you drink and die, and the Heavenly Name be profaned.</p>

### ***The Structure of the Third Word***

a. Human holiness	Remember the Sabbath day to hallow it
b. Human labor	Six days you shall work and you shall do your tasks but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God.
	I            You shall do no task, you
	II           your son or daughter
c. The interface between the human and the divine: extended self	III          your male slave or slavegirl
	IV          your beast,
	V           and your sojourner who is within your gates
d. Divine labor	For six days did the Lord make the heavens and earth, the sea and all that is in it, and He rested on the seventh day.
e. Divine holiness	Therefore did the Lord bless the Sabbath day and hallow it.

### ***Linguistic Parallels in Set IV***

I have reprinted above the analysis of the internal symmetry of 2A from Part 1. It delivers a graphic presentation of the other placed between self and the Lord. In order to understand how Rabbi replicated this format in Pair iv, we will first turn to the linguistic links. There are several significant parallels between these two pairs. The first is based on the common word “מלאכה”, labor. The Decalogue (2A) instructs one to labor six days a week and the parallel Avot aphorism (ivA) instructs us to love labor. Both refer to the possibility of exile from the land. The Decalogue (2B) says “that you may long endure on the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” The Avot parallel (ivB) has “lest you incur the penalty of exile.” These two parallels are more than sufficient to establish that Rabbi viewed the two positive commandments of this set

as a pair. Nevertheless, he created another extremely sharp parallel in the set. However, this third parallel appears to be out of place because it is between the first Word, the Sabbath, (2A) and the second member of the Avot Pair, Avtalion, ivB. Rabbi created a triple link between Avtalion's words and the Sabbath: 1) heaven-heaven; 2) sea-water; 3) hallow-profane. The third parallel is especially interesting because the individual words "hallow" and "profane" are the last Hebrew words in their respective sections. Rabbi has unmistakably added the dimension of holiness to the aphorisms to match the Words. This point is especially pertinent since set IV is the first to mention holiness and God. Why then did Rabbi create this important parallel out of place?

The first three sets established a progression: I) self, II) connections between the self and other, III) other. Employing Rabbi's set of instructions derived from the analysis of the Pairs, leads us to predict that the subject of set IV should, in some manner, transcend the "other." That is exactly what we find in the closing words of Avtalion, "the Heavenly Name." Just as seeing "Sages" at the beginning of Avtalion's speech fulfills our expectation of a class above "judges" in the analysis of the Pairs, the appearance of "the Heavenly Name" at the end of his speech fulfills our expectation in the analysis of set IV. In fact, the construction of his speech demonstrates exactly what we were looking for. It begins by addressing its subject, Sages, and continues by referencing the "other" with whom the Sages have contact, their students. Finally, the death of the students leads to that which transcends them, the Heavenly Name. This is precisely the format we noted in Word 2A in which the dependent other is the link to the transcendent. It would appear that Rabbi created this ingenious parallel between 2A and ivB, which are not formally parallel, in order to create a literary example of a link to the

transcendent through the “other”, the out of place ivB. The link is supported by the centrality of the “name” in the following set, especially in 1B. In that respect, ivB can be seen as creating a flow from “watch your words” in iiiB to 1B “You shall not swear falsely by the name.”

**Set V**

<p>1A I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods beside Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness, of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.</p>	<p>1B You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.</p>
<p>vA Hillel said: Be of the students of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving one's fellowmen and drawing them close to the Torah. He also said: He who invokes the Name will lose his name; he who adds not will be taken away; he who studies not deserves death; and he who makes use of the Crown will soon be gone. He also said: If I am not for myself, who will be for me; and if I am only for myself, what am I; and if not now, when?</p>	<p>vB Shammai said: Make regular your [study of the] Torah; say little and do much; and greet everyone cheerfully.</p>

There are several very sharp parallels between the Decalogue and Avot in set V, however they all appear in Hillel’s speeches. Each of his three seemingly independent speeches contains a link to the Dec. The most obvious is the use of the first person pronoun “I” which appears three times in vAc, paralleling the two appearances in 1A. The second linguistic link connects vAb, “He who invokes the Name will lose his name” to 1B “the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name”. In vAa “loving one's fellowmen and drawing them close to the Torah” resonates with 1A “those who love Me and keep My commandments”.

There are also two formal parallels between vA and 1A. The first is chronological. Hillel’s first saying is like the first segment of 1A in the Dec, since both of them refer to history. His third is like the closing “I am” looking towards the future from the present. The second formal

parallel is based on the middle section of both seeming out of place, Hillel's inscrutable Aramaic aphorism, and the Lord's three prohibitions. In both cases the central element is conspicuously unlike the surrounding material. Hillel's first and third speeches are in Hebrew, while his central speech is in Aramaic. God's first person revelations enclose three prohibitions. If we were to read Hillel's set of speeches as in some way a commentary on the first Word, we might try to see a connection between something in God's speech to be compared with the use of two languages in Hillel's speeches. We might say that God spoke in two languages also, meaning in two grammatical persons. The inclusio is in the first person, while the core is in the second person. The inclusio tells us something about the nature of God, while the central section warns of things which were commonly mistaken as objects of worship. At the core of God's self-revelation is the non-God. Hillel's speech duplicates this aspect of "otherness" at the core in two ways. The middle speech is in Aramaic, rather than Hebrew, and as noted in the linguistic parallels, and it includes the parallel to 1B, which ostensibly should have appeared in Shamai's speech, vB.

We should note now a similarity between vA and iB. Both of them are similarly extended beyond the limits of a single aphorism of a single speaker, as appears in the other eight speeches of the structure. Hillel delivers three speeches while iB contains three speakers: "1) Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem said... 2) they said this of one's own wife; ...3) hence the Sages said." Ben Yohanan's speech contains two extrinsic additions by other speakers while Hillel's speech has two intrinsic additions, additional speeches by Hillel. Since we identified Rabbi's version of the "divine dyad" in set I as "intrinsic/extrinsic", the similar expansions of iB and vA according to this dyad takes on added significance. This point is expanded in Chapter Five.

