

2-קדושה דסידרא AND יושב בסתר, ויהי נעם

In an article entitled: 'ויהי נועם' וקדושה דסדרא של מוצאי שבת in his book: התפלה Professor Israel Ta-Shma notes that the basis for the practice of reciting קדושה דסדרא and ויהי נועם on מוצאי שבת introduced a new concept into Jewish liturgy; i.e. that humans on earth can undertake actions that influence the fate of the deceased. That concept ultimately led to the introduction of קדיש יתום during the period of the ראשונים. The following statement by רב עמרם גאון is an early indication that the concept had found acceptance in Rabbinic circles:

סדר רב עמרם גאון (הרפנס) סדר מוצאי שבת—וזה שנהגו לומר ויהי נועם וקדושה דסדרא ולומר בנעימה ובעריבות טעם באפוקי שבתא, כדי שישתהו ישראל בהשלמת סדריהם, כדי להאריך מנוח לרשעים מלהזור לגיהנם, כדאמרין במוצאי שבת צועק המלאך שהוא ממונה על הרוחות חזרו לגיהנם שכבר השלימו ישראל סדריהם. ולכך מזכירין ישראל בסדר מוצאי שבת.

Translation: It is customary to say V'Hiy Noam and Kedushah D'Sidra with a nice tune and with feelings of brotherhood at the end of Shabbos. This is done so that the Jewish People will spend time studying a section of Torah in order to prolong the rest that the evil ones are given on Shabbos before they are required to return to Gehenom, as we learned: On Motzei Shabbos the angel who is in charge of the souls calls out: return to Gehenom because the Jews have completed their learning session. That is why we recite Kedushah D'Sidra on Motzei Shabbos.

The concept that humans on earth can undertake actions that influence the fate of the deceased evolved from earlier sources:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף סה' עמ' ב'—ואף שאלה זו שאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את רבי עקיבא. אמר לו: ומה יום מיומים? אמר לו: ומה גבר מגוברין? אמר ליה: דמרי צבי. שבת נמי, דמרי צבי. אמר ליה: הכי קאמינא לך, מי יימר דהאידנא שבתא? אמר לו: נהר סבטיון יוכיח, בעל אוב יוכיח, קברו של אביו יוכיח, שאין מעלה עשן בשבת. אמר לו: ביזיתו, ביישתו, וקיללתו.

Translation: And this question was asked by Turnusrufus¹³ of Rabbi Akiba: 'What makes the Sabbath a day that is different differ from the others?' Rabbi Akiba replied: 'What causes one man to differ from another?'¹⁴ 'Because my Lord, the Emperor wishes it.' 'The Sabbath too,' Rabbi Akiba rejoined, 'then, is distinguished because the Lord wishes so.' He replied: 'I ask this: Who tells you that this day is the Sabbath?' Rabbi Akiba answered: 'Let the river Sabbath¹⁵ prove it; let the Ba'al ob prove it;¹⁶ let your father's grave, from which no smoke ascends on the Sabbath,¹⁷ prove it.' Turnusrufus said to him: 'You have shamed, disgraced, and reviled him by this proof.'

Footnotes: (13) Tineius Rufus, a Roman Governor of Judea.

(14) 'Why is one a noble and one a commoner?' referring to the high office which Rufus held.

(15) A legendary river, said to flow with such a strong current on week days, carrying along stones and rubble with tremendous force, as to be quite unnavigable, but resting on the Sabbath.

(16) Who cannot conjure up the dead on that day.

(17) The whole week smoke ascended from his grave, as he was being burnt in the fires of purgatory: but even the wicked in Gehenna have rest from their torments on the Sabbath. (Davka-Judaic Classics Library).

