

PREFACE

Mishnah-Tosefta Negaim is a form- and literary-critic's delight. First, the tractate is rich in elegant and meticulously built formal constructions. Second, certain exegetical problems, originated by the established theory of non-repetitious, unitary, and wholly harmonious pericopae, turn out to yield quite novel solutions when analyzed in accord with the differing presuppositions of literary-critical and form-critical inquiry. In such cases I have given both the inherited interpretation as well as my own.

A third reason for the sheer pleasure of the present tractate is simply the mathematical order and architectonic logic of its laws. The givens—basic rules, various sorts of fixed relationships—generate pointed and purposeful problems, though none is so complex as those of Kelim Chapters Eight through Ten and Twenty-Five through Twenty-Eight, not to mention nearly the whole of Ohalot. But, unlike the preceding tractates, Negaim is consistent in its precise unfolding of rules and, especially, of complicating factors in their interpretation. It has few of the lists and aimless catalogues of items which Kelim loves, and it also refrains from posing complicated theoretical problems pretty much for their own sake, so characteristic of Ohalot (e.g., Chapters Nine and Ten). It further is better organized, more coherent and lucid as a whole than what has preceded. In all, it would be difficult to point to a more engaging tractate.

In our studies of the first two tractates of Seder Tohorot, we devoted requisite attention to the pertinent pericopae of the compilations of legal exegeses known as Tannaitic Midrashim, primarily passages of Sifra for Kelim and Sifré Numbers and Sifré Zutta for Ohalot. Naturally, I assumed at the outset that I should cite the pertinent materials of Sifra Parashat Negaim and Parashat Mešora^c right along with Mishnah-Tosefta of our present tractate. Naively, I even supposed that, in addition, it would be possible to lay out the literary and historical problems, all within a single book. A quick survey of the relevant materials of Sifra shows that an entire volume is required even for a brief account of Sifra's materials on Negaim. Accordingly, what I had hoped would be a single volume on Negaim now turns out to be three, the present one, limited to a commentary on Mishnah-Tosefta Negaim, the next, VII. *Negaim. Sifra*, a brief presentation

of Sifra Parashat Negaim and Parashat Mešora^c, and, finally, Part VIII, *Negaim. Literary and Historical Problems*, which will follow in due course, and which will contain indices for the whole.

I thank The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation for a research fellowship in the calendar year 1974 and Brown University for an extraordinary research-leave in the same period, during which I was able to accomplish the research for the present part of the project. I am grateful to E. J. Brill for the continuing commitment to the publication of my research. My gratitude to my colleagues and students at Brown University, as well as to my former students, who take time out to read my manuscripts and criticize them, to my teacher, Morton Smith, and to many dear *haverim* in research, first and foremost, Baruch A. Levine, is enduring.

The work is dedicated to a friend who, in my mind, does what the rabbi of ancient times intended a rabbi to accomplish: scholarship in Judaism, leadership in the Jewish community, and public service. Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, author of major contributions to Jewish learning, University professor, rabbi of a flourishing congregation, and leader in important Jewish organizations, to my mind exemplifies for the present age the ideal of the rabbi, whose leadership is based upon learning, discernment, and foresight.

The present studies on Negaim bring us to the mid-point in this *History*. Sixty-two chapters of Mishnah, with the whole correlative Tosefta, have now been analyzed, and sixty-four remain. When I began the project, the end of which I cannot now envision, it was not because of a predominant interest in the details of the Mishnaic laws of purities but because of a concern for certain experiments in problems of historical method, in another regard entirely. It quickly became clear, however, that careful exegesis and close dissection, then reconstruction, of texts and of the historical (sequential) and conceptional interrelationships of their laws constitute the sole reliable method for history and much else. Further, I found that the laws under study produced endlessly fascinating problems. I hope that the reader, following my commentary with the texts of Mishnah-Tosefta in hand, hopefully also consulting the great classical commentaries, will not find what I have done wholly worthless. If he or she is able to grasp the problems I raise and perceive the urgency of the critical agendum I have shaped, then, whether or not my literary-critical, form-critical, exegetical, and historical answers are acceptable, I believe the work will have been worth what it has required.

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