He who (wishes to )invoke(s the Name will (must) lose his name	נגד שמא אבד שמה	link one's self to the holy by means of self-denial
he who adds not will be taken away	ודלא מוסיף יסוף	add the holy to one's self
he who studies not deserves death	ודלא יליף קטלא חיב	accustom one's self to the holy
and he who makes use of the Crown will soon be gone	ודאשתמש בתגא חלף	be a vessel for the dissemination of the holy

## ***Chapter Four. Expanding the Maharal's Discovery***

### ***The Progression of Literary Devices***

At this point, we begin to examine some of the points the Maharal left unsaid and to expand on others. Close analysis reveals that a subtle device is used to convey the sense of a widening gap between the Pairs. In each of the five Pairs the common frame of reference is expressed differently. For example, in the first Pair there is a simple repetition of the initial phrase. But the devices which point to the common subject change from Pair to Pair, thus



creating an additional progression parallel to the progression described in weft. As we will see, the overall effect of this sequence of devices is to create a sense of increasing distance between the members of the Pairs. We will see now how this "rule of literary devices" is derived from the first three Pairs and then utilize it to understand the fourth and fifth. At the same time, we will examine the connections between Rabbi's devices and those in the parallel pairs in the Decalogue.

iA	iB
Yose ben Yoezer of Zereda said: Let your house be a meeting place for the Sages; sit in the dust of their feet, and drink in their words thirstily.	Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem said: Let your house be open wide; let the needy be part of your household. Do not speak too much with women. They said this of one's own wife; how much more is it true of another man's wife. Hence the Sages said: When a man speaks too much with women he brings evil upon himself, neglects the study of the Law and in the end will come to perdition.
5A You shall not covet your fellow man's house.	5B You shall not covet your fellow man's wife, or his male slave, or his slavegirl, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that your fellow man has.

Both members of the first Pair have the same first name, Yose. Like the parallel Decalogue pair, as noted above, their statements begin with the identical words "Let your house be." This has two effects. In reference to the weft, it gives them an absolutely common frame of reference and directs us to seek similar frames of reference in succeeding Pairs. It is also the basis for the Maharal's description of the Pairs as beginning "close" to each other, using the same words. The links with the parallel Decalogue pair are inescapable.

iiA	iiB
Joshua ben Perahia said: Get yourself a teacher, acquire a comrade, and give the benefit of the doubt.	Nittai the Arbelite said: Keep away from evil neighbors; do not associate with the wicked; and do not despair of retribution.

4A	4B
You shall not steal.	You shall not bear false witness against your fellow man.

The statements of the second Pair do not share as clear a linguistic link as the first pair, but structurally they are identical. Each statement has three parts. The first two point to close personal contacts and have the root "חבר", "connect", (which, translated in context means: "comrade" and "associate"), in common in the second element. The third part of each of their statements speaks of a general attitude rather than a specific relationship. It is clear that the two statements have been cast in the same mold, even though they do not share the same language, as did the first Pair. However, since they do not have an explicit common element, they can be described as "farther apart," in line with the Maharal's observation. The comparison with the parallel Decalogue pair reveals a specific technique that Rabbi copied from the Decalogue in this Pair. Since it involves a connection with the next Pair, we will postpone the comparison for now.

iiiA	iiiB
Judah ben Tabbai said: Act not the part of counsel; when the litigants stand before you regard them as guilty, but as they leave, regard them as innocent, for they have accepted the verdict.	Simon ben Shetah said: Examine the witnesses thoroughly, and watch your words, lest they learn to lie from them.
3A	3B
You shall not murder.	You shall not commit adultery.

The statements of the third Pair have neither a linguistic nor a structural common denominator. It is clear from their contents that both statements are addressed to a sitting judge. The connection with the parallel Decalogue pair could be that the violation of both laws is a capital crime which must be tried in a court. While the statements have diverged in form,

they are still close in substance. Each of the first three Pairs indicates its common subject in a different way. I will summarize this point in the following table.

***Parallels within the First Three Pairs***

Pair	Literary Device	Degree of Parallel
1	a. identical opening language-“Let your house be” b. identical structure (three parts)	absolute
2	a. similar language –“comrade, associate” "חבר" b. identical structure (three parts)	very precise
3	obviously similar subject	close

In our terms, we have seen three different types of textual parallels in the first three Pairs.

In the Maharal's terms, the Pairs grow farther apart, the differences between them become more pronounced. Evidently, he is speaking in terms of form, not of content. Both speakers in the third Pair are quite clearly addressing the same audience. Their common subject is even clearer than that of the second Pair. Only when we analyze the devices utilized to define the common frame of reference in each Pair, does it become apparent that it is the devices themselves that are logically ordered. The similarity in the first two Pairs is based on structural and linguistic parallels. These are elements of style and can be thought of as extrinsic to the content. The statements of the third Pair have no common structure or linguistic element to tie them together, but there is an intrinsic parallel in their content. We began with an obvious linguistic parallel and have been drawn more and more into the content of the statements in order to see what they have in common. Of course, we have read the statements of only three Pairs and cannot draw substantive conclusions at this point. Still, we have already seen a degree of literary sophistication in the overall scheme which demands that we be prepared to follow wherever the text may lead. It seems to be leading to the conclusion that analysis of the

structure reveals additional layers of meaning. Before analyzing the literary device employed in the fourth Pair, I would like to underline this link between form and content by means of a short digression concerning the names of the Pairs.