This excerpt from the Talmud introduces the concept that the evil are given a reprieve from their punishment on שבת. That concept then evolved into the following:

שאלתות דרב אחאי' פרשת בראשית שאילתא א'—מעשה ברבי עקיבה שהיה יושב בשבת לפני טורנוסרופוס הרשע. אמר לו טורנוסרופוס מה יום מיומים. א"ל ר' עקיבה: מאי את גבר בגברי א"ל מאי אמרי לך ומאי אמרת לי? א"ל אמרת לי מאי שנא שבת משאר יומי ואמרי לך מאי שנא טורנוסרופוס משאר גברי. א"ל טורנוסרופוס: דצבי מלכא ליקורי. א"ל ר' עקיבא: שבת נמי דיצבי קמיה קב"ה ליקוריה. אמר ליה מי יימר דהוא שבתא דילמא ליתיה אלא חד בשבא או תרי בשבא דבזה גשמ' וטללים ובזה גשמים וטללים בזה משיב רוחות ובזה משיב רוחות בזה נולדים ובזה נולדים בזה מתים ובזה מתים? א"ל רבי עקיבא בעל הבית שעירב מטלטל ומכנים ומוציא מרשות לרשות. אמר לו טורנוסרופוס ממה ילפינן א"ל רבי עקיבא ממן שהיה יורד לישראל, שבכל יום היה יורד ובשבת אינו יורד א"ל הנח ממן שלא היה יורד בימינו.

Translation: A story involving Rabbi Akiva who was sitting on a Shabbos with Tineius Rufus, a Roman Governor of Judea. Rufus, the evil one, said to Rabbi Akiva: what makes this day, Shabbos, different from the other days of the week? Rabbi Akiva answered: What causes you to be different from other men? Rufus responded: What does that have to do with what I asked you? Rabbi Akiva answered: You asked me what makes this day, Shabbos, different from the other days of the week and I answered: what makes you, a Governor, different from the common people? Rufus responded: Because my Lord, the Emperor, wishes it. Rabbi Akiva answered: So too Shabbos is a special day because my Lord, G-d, wished it. Rufus responded: How do you know that today was meant to be a day of rest. Perhaps Monday or Tuesday was meant to be the day of rest? Does the rain and dew not fall on this day as it does on other days? Does not the wind blow on this day as it does on other days? Do not people die and give birth on this day as they do on other days? Rabbi Akiva answered: Shabbos is different from the other days of the week because only if a homeowner creates an Eruv may he carry from one domain to another on Shabbos. Rufus answered: From where did you learn that a homeowner must create an Eruv in order to carry on Saturday? Rabbi Akiva responded: we learned it from the Mohn that came down from Heaven for the benefit of the Jewish People. Each day it would fall from Heaven but it would not fall on Shabbos. Rufus answered: the Mohn cannot be the source for Shabbos since it does not fall from Heaven during our time.

נילף מדבר אחר א"ל ממאי נילף? מנהר סמבטיון, שהוא ריץ כל הימים, ובשבת הוא עומד. אמר ליה: אף בנהר הזה איני מאמינך, שאיני יודע את מקומו. אמר ליה רבי עקיבא לך אצל מעלה זכורים, שכל הימים הוא עולה בידו ובשבת אינו עולה בידו, המתים יודעים שהוא שבת, והחיים לא ישמרו אותה. ועוד א"ל לך אצל קבר אביך שכל ששת ימים מעלה עשן ובשבת אינו מעלה עשן הלך ובדק בקבר אביו וראה שבכל יום מעלה עשן ובשבת פוסק. אמ' שמא נגמר גזר דינו

1. Rav Achai (Acha) of Shabcha was born ca. 680 CE and passed away in the land of Israel in 756. Even though he was one of the greatest Torah scholars of Babylonia, he was not appointed to the office of Ga'on. Rav Acha's Sheiltot is the first known halachic work composed in post-Talmudic times for public use. Written in Aramaic, it contains traditions which are unknown to us from other sources. Each sheilta deals with a particular halakhic theme, somehow associated with the weekly Torah reading, and containing a halakhic question, solution, and aggadic homilies. (Bar Ilan Digital Library)