### ***The Progression of Names***

Pair	The Names of The Pairs
i	Yose ben Yoezer of Zeredah and Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem
ii	Joshua ben Perahia and Nittai the Arbelite
iii	Judah ben Tabbai and Simon ben Shetah
iv	Shemaia and Avtalion
v	Hillel and Shammai

There is a dynamic flow in the names of the Pairs which runs parallel to the chronological and conceptual flow. Through the five generations, the names undergo a process of simplification. In the first Pair, both of the names have a three-part form: first name, father's name, place of origin. Both start with the same first name, Yose, just as their statements begin with the same words. Both have a place delimiter, as does the content of the statements, the home. In the third Pair, the names are in the standard Mishnaic form of "A ben (the son of) B." In terms of the structure of their statements, the second Pair is closer to the first than the third. However, the form of the names indicates an intermediate position between the other Pairs. Like the third Pair, one, Joshua ben Perahia, is in the standard form. Like the first Pair one has a place delimiter, "the Arbelite." Looking forward to the fourth and fifth Pairs, we see that they are introduced only by their first names. Since the names of the fifth Pair are shorter than those of the fourth Pair, we can infer a process of "simplification" from generation to generation. In Hebrew, we could use the word התפשטות to describe the process. This is the word used by the Maharal to describe the conceptual flow of expanding social circles. The same word is used for seemingly opposite processes, expansion and contraction. This is more than just a linguistic

curiosity of Hebrew usage. We are about to see that the interdependence of these concepts is an essential feature of our text. But first, let us see just how much Rabbi's arrangement of his Pairs depends on the arrangement of the Decalogue pairs.

### ***The "Flow" Technique***

We will now examine the formal "glue" that holds together the three pairs of Words as well as the three Avot Pairs in I-III. I will call the technique utilized to create this "glue" "the flow technique". It is utilized both to create a sense of movement from pair to pair as well as to link together the pairs in both structures, in sets I-III. This is a case where we can see how Rabbi took one of the characteristics that he found in the biblical text, the "flow" technique, and amplified it in Avot. The application of the flow technique in the Decalogue is both obvious and subtle.

### ***The Flow Technique in Decalogue pairs 3-5***

5A	5B
You shall not covet your fellow man's house;	You shall not covet your fellow man's wife...
לא תחמד בית רעך ס יד	ס לא תחמד אשת רעך ועבדו ואמתו ושורו וחמרו וכל אשר לרעך
4A	4B
You shall not steal.	You shall not bear false witness against your fellow man
ס לא תגנב	ס לא תענה ברעך עד שקר
3A	3B
You shall not murder.	You shall not commit adultery.
לא תרצח ס יג	ס לא תנאף

The technique involves incorporating a characteristic of each of the surrounding pairs of Words, 5 and 3. Both Words in pair 5 contain the expression "your fellow man." That expression appears in 4B. Both Words in pair 3 consist of two words, לא, "(You shall) not"

followed by a single intransitive verb. This is also the format of 4A. So Decalogue pair 4 contains one Word formulated like pair 5 (4B), in content, and one Word formulated like pair 3 (4A), in form. Once we see these similarities, we can view the Words of Decalogue pair 4, Set II, as a link between Dec pair 5 (I) and Dec pair 3 (III).

Rabbi must have devoted quite a bit of attention to amplifying this “link” in the parallel Avot Pairs. As we will see now, Rabbi amplified the biblical use of “the flow technique” by applying it to the names of the speakers in set II as well as to the content of their speeches. He also utilized it in order to leave us a very clear idea of how he understood the significance of the flow technique in general, and what it can teach us about the Decalogue.

### ***Comparing the Flow from Pair to Pair***

The first and most obvious aspect of flow from Pair to Pair in Avot, is also the most perplexing, the change in the format of names from generation to generation. The various names that appear seem to follow the [Greek conventions](http://www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/names/practices.html) ([www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/names/practices.html](http://www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/names/practices.html)) of the period, utilizing a single given name with the common addition of the patronymic, and the less common addition of the individual’s origin. What is unusual, as we noted earlier, is the Pair-to-Pair transition from using all three components to using just the given name. The names of the second Pair, Joshua ben (the son of) Perahia and Nittai the Arbelite, are useful in demonstrating just how the sense of progression is created. But beyond their utility in describing the progression of names, they provide an important insight into the way Rabbi constructed both the names and the aphorisms in order to emulate the parallel Decalogue pair.

### ***The Flow Technique in the Names***

There are two distinct name formats used separately in the second Pair. One sage is referred to by his given name, Joshua, and the patronymic, son of Perahia. The other is referred to by a given name, Nittai, and by place of origin, the Arbelite. The combination of these two forms in the names of the second Pair creates a transition from the first Pair, in which, uniquely among the Pairs, both names contain the place of origin, to the third Pair, in which both names contain a given name and a patronymic but no place of origin. The technique by means of which the sense of transition is created in the second Pair is to take a characteristic of the first Pair, place of origin, and combine it with a characteristic of the third Pair, the patronymic. This technique is repeated in the content of both aphorisms of the second Pair.

### ***The Flow Technique in the Content of Avot Pair 2***

<b>Avot Pair 2</b>	
2A	2B
Joshua ben Perahia said: a. Get yourself a teacher, b. acquire a comrade, c. and give the benefit of the doubt.	Nittai the Arbelite said: a. Stay away from an evil neighbor, b. do not associate with the wicked, c. and do not despair of retribution.
יהושע בן פרחיה אומר a. עשה לך רב b. וקנה לך חבר c. והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות	נתאי הארבלי אומר a. הרחק משכן רע b. ואל תתחבר לרשע c. ואל תתיאש מן הפרענות

Pair 2 is a micro version of the first three Pairs. The micro structure was created by using the same technique as we found in the flow of names, as well as in the parallel Dec pair, 4. Both aphorisms have three elements, marked a-c. They have been constructed so that in each aphorism the first element (a) reflects the aphorisms of the first Pair and the third element (c) reflects the aphorisms of the third Pair. The linguistic constituent which links the two aphorisms of the second Pair to each other is found in the second element (b) of each. The three elements

of the aphorisms are thus ordered in parallel to the first three Pairs: a,b,c=1,2,3. Here are the details. In 2Aa ben Perahia recommends getting a teacher. This is directly connected with Yosef ben Yoezer of Zereda's advice in 1A to fill your home with the wise and to "drink in their words thirstily." In 2Ba, Nittai the Arbelite says "Stay away from an evil neighbor." The exact word translated "evil", רע, appears in 1A in "he brings evil upon himself." So we see that the first element (a) in both aphorisms of Pair 2 reflects the parallel member of the previous Pair. The third element (c) in each aphorism refers to judgment, and Pair 3 is addressed to judges. Specifically, the phrase translated idiomatically "give the benefit of the doubt" in 2Ac, could be translated more literally "judge (הוי דין) everyone favorably." The fact that Pair 2 is connected both to Pairs 1 and 3, emphasizes the significance of the shared root in 2Ab and 2Bb, חבר, translated here "comrade" and "associate", but also meaning "connect." Pair 2 "connects" Pairs 1 and 3. So we see that Rabbi has used the same literary tool to connect Pairs 1-3 both through the content of the three-part aphorisms and through the formats of the names. He has thereby amplified the subtle usage of the flow technique we noted in Dec 4. Rabbi must have considered demonstrating the flow technique to be of great significance in order to reproduce it both in the names and in the content of Pair 2. We can conclude that exactly the same literary technique was used in the Decalogue and in Avot to create the sense of flow in sets I-III.

### ***Social Circles and Social Roles***

We will now examine the literary device employed in the fourth Pair. It requires the application of a lemma of the rule of the weft. The lemma can be described as follows. Each of the expanding social circles is associated with a social role. The range of the first Pair is the home, and the role is that of householder (בעל הבית). In the third Pair the range is that of law



or formal relations, and the role is that of judge. There is an inverse relationship between the size of the sphere of influence and the number of people in the role. Householders are much more common than judges, but their individual influence is less than that of a judge. This inverse relationship is the lemma, and it will lead us to the role associated with the fourth Pair.

While we have had no difficulty in identifying the roles associated with the first and third Pairs, the second is less clear. If, as in the first Pair, we derive the role from the common linguistic element, we can identify it as that of the חבר, (comrade). This role typifies the types of interpersonal relationships considered in the first elements of the second Pair. The word חבר is also the formal title of a student in the time of the Mishnah; he is a "member" of the academy. After him comes the judge, the subject of the statements of the third Pair. We see that the social circles of the weft may imply an academic pyramid:

Judge  
Student  
Householder or layman

### ***Each Pair Addresses a Different Audience***

We have jumped from the "social circles" pattern to one which is defined in terms of academic standing. This could imply that the basic standard for social groupings is an academic standard, or that the text forces a quantum jump, a new level of differentiation between the Pairs. Now comes the point of internal verification. All of the statements of the Pairs are imperatives. The speakers in the third Pair are not describing an abstract theory of justice. They are giving advice to judges. They and all the other Pairs are directly addressing specific role requirements. The subjects being addressed are those we identified in the academic pyramid.

Therefore we were justified in making the jump from the "social circles" theory. In fact, the academic pyramid is a closer representation of the text, because it acknowledges that different types of roles are being addressed by each Pair. Part of the artifice of the text, in fact, is the direction of each set of aphorisms to a different audience. Actually, the line between artifice and substance is no longer clear. Now we will consider how the academic pyramid is connected to the progression of literary devices.

### ***The Literary device Suits the Audience***

We found that a literary device was used to define the common subject of each Pair's statements and that each Pair addresses a specific role. Each of the devices is suited to the role being addressed. The layman is the least sophisticated and must be addressed with statements that are literally identical, "Let your house be", in order to grasp that both members of the Pair are speaking about the same subject. The student or "comrade" (חבר) is more advanced and, as his title implies, deals with connections, which is another form of the Hebrew (חיבור). (insert link analysis 1-3) He is equipped to appreciate the more subtle device used by the second Pair. The judge is told to examine carefully what the witnesses say. He involves himself with content. The first two stages are similar in that they utilize superficial similarities to establish the common element in the respective Pairs. The Judge is limited to the testimony of the witness, the content of his statements. Superficial resemblances have no significance for him. From this reading of the link between the type of literary device and the role, we are prepared to predict some things about the fourth Pair. First of all we are looking for a role on a higher level than that of the Judge of the third Pair. Secondly, we are looking for a literary device which goes beyond the content of the two aphorisms.

## ***A Word to the Wise***

### The Fourth Pair

Shemaia said: Love labor, hate domination (authority), and do not make yourself known to the ruling powers.	Avtalion said: Sages, watch your words, lest you incur the penalty of exile, and be banished to a place of evil waters, and the disciples who follow you drink and die, and the Heavenly Name be profaned.
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The author has left no room for doubt as to who is next up the ladder from the judge.

Avtalion's statement is addressed directly to sages, חכמים. Proof that the next category is in fact the Sages appears in Shemaia's statement. It is also the solution to a textual problem. He says שנא את הרבנות, which can be taken literally to mean "hate authority." But Shemaia is hardly likely to be telling the average citizen to rebel. If, however, he is addressing the Sages (or those who could become such), his admonition makes sense: "Those of you who have been chosen to lead must commit yourselves to the task--`love labor'-- and not become enamored of the perquisites of the role--`hate domination.'" There can be no doubt that both members of the fourth Pair address themselves to leaders. And yet it is virtually impossible to reach this conclusion without going through the process of analyzing the previous statements, abstracting the academic pyramid, and then seeing that Avtalion address "Sages." Otherwise, we would not be able to understand who the audience for Shemaia's statement is. Only because of our prediction that *both members of the fourth Pair address people in a higher role than judges* were we prepared to extend Avtalion's addressing "Sages" to Shemaia. The fact that one of the Pair addresses "Sages" verifies the existence of the academic pyramid and discloses the audience of Shemaia's statement.

The key element in identifying the role addressed by the fourth Pair is the literal appearance of the term "Sages." But this is not the point of departure for an analysis of the statements of the fourth Pair; it is, rather, the fulfillment of a prediction. From observing the process that begins to unfold in the first three Pairs, it is possible to predict that the fourth Pair would speak to those higher up the academic pyramid than judges, and sages exactly fit the expectations. Literally, "a word to the wise is sufficient," if the word is "the wise"! The parallel in the fourth Pair is predicated upon the fact that the reader comes to the text prepared by the dynamic rule of the academic pyramid which has developed over the first three Pairs. Once he or she spots the opening, "Sages", he or she knows that the pyramid theory, that each Pair addresses those on a higher rung, is valid.