להבין את התפלה

א"ל חזור ובדוק מראש חזר ובדק וראה כך. א"ל שמא נתגייר אבי ולכך פוסק מקברו בשבת א"ל לך שאל את אביך, ויאמר לך. הלך ועשה כשפים והעלהו מקברו א"ל מה שבחייך לא שמרתה במיתתך אתה משמר? א"ל לא כי אלא מלאך שהוא ממונה עלינו דומה שמו והוא דן אותנו בכל יום ויום ובערב שבת עם חשיכה בת קול מכרזת ואומרת הנח להן לרשעים אלו וינוחו ומניחים אותנו כל השבת כולה ובמוצאי שבת עם חשיכה צועק המלאך שהוא ממונה על הרוחות ואומר חיזרו לגהנם שכבר השלימו ישראל את סדריהן. ולכך ישראל מזכירין בסדר מוצאי שבת ואומרין ויהי נועם י-י א-להינו עלינו במוצאי שבתות ובמוצאי ימים טובים שחל להיות בשבת. מיכן רמז לוייה נועם במוצאי שבתות.

Translation: Rabbi Akiva responded: Let us learn it from another source. From where shall we learn it? From the River Sambatiyon. It flows each day but not on Shabbos. Rufus answered: That is not a good source. I do not know where the River Sambatiyon is located. Rabbi Akiva answered: Then go to the ones who claim that they can raise the dead. Each day of the week, they can raise the dead but on Shabbos, they are unable to raise the dead. If the dead know the difference between Shabbos and the other days of the week, should not the living distinguish between Shabbos and the other days of the week? Rabbi Akiva further told him: Go to your father's grave. On the six weekdays, smoke rises from his grave but on Shabbos, the smoke does not rise from it. Rufus went to his father's grave and saw that the smoke rose on weekdays but did not do so on Shabbos. Rufus then responded: perhaps my father has completed his sentence. Rabbi Akiva told him to return to the grave and to watch it for a full week. Rufus went to visit his father's grave and saw that what Rabbi Akiva said was true. Rufus then answered: maybe my father converted to Judaism. Rabbi Akiva told him to go back and to ask his father. Rufus then used witchcraft to raise his father's soul. Rufus asked his father: is it true that you are now conducting yourself in a way in which you were not conducting yourself during your lifetime? Rufus' father answered: no. There is an angel appointed over us and Domeh is his name. He punishes us each day. On Shabbos eve as the skies darken a voice is heard from Heaven saying: leave the evil ones alone and allow them to rest. They are allowed to rest throughout Shabbos. On Motzei Shabbos after it is dark, the angel who is in charge of the souls calls out: return to Gehenom because the Jewish People have completed their study sessions. That is why the Jewish People recite Kedushah D'Sidra and the verse of V'Hiy Noam on Motzei Shabbos and Motzei Yom Tov that fall out on Shabbos. This is the source for our practice to recite the verse of V'Hiy Noam on Motzei Shabbos.

In this excerpt, the **שאיִלְתוֹת**, an early Gaonic work, directly links the fate of some of the deceased to the actions of humans on Earth.

The following is a brief excerpt from Professor Ta-Shma's article in which he explains the evolution of the practice (page 134):

כך הוא מהלך התפתחות המנהג לפי פשוטם של דברים. תחילה נקבעה קריאת פרק צא' בתהלים כ'סדר' למודי-ליטורגי (אולי לא יחיד), הנלווה לתפלת הערב-מן הסתם כל ערב, מחמת סכנת מזיקי הלילה. סדר זה נקבע כדי לסיים את התפלה, כמו בשחר, ביקדושא דסדרא, שחז"ל ייחסו לה חשיבות עליונה. לעניין זה נתקשר בתקופת המדרש ארץ ישראל המאוחר רעיון נוסף, שמועד חזרת הרשעים לגיהנום במוצאי שבת כרוך במועד סיום אמירת הסדרים בבתי הכנסת, כפי שראינו לעיל בתנחומא. העיקרון ששוכני הגיהנום נחים בשבת היה מוסכם במסורת כבר בתקופה התלמודית, כפי שעולה מן הסיפור על טורנוסרופוס הרשע, ובוודאי קדם לה תקופה ארוכה.