### ***Activating the Reader***

The device employed by the fourth Pair is not limited to the content of their statements, as was that of the third Pair. This new literary device requires *the reader* to be "wise" and integrate the content of the statements of the fourth Pair into the rule determined by the first three Pairs. The fourth Pair demands that the reader be aware of the previous Pairs. It dictates his or her active participation on a level beyond that of the isolated parts of the text, the level of a comprehensive overview. In terms of the progression of literary devices, the Sage transcends the limitations imposed upon the Judge who was directed to the evidence of the witnesses, the Pair which stood before him. As a Judge he could clearly determine that their statements supported each other and were addressed to a judge, thereby fulfilling the requirements for testimony. The Sage does not limit his judgment to the evidence presented to

him in the testimony of the fourth Pair. He is wise because he integrates their statements within the context of all that preceded them. The device is his inclusive reading of the text.

### ***Avot is Not a Collection***

It is no longer sufficient to say that each Pair independently addresses a particular role. The fourth Pair *requires the context of the first three Pairs* in order for its common subject to be comprehensible. This fact has implications regarding the authorship of the text. We must concede that we are reading a text written by one hand. Avot is redefining itself. Far from a collection of popular aphorisms, the text has revealed itself as a highly sophisticated literary composition. This revelation takes place in the framework of statements addressed to Sages. The exoteric *collection* has been replaced by an esoteric *composition*, one reserved for the initiated, the Sages. I believe that here, too, the text provides internal verification. Avtalion's statement, which otherwise seems inscrutable, begins to make sense if it is read as a warning to those who have begun to probe the esoteric level of the text. The key is in the reading of the word *galut*, גלות, dispersion, as גלות, *galot*, revealing.

### ***Exoteric and Esoteric Knowledge***

Avtalion's statement has *no overt meaning*. It is a cryptic metaphor addressed only to those, the Sages, who are capable of deciphering it. I suggest the possibility of reading the warning as if it said "choose your words carefully lest you be forced to reveal [more than you should]...." Not all knowledge can or should be transmitted openly. This reading of Avtalion's statement sheds additional light on part of Shamaia's saying: "do not make yourself known to the ruling powers." The free transmission of certain knowledge is dangerous, both to the teacher, as

implied here by Shemaia, and to the student, as stated by Avtalion, "the disciples who follow you (will) drink and die." The image of knowledge as water already appeared in the first pair: "sit in the dust of their feet and drink in their words thirstily." The beginning student, the layman of the first pair, lacks the necessary tools of discernment to understand the teacher fully. Nevertheless, because of his "thirst" he may "drink" ideas which he cannot digest. Therefore the teacher must be careful not to expose the unprepared student to ideas that could harm him.

We need only to read our text as the Sages would have, in order to understand some of the potential danger inherent in the knowledge they acquired. We can now see that Avot exemplifies the dichotomy between exoteric and esoteric knowledge. For eighteen hundred years readers have been delighting in the collected aphorisms of the Sages, the exoteric Avot. Rabbis and teachers have found inspiration for countless homiletic flights within each of its sayings. Yet, from our analysis, the scholar who grasps the text as a whole is forced to say that it is a composition written by one hand, not a collection. Is the scholar free to contradict common wisdom and declare these conclusions in the marketplace? This question is similar to the question our author is addressing through Avtalion. The author has created a vehicle for transmitting esoteric knowledge to the few who can profit from it while keeping it totally hidden from the masses, for reasons yet to be discovered. At the same time, he has created a popular work which can be used profitably by the general public, while reserving its treasures for the initiates. The continued popularity of Avot attests to the author's skill.

### ***Predicting the Fifth Pair***

The fifth Pair is the last step up the religious-academic pyramid. As such, it presents the final stage of the progression, the apex of the pyramid. If we follow the pyramid metaphor, we reach a point at the apex, which differs in kind from the previous stages. We have followed a progression of classes of people associated with academic achievement: 1) layman, 2) student, 3) judge, and 4) sage. Each class was progressively more restrictive, containing fewer members. This gave rise to the pyramid metaphor. At the apex, there is room for only a single individual, not a class. While we need not follow the metaphor slavishly, so far it has led us to a deeper understanding of Avot. Therefore, we should attempt to follow it, and ask the obvious question “who is on top of the pyramid.” We will see that the answer, “I am”, is just as unavoidable as the question. An examination of the progression of literary devices will lead us to that answer.

We have been following two parallel developments. The first, the revelation of the academic pyramid, was a direct corollary of the Maharal's description of the subject flow from Pair to Pair. Each Pair has a common subject. We found that the subject could be identified with a specific station on the religious-academic pyramid. The second development was the discovery of the set of literary devices associated with the various levels of the pyramid. We found that the common elements of the first two Pairs were superficial devices. The third Pair depended solely on similar content without an extrinsic device, leading us to say that the content itself was the device. With the fourth Pair we made a quantum jump. The device was no longer within the text of the Pair under investigation. It would remain invisible if the reader were not דבן, sagacious, if he or she were not able to abstract the dynamic rule of the first three Pairs and anticipate its application to the fourth Pair. In this sense, the text has become

"interactive." Only an active reader who identified the progression of the first three Pairs would receive the feedback of internal verification which we found in Avtalion's speech. The literary device was thus dependent on the reader's wisdom. The reader-sage read the statements of the first three Pairs, formulated a theory and verified it with the fourth Pair.

### ***Reading between the Lines***

The process we have analyzed across the first four Pairs can be considered a process of education. The author has taught the reader how to read "between the lines." The reader gradually discovers that the text is two-faced, exoteric and esoteric. The exoteric text appears in the ostensible quotations of the Pairs, the common sense aphorisms such as "stay away from an evil neighbor." The esoteric text is developed between the lines, in the structure that led us to identify the process created by the flow from Pair to Pair. As we discovered the process, we also discovered that the text contained internal verification that we were on the right track, such as the fact the Avtalion addressed "Sages." The same speech can be read as an indication that the process of education of the reader is in some way completed with the fourth Pair. The reading is based on the use of the literary device, closure.

Closure is created when the end of a composition recalls the beginning. In our text it is created by the repetition of the "wisdom as water" metaphor. It first appears in 1A as "Let your house be a meeting place for the Sages; sit in the dust of their feet, and *drink in their words thirstily*." It reappears in 4B "Sages, watch your words, lest ... the disciples that follow you *drink and die*." In both cases the Sages speak and the disciples "drink." However, there is a significant difference of perspective. In 1A the reader is addressed as a thirsty disciple, but by the time we



reach 4B, the reader has become a Sage. Therefore, the literary device, closure, can be understood to indicate that the education of the reader has been completed with 4B. This is an example of reading between the lines.

Having successfully completed the required analysis, the reader-student learns that he or she is being addressed by the author. His or her proven ability has won him or her the title "חכם", Sage. The fourth Pair addressed Sages; if he or she understood their message, he himself or she herself must be one of them. This awakening is at the heart of the process that we began identifying as the progression of literary devices. They were indeed devices, but different in scope than we might have thought at first. Their function was not simply to acquaint us with the common elements of the Pairs, but to make us aware of the teacher, just out of sight, who whispered encouragement at every small step of progress, finally to reveal himself with the fourth Pair. The last step of the process is thus the student's self-realization. He or she recognizes that the author is trying to reach him or her as a unique individual. The reader has already seen that the text must be viewed as esoteric, written for the few. At the pinnacle of the pyramid stands just one, the reader who has gone this far in the analysis.

### ***Creating Torah***

Once the reader becomes aware of the fact that this ostensible historical collection is in fact a composition, it must be reread and reevaluated. The reader is required to establish a new reading that will link the substance of the speeches of the fifth Pair to what has preceded. The reading must be integrative, as demanded by the new understanding that the text is a formal composition. Each reader must create a new integrated reading that will be a function of the

reader's own ability to analyze, and talent to synthesize. The academic pyramid effectively self-destructs when the reader grasps its full implication: it was constructed in order to place the individual reader at the apex. From this exalted point, at the top of the pyramid, the reader must develop a reading that integrates all ten speeches in a composition that addresses the singular reader rather than the classes of the academic hierarchy with which we have dealt up to now.

Even before reading the speeches of the fifth Pair, it is clear that the reading which integrates the ten speeches must have a theme consistent with the emergence of the individual reader as the recipient of the esoteric content of the composition. We will see that "self-realization" may itself be the theme of the composition as a whole, as well as the specific subject of Pair 5. The unique reader who reads the whole text as containing a composition written between the lines will, perforce, develop a unique reading. The reading will be a function of the reader's creativity, while adhering to the framework of the text. By applying individual creativity to the task of understanding the esoteric message embedded in Avot, the reader becomes a part of the creative process of maintaining and developing the tradition handed down from Moses to Joshua et al., as described in the opening of Avot.

## ***Chapter Five. My Reading***

### ***Creating an Integrative Interpretation of the Pairs***

In developing the metaphor of the academic pyramid, we have focused on the weft, the progression of the Pairs. In order to develop a fully integrated reading of the five Pair structure, it is necessary to integrate the warp (the Maharal's "love and fear"), with weft, the progression

of the five Pairs. The goal is to see how the two sets of threads weave a unified composition. Rabbi has aided us in this quest by embedding several hints within the text. Two of them are linguistic, and one is formal. One linguistic hint is based on no less than a form of the titular name the author was known by in his own lifetime, as well as later, רבי, Rabbi, *teacher par excellence*.

In each of the five Pairs, one of the speakers uses a form of the root “רב”, which has two basic meanings here, “much” and “master, authority”. Each column uses one of the meanings exclusively. In column A, 2A contains "רב" (teacher) and 4A contains "רבנות" (authority). In column B, 1B and 3B contain the verb form meaning “much” and 5B has a similar meaning in an adverbial form. The two meanings thus successively alternate from column to column: 1B, much; 2A, teacher; 3B, much; 4A, authority; 5B, much. So we have two pieces of evidence that the choice of this root is not arbitrary. The first is that one speaker in each Pair uses this root, but never both. The second is that the two meanings successively alternate columns.

The second linguistic hint is that four of the five speeches in column B contain warnings regarding speech: 1B) “Do not speak too much”; 3B) “watch your words”; 4B) “watch your words”, 5B) “say little”. None of the speeches in column A contain similar references to speech. Since all the occurrences restrict the speech of the individual addressed in the aphorism, we can conclude that column B addresses people who have a need or tendency to speak.

A third hint is found in the substance of the ten speeches. Five of them refer to the consequences of actions, 1B, 2B, 3B, 4B and 5A. In the first four Pairs, those that comprise the academic pyramid, column B exclusively points to the consequences of actions. The last two

hints combine in a way that also clarifies the first. The fact that speech appears exclusively in column B, would seem to indicate that B focuses on interactions with others, as opposed to A, which focuses on the self. Consequently, the consequences associated with social interactions also appear in B. (When we deal with the fifth Pair, we will have to explain why the consideration of consequences shifts to 5A.) If column B contains a social component lacking in column A, that could explain the first hint also. The meaning of “רב”, used in B, much, could imply that this column deals with manifoldness, as opposed to A which has a more unitary subject. This distinction is locked down by one more structural consideration, which we will examine now.

***Three Speeches and Three Speakers***

<p>1B</p> <p>a. Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem said: Let your house be open wide; let the needy be part of your household. Do not speak too much with women.</p> <p>b. They said this of one's own wife; how much more is it true of another man's wife.</p> <p>c. Hence the Sages said: When a man speaks too much with women he brings evil upon himself, neglects the study of the Law and in the end will come to perdition.</p>	<p>5A</p> <p>a. Hillel said: Be of the students of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving one's fellowmen and drawing them close to the Torah.</p> <p>b. He also said: He who invokes the Name will lose his name; he who adds not will be taken away; he who studies not deserves death; and he who makes use of the Crown will soon be gone.</p> <p>c. He also said: If I am not for myself, who will be for me; and if I am only for myself, what am I; and if not now, when?</p>
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We are now going to compare two unusual speeches, Yose ben Yohanan’s, 1B, and Hillel’s,

5A. These speeches are related chiasmically: 1B is at the beginning of column B, and 5A is at the

end of column A. Each has been clearly marked by Rabbi as an exception. 1B is an exception because it contains three speakers. 5A is an exception because it contains three speeches. We will see that these two exceptions may be the “exceptions that come to teach the rule”. The rule which they teach is: how to read the five Pair structure as an integrated composition. By closely comparing these two units, 1B and 5A, we will see how to integrate the warp with the weft.