Translation: This is how the practice evolved. At first, our Sages instituted the practice of reciting Chapter 91 of Tehillim as a daily order of learning/prayer (perhaps not the only form of learning/prayer) to accompany the night prayer service-probably every night, out of concern for the dangers posed by demons at night. This set of prayers was added as a way of closing the night service in the same manner as the morning service was concluded, with Kedushah D'Sidra, a prayer to which our Sages attributed great importance. During the late Midrashic period in Israel another concept was added; that the time when the evil ones return to Gehenom on Motzei Shabbos is dependent on the time when the order of learning is completed in synagogue, as we learned earlier from a Midrash in Midrash Tanhuma. The idea that those who reside in Gehenom rest on Shabbos was already a part of the tradition during the Talmudic period as we see from the story of Tineius Rufus, the evil one, and certainly predated that period by a long time.

חזרתם של המתים לייסוריהם עם צאת השבת נובעת מעצמה מן העיקרון הנזכר. ואולם קשירת מועדו המדויק של רגע קריטי זה עם מועד סיום תפלת ערבית הארוכה של מוצאי שבת היא מחידושיה של התקופה המדרשית המאוחרת. במחצית הראשונה של המאה השמינית לערך, עם שקיעתו של מנהג אמרת הסדרים בתפלת ערבית של ימות החול, נתגבש הרעיון שקריאת הסדרים במוצאי שבת נועדה מלכתחילה לנצל קשר זה, כדי למעט את סבלם של הרשעים, כפי שנאמר בשאילתות. מן הטעם הזה נקבע עוד, שיש 'למשוך' את מילות האמירה ולבצע בניגון, כדי להרוויח זמן.

Translation: The concept that the deceased return to their punishment with the close of Shabbos flowed from the above mentioned concepts. Yet the link between that critical moment occurring so precisely timed with the end of the long Arvis service of Motzei Shabbos was a new concept that developed in the late Midrashic period. Approximately in the first half of the 800's, around the time when the practice of reciting an order of study as part of the weekday Arvis service came to an end, the notion that reading this set of learning on Motzei Shabbos for the purpose of reducing the amount of suffering for the evil, as we learn in the Sheiltos, was conceived. For this reason our Sages also instituted the rule that it was necessary to prolong the recital of the words of Tefilas Arvis and to say them with a tune in order that time would pass.

הרחקתה של אמירת הסדרים ממקורה הראשון וקירובה אל עולם המתים והשאל אופיינית להלך הרוח הכללי בימי הבניים. היא קשורה באופן מיוחד עם האמונה שהחלה משתרשת בישראל ממש באותו עת, היינו: בראשית המאה התשיעית, כי החיים יכולים להועיל למתים והיטיב את מצבם, בכמה וכמה דרכים, לפחות במהלך שנים עשרה החודשים הראשונים לאחר הפטירה. ואולם התפתחות רעיונית זו עוררה עמה עיון מחודש, וממילא גם הבנה מחודשת, שאלת הקשר של המנהג למוצאי שבת דווקא, למעט מוצאי ימים טובים, שאינם בכלל אמירה זו.

Translation: The path taken by the practice of reciting an order of Torah study from its origin to it becoming associated with the deceased and Gehenom was characteristic of the general mood of the Middle Ages. It was very much tied to the belief that became prevalent in the Jewish community at that time; i.e. the beginning of the 900's that the living can undertake actions that benefit the deceased and that improve their lot in several ways, but at a minimum, during the first twelve months after their deaths. The development of this theory brought with it a need to re-analyze, and in any case a new understanding, about the possible link between the custom and Motzei Shabbos particularly, as opposed to Motzei Yom Tovim that were not included within that practice.