While each of the other sages in the text has just one speech quoted in his name, Hillel has three. The first is introduced as all others, “Hillel said”; the next two are introduced “He also said.” The first of these three speeches is similar to those of the other nine Sages because it is a second person imperative. Hillel’s second speech is formatted in the third person and his third speech is in the first person. These unique formats in the second and third speeches emphasize the fact that they should be seen as additions to his first speech, which fits the overall format of second person imperatives. This unusual three-speech unit is balanced by an equally unusual unit, 1B, which contains three speakers. Yose ben Yohanan’s speech ends with: “Do not speak too much with women.” Following it are two external additions, “They *said* this of one's own wife...”, and “Hence the Sages *said*...” So both 1B and 5A are similarly “enlarged”; 1B contains speeches by two extra speakers and 5A contains two extra speeches by Hillel. Since 1B and 5A are in the first and last Pairs, they help define the framework, or the limits, of the Pairs. Specifically, Yose ben Yohanan is the first speaker in column B, while Hillel, 5A, is the last speaker in column A. The inverse placement of the two “enlarged” speeches, together with the inverse enlargement of speakers and speeches, led me to look for an inversion in the contents

of the speeches. I quickly realized that the type of “enlargement” pointed to the link with the content.

The additions to 1B are outside commentaries and thus extrinsic to Yose ben Yohanan’s speech. The additions to 5A are by the same speaker, Hillel, and so should be considered in-place, or intrinsic. I then saw that the distinction between “external and internal” or “extrinsic and intrinsic” or “other and self” could replace the Maharal’s “fear and love” as the dyad that best characterizes the distinction between the columns in an integrated reading. I then interpreted the expansion of 1B to indicate that the emphasis in Pair 1 was on “the other” or “the external”, and Pair 5 “the self” or “internal”. The evidence gathered from the three “hints” supported this distinction between the columns. The five-step process would then be seen as the transformation of the individual from a state of dependence on external influences, to one of independence, capped by Hillel’s “If I am not for myself, who will be for me.” Each of the three intermediate Pairs could then be read as facilitating the shift from the dependence on the external in column B to creative independence in column A. This process would integrate the warp and weft into a tightly woven fabric.

### ***Summary of the Proposed Integrated Reading of the Five Pairs***

Each of the five Pairs contains one speech which points “inwards” (A) and one which points “outwards” (B). Speech (A) focuses on the individual and speech (B) focuses on the individual’s contacts with the “outside” world. As the individual develops internally, his or her dependence on the outside diminishes, reaching the stage of full “self-actualization” in Pair 5. In the first stage, Pair 1, the individual is considered a vessel that needs filling, a tabula rasa, thus the

metaphor of the house. At this beginning stage, there is complete dependence on the external world: “Let your house be open wide”, (1B). Even the inner person -within the “house”- is dependent on the input from others: “drink in their words thirstily”, (1A). At the other extreme, we hear Hillel assert “If I am not for myself, who will be for me” (5A). By stage 5, the individual has morphed from the tabula rasa totally dependent on input from others, to an independent “self-starter”. (This polarization of the extremes is reflected in a similar five-part structure in the second chapter of Avot. There, Raban Yochanan ben Zakai describes the character of each of his five students. He calls the first “a sealed cistern which loses not a drop”, and the fifth “a spring that ever flows stronger.” Although both descriptions employ a water motif, the first student merely contains “water”, while the fifth is an ever-growing source of “water”.) We are now prepared to see how Hillel and Shammai address the reader’s creative independence.

### ***Hillel and Shammai***

The fifth Pair, Hillel and Shammai, are a class apart from the previous four Pairs about whom we know very little and whose rulings had a minimal influence on the development of Jewish law, if any. Both Hillel and Shammai are transitional as well as seminal figures, being at the same time the leaders of the last generation of Second temple scholars and the founders of two new schools, named after them, which would have tremendous influence on future generations of scholars. The founding of these schools can be seen as the beginning of the rabbinic era, which parallels the early development of Christianity. The disputes between these two schools constitute the bedrock upon which the oral law developed during the rabbinic period. Over three hundred of their disputes are recorded in the Talmud. The unique status of Hillel and Shammai amongst the Pairs cannot be overestimated. It is not inconceivable that the

five-Pair structure was constructed in order to present Hillel and Shammai as the final stage of a five-step process. It may be possible to encapsulate the significance of the five-part figure by considering the link between the opening words of the members of the first Pair, “Let your house be”, and the historical contributions of the schools of Hillel and Shammai.

The word that we have translated “house”, in “Let your house be...”, is the very same term that is used for “school” in “the school of Hillel.” This supports the view that the five-stage process is one of transformation. The private domicile of the first pair is transformed through the five-stage process into an historical reality capable of affecting not just those within the “houses” of Hillel and Shammai, but also their spiritual descendants for millennia to come. If this is the case, then we would indeed be justified in describing the process vis-à-vis the individual reader as self-actualization. This is in fact close to the Maharal’s description of the process as "יציאה מן הכוח אל הפועל", (realization of potential). The fourth Pair addressed those who were public figures, community leaders. Through their schools, Hillel and Shammai, the fifth Pair, transcended the limitations of time and place to become leaders of a people across the ages. Even more than transmitting a received tradition, they created the framework of the future. If the transformation of the reader in the five-part process culminates in a demand to shape the future, like Hillel and Shammai, it is clear why the author hid this message deep within layers and layers of structure. It is a call for the continuous development of tradition, as we will see immediately in Hillel’s words. The beloved little book of aphorisms, Avot, has transformed itself into something as powerful and threatening as the little red book of Chairman Mao! The reader is invited to become a partner in shaping ever-changing reality. Self-actualization goes hand-in-hand with the universal creative process.



### ***Pair 5 Self Actualization***

<p><b>5A</b> Hillel said: Be of the students of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving one's fellowmen and drawing them close to the Torah. He also said: He who invokes the Name will lose his name; he who adds not will be taken away; he who studies not deserves death; and he who makes use of the Crown will soon be gone. He also said: If I am not for myself, who will be for me; and if I am only for myself, what am I; and if not now, when?</p>	<p><b>5B</b> Shammai said: Make regular your [study of the] Torah; say little and do much; and greet everyone cheerfully.</p>
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If the whole of the Pairs structure has been contrived to place the individual reader at the apex of the pyramid, as a participant in the creation of tradition, then the beginning of the fifth Pair would be the appropriate point to welcome the reader as a participant. I would like to read the opening of Hillel's speeches, "Be of the students of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving one's fellowmen and drawing them close to the Torah" as the author's "welcome", as well as an example of the creation of tradition. This is the first reference of any sort to the historical Torah in the Pairs structure. At the very point where the author of Avot begins to address the self-aware, uniquely creative reader, he does so through the persona of the most rigidly defined role in the whole Torah, the High Priest. While seemingly expressing the character of one of the central figures of the Torah, Aaron the High Priest, Hillel, in fact, expresses a totally new understanding of Aaron and the High Priesthood.

### ***The Esoteric Society of the Students of Aaron***

As High Priest, Aaron occupied the highest position in the formal religious hierarchy. Moses the prophet, Aaron's brother, was the law-giver and was in continuous contact with the divine, but he did not occupy a formal position. While the Torah describes in detail the role of the High Priest, there is no such description of the "prophet". Hillel's first speech focuses the reader on the holder of the highest office in the Torah's theocracy, the individual at the top of the religious pyramid. (This can be read as verification of our prediction that the fifth Pair addresses the top of the pyramid.) At the same time, Hillel creates a distance by instructing the reader "Be of the students of Aaron" rather than "be like Aaron." Aaron had no students in the biblical narrative. They are clearly an invention of Hillel's. It is as if Hillel has given the name "students of Aaron" to the esoteric society which the reader has just joined and said: "Welcome to the society of the students of Aaron." Moreover, there is no biblical foundation for ascribing to Aaron the characteristics "loving peace, pursuing peace." What then might be the connection between the "society of the students of Aaron" and the qualities mentioned in the context of Hillel's first speech?

Aaron, as High Priest, was required to leave the community in order to enter the Holy of Holies and stand in the presence of God, both as an individual and as the representative of the entire nation. While God spoke to Moses, His prophet, regularly from between the cherubim, Aaron's contact with the divine was regulated by prescription, a formal process. Aaron, as High Priest, thus possessed a manual, a method, for entering into the closest possible contact with the holy. I would like to suggest that the author of Avot may have had Hillel invoke Aaron at this point both to restrain and encourage the reader who has begun to engage the esoteric. The

image of Aaron restrains the reader from rushing into the holy place with strange fire like Aaron's sons, while at the same time assuring the reader that there is a method for developing intimacy with the divine, a method known to "the students of Aaron", perhaps related to the reading of Leviticus presented in Part 4. The preconditions for undertaking the study of the method are "loving peace, pursuing peace, loving one's fellowmen and drawing them close to the Torah." I would interpret these instructions as applying to two realms of experience, the private and the public. I take "loving peace, pursuing peace" as referring to the private realm since "fellowmen" are mentioned afterwards. This is consistent with the ritual of entering the Holy of Holies. Like the High Priest, students of Aaron must first pursue inner peace in order to stand before God as individuals, and then return to the community waiting in the courtyard in order to extend the experience of the holy to them.

While the invocation of Aaron in Hillel's first speech has confirmed our prediction that we are now involved with the top of the pyramid, it is Hillel's third speech that confirms that the individual reader has become a participant in the process. "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" The use of the first person places the onus of self-realization squarely on the reader, as if Hillel were saying "Repeat these words after me, if I am not for myself..." The reader has been activated. Lest the now "realized" reader, who has become an "ever-growing source of water", cause a flood, Shammai has the final word.

Hillel has addressed the final stage of the individual's inner development. Shammai describes the face that this individual shows the world. The Hebrew phrase translated/paraphrased "greet everyone cheerfully" contains the word "face". A more literal

translation would be “receive all of humanity with a pleasant face.” The permanent Buddha-like “pleasant face” could be seen as a mask to hide the inner turbulence of the bubbling waters, much like the exoteric face of Avot, the beloved collection of wise aphorisms.

### ***Conclusions***

The first chapter of tractate Avot begins with a listing of individuals who, from generation to generation, received and passed on an esoteric tradition that Moses first received from Sinai and handed down to Joshua. We began by noting an apparent dissonance within the text: while the stated subject of the chapter is the dissemination of esoteric knowledge from Moses, the contents of many of the individual aphorisms quoted in it seemed quite trivial. With the aid of the Maharal, we are now in a position to better understand the nature of the Pairs passage. There are two different ways to read the aphorisms of the Pairs, exoteric and esoteric. The exoteric, popular, reading sees each aphorism as a self-contained unit. This is how virtually all commentators except the Maharal approached the text. The esoteric reading combines the ten aphorisms into a single dynamic structure which contains within it a five-step process. By carefully following the five steps, we found that the process ultimately empowers the reader to hear the voice of the author from within the text. Perhaps the clearest statement by the author is that *there is an author*, and not an editor or a redactor. The text is not what it initially presents itself to be, a compendium of wise aphorisms organized according to an historical key. What is it then?

On a purely technical level, the Pairs structure is a composition constructed in the format of a weave. Only a reader who deciphers the woven structure, consisting of the organizing

principles of the warp and the weft, can begin to explore the substance of the composition. To all others, the composition is invisible. Thus the composition must be viewed as esoteric, because its inner message is only accessible to very careful readers, and in some way contradicts its outer message, which is available to the general audience. This observation should help us assuage the cognitive dissonance mentioned earlier. The framework of the chapter is the transmission of esoteric knowledge, and the author has demonstrated a method of transmitting esoteric knowledge by means of the Pairs structure, a method of “writing between the lines.” So we can conclude that the framework is consonant with the content, both of them concern esoteric knowledge.