SUPPLEMENT

The Life Of רבי עקיבא

Dictionary of World Biography: The Ancient World, Vol. 1, Frank N. Magill, editor, page 29

AKIBA BEN JOSEPH

Born: c. A.D. 40; probably near Lydda (modern Lod), Palestine

Died: c. A.D. 135; Caesaria, Palestine

Areas of Achievement: Religion and politics

Contribution: The most influential rabbi in the formation of Jewish legal tradition and Mishnah, Akiba is the one scholar most often quoted in the text. He espoused the unsuccessful cause of Simeon Bar Kokhba and died a martyr. The legends about Akiba have been almost as influential as his teachings and life.

Early Life

Akiba (also transliterated Aqiba) ben Joseph was born to humble parents. His father's name was Joseph, but tradition has no other information about him. Akiba worked as an unschooled shepherd. He was part of the lower class designated as the *am ha-aretz* (people of the land), a term of common abuse. While working for a wealthy man of Jerusalem whose name is sometimes given as Johanan ben Joshua, Akiba fell in love with his daughter, Rachel, who returned his love.

This period of Akiba's life has been variously treated in exaggerated fashion by legendary accounts. Based on the historically most reliable traditions from the Mishnah, it appears reasonably certain that Rachel, agreeing to marry him, was disinherited by her father, and the couple lived in poor circumstances. It was only after his marriage and the birth of a son (probably at about age thirty-five) that Akiba began learning how to read. After learning the basics, Akiba (probably now age forty) left both home and occupation to attend the rabbinic academy at Yavneh, in southwestern Judaea.

In the generation after the destruction of the temple (c. 80-100), the rabbinic assembly at Yavneh was presided over by Rabbi Gamaliel II (an aristocrat) as *Nasi* (Ethnarch) and Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah (a nonaristocrat) as *Ab Bet Din* (head of the rabbinic court). It was to the latter that Akiba went for instruction, but Hananiah directed him first to Rabbi Tarfon, who was in turn his teacher, friend, and then follower. Later, Akiba studied with Rabbi Nahum of Gimzo and then Hananiah himself. Thus by birth, training, and temperament, Akiba was aligned with the more liberal antiaristocratic wing of the academy, which traced its roots back to Rabbi Hillel. Finally, Akiba studied under Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, a leading figure of the aristocratic wing, whose tradition went back to Rabbi Shammai. Akiba's formal training came to a conclusion at Yavneh when in public debate Hananiah was defeated by Eliezer on the primacy of sacrificial duties over

Sabbath rest. As the debate was being concluded, the relatively unknown Akiba entered the debate and carried the day against Eliezer. At this point, Akiba was recognized as a rabbi. He began to teach, and pupils began to seek him out.

During this thirteen-year period of study, Akiba must have spent long periods of time away from home. He was encouraged and supported by his wife. While popular legend has undoubtedly exaggerated this aspect of Akiba's life, there is an underlying truth to the material, and, more important, his love and appreciation for Rachel are reflected in his teaching.

Life's Work

In the beginning, Akiba began to teach in Yavneh and spent most of his time actively engaging in the disputes of the rabbinical assembly. These must have been vigorous, for tradition indicates that there were punishments meted out to Akiba on several occasions for his lack of respect for procedure and that at one point he left the assembly and retired to Zifron in Galilee. Akiba was later invited to return to Yavneh by Gamaliel.

Akiba was a tall man, bald, muscular from years of outdoor work. He had transformed himself into a gentle scholar who stressed the value of polite behavior and tact. This emphasis on courtesy, however, did not stop him from entering into debates and arguing passionately for his convictions. As part of his philosophy, he upheld the authority of the *Nasi*, even when he was arguing strongly against the specific ideas that the *Nasi* held.

While he was never entrusted with either of the chief offices of the assembly, he was an important member of the inner circle. When Gamaliel was removed from office because of his arrogance, it was Akiba who was chosen to inform Gamaliel. Eleazar ben Azariah was made *Nasi* in his place, but he was a figurehead, and real leadership rested with Hananiah and Akiba. Having secured dominance of the assembly, Akiba and Hananiah brought the number of the assembly members up from 32 to 72, seating younger scholars to whom Gamaliel had refused admission because of their positions, which were similar to those of Akiba. Akiba seems also to have played an important part in the restoration of Gamaliel to the position of *Nasi*. Direction of the assembly was in the hands of Gamaliel, Eleazar, Hananiah, and Akiba. At that time, he was appointed overseer for the poor. In that capacity, he traveled widely in the area, raising funds. He traveled throughout Judaea, Cappadocia, Arabia, and Egypt.

In the fall of 95, Akiba, Gamaliel, Hananiah, and Eleazar were sent as an embassy to the Emperor Domitian to calm the imperial displeasure over the fact that a member of the imperial family, Flavius Clemens, had converted to Judaism. During this visit, the rabbis probably consulted the Jewish historian and imperial freedman, Flavius Josephus, for advice on imperial protocol and influence for their petition. Before this could be done, however, Domitian died, and Nerva was appointed emperor. Although there is no written record of what was done, it would have been unthinkable for the embassy not to have given the new emperor the formal greetings of the Jewish community and to have made expressions of loyalty. Nerva was seen as opening up a new era in Jewish-Roman relations.

At this point (c. 97), Akiba was between fifty and sixty years of age. He established his own school at Bene-Berak (near modern Tel Aviv). It was during this time that Akiba's most enduring work

was accomplished. In his teaching, he used a combination of demanding logic, rules of interpretation, and homely parables to put forth his ideas and ideals. He set the basic organization of what was to become the Mishnah into its six parts, and developed his ideas of interpretation of the Law based on the mystic significance of the text. In addition to a passion for social justice, he developed his unique positions on women, marriage, and other issues. None of these positions was achieved without extensive debate and discussion in Akiba's own school and in the assembly in Yavneh. There, the new leading opponent of Akiba was Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha. Many of the teachings of these men were later arranged into opposing debates, even when it can be shown that no such discussion took place. The two men had great respect for each other and were cordial in their relations, but they were not friends.

The first generation of Akiba's disciples-Elisha ben Abuyah, Simeon ben Azzai, and Simeon ben Zoma-did not fare well. Elisha became an apostate, Simeon ben Azzai became mad, and Simeon ben Zoma lost his life. The second generation of scholars taught by Akiba, however, provided the rabbinic leadership of the next generation. Of these, Rabbi Meir and Aquila deserve special attention. Meir, who had studied with Elisha ben Abuyah and Ishmael before coming to Akiba, was responsible for continuing the arrangement of the Mishnah following the principles of Akiba. He wrote down many of the sayings of Akiba, often giving the opposing view of Ishmael. Aquila was a Greek who converted to Judaism and studied with Akiba. With Akiba's encouragement, he made a new (or made revisions to the) Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. For a time, Aquila seems to have been in the confidence of both the Jews and the Roman officials.

The last phase of Akiba's life is a matter of considerable debate among scholars. Relations with Rome, never good under the best of circumstances, went through a series of radical shifts. There is no clear understanding of these years since the sources (Jewish Talmudic and Roman writers) preserve the misunderstandings of the principals. What part, if any, Akiba played in the formulation of Jewish positions is not clear until the very end of the conflict. Some indicate that he used his position as overseer of the poor to travel throughout the land and ferment revolt. Others suggest that his position was essentially nonpolitical and that he did not resist until religious practices, including prayer and study, were forbidden. There is no evidence that Akiba was active in politics or any other capacity during the troubles at the end of Trajan's reign through the beginning years of Hadrian.

In about 130, to ease some of the existing tension, Hadrian sought to rebuild the temple but insisted on placing a statue of himself in it and dedicating the temple to Jupiter Capitolinus. The implications of this position for the Jews clearly was not understood by Hadrian. There is a tradition, not in itself improbable, that the rabbis selected the now-aged Akiba to lead a delegation to Hadrian to reverse this stand. It is not known whether they reached the emperor, but their efforts, for whatever reason, were unsuccessful. Open and widespread rebellion broke out, which required five years and some of Hadrian's best military talent to quell.

Of Akiba's activities during that period, only a few events are clear. The Talmudic evidence shows that Akiba was a firm supporter of living within the restrictions of 125 that forbade circumcision and severely restricted the rights of Jewish legal courts and synagogue practices. At some point in the rebellion, Akiba joined other rabbis, including Ishmael, and gave his endorsement to Simeon Bar Kokhba. Bar Kokhba (meaning son of a star), the name taken by Simeon Bar Kosiba, carried

messianic implications; it was Akiba who applied the verse from Numbers 24:17, "The star rises from Jacob," to him. This stance was not without opposition. The Midrash records that "when Rabbi Akiba beheld Bar Kosiba he exclaimed, 'This is the king Messiah!' Rabbi Johanan ben Tortha retorted: 'Akiba, grass will grow in your cheeks and he will still not have come!'" (*Lamentations* 2:2). Thus, at least in the last stages, Akiba gave his support to Bar Kokhba, who claimed to be the *Nasi*, superceding the rabbinical *Nasi* at Yavneh; Akiba hailed him as Savior (Messiah).

Sometime after 130, and possibly as late as 134, Akiba was arrested and imprisoned by the consular legate, Tineius Rufus. For a while, he was allowed to have visitors and continued to teach. There is a strong element of folktale about these circumstances, and the possibility of the sources imitating the classical model of Socrates cannot be ignored. Akiba's final act of scholarship was to bring the religious calendar into order. Whether these activities were too much for the Romans to allow or whether Akiba's support of Bar Kokhba made him a symbol of resistance, Rufus brought him to trial in Caesaria and ordered his execution.

Summary

Akiba ben Joseph's most significant contributions were made to the organization of the Mishnah and the teachings in the Talmud. Akiba took the many rabbinic decisions and arranged them under these major headings: *Zeraim* (Seeds, on agriculture), *Mo'ed* (Seasons, on holidays), *Nashim* (Women, on marriage and divorce), *Kodashim* (Sanctities, on offerings), and *Teharoth* (Purities, on defilement and purification). These headings with their tractates (subheadings) were continued by Rabbi Meir and then codified by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi around 200. There are more than twenty-four hundred citations of Akiba in the Talmud; he is the most frequently cited authority.

Akiba championed a special method of interpretation of the text which he learned from Rabbi Nahum of Gimzo and which he retained even though the latter abandoned it. Akiba saw hidden significance in every aspect of the received text, whether it was an unusual wording, a special grammatical form, or an aberrant spelling. He was opposed on that count by Ishmael, who declared that the Torah was written in the language of men (with its possibility of error). Akiba made his points by Ishmael's method and then would extend the argument with his method. Akiba was fond of using parable to explain ethical points.

Akiba's area of special concern was marriage, where he championed attractiveness for women as a means of holding their husbands' affections and divorce for loveless matches. He opposed polygamy, which was still permitted and practiced by the aristocrats. As an extension of this stance, he fought for and gained the acceptance of the Song of Songs (*Shir ha-Shirim*) in the biblical canon, against heavy opposition.

As important as Akiba's work was, the stories about his life have exerted an equal influence on Judaism. Many of them are gross exaggerations and many are probably apocryphal, but the points which they make are consistent with the known teachings of Akiba.