



A Jewish Doctor in Medieval Spain and His Demon: *The Book of Delight* by Joseph Ibn Zabara

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CHAPTER I

Zabara beholdeth in his dream a man exceeding tall, who doth then rouse him out of his slumber, and give him victuals to eat. But first he disputeth with him concerning prayer and food and wine.

There lived a man in the city of Barcelona whose name was Joseph ben Zabara. From his youth up had he dwelt at ease, in amity with his friends and comrades. All that knew him became his friends, and they that were his friends loved him; among them was he respected and esteemed, bound to all by ties of affection. He for his part honored and exalted them, served them and healed them. For those of them that were sick he compounded suitable remedies, in accordance with his knowledge and his skill. In his love and charity he busied himself with his patients whether old or young, and served them, and ministered to them. Everyone, then, loved Joseph and sought his company eagerly; but as Scripture hath it (Psalms 117:5), Joseph was sold for a servant.

Came then a night when I, Joseph, was sleeping upon my bed. My sleep was sweet upon me, for that alone was my portion of all my labor. Things there are which are for the soul a weariness but for the body restful; other things are weariness for the body but restful for the soul. But sleep bringeth rest at once to body and soul, as all men know well.

Saintly Hippocrates was once asked, "What is sleep?" "In sleep," he replied, "the highest virtues descend into the depths of the being, to provide refreshed vigor for the body." Furthermore, Aristotle hath said, "Natural slumber compriseth a remedy for every malady." And Galen, "Natural slumber increaseth vigor and miniseth the evil humors." And finally hath the wise Jahja ibn Maseweih said, "Sleep in season bringeth the body to healthfulness."

And it came to pass as I slumbered that I saw an appearance

before me in my dream, in the likeness of a man exceeding tall, who did then rouse me as is the wont of a man who arouseth another from his sleep. "Arise, thou son of man," quoth he. "Wherefore slumberest? Awake thee, and look upon the wine as it floweth red. Arise, and recline at my side and eat whereof I have brought thee, as my means did avail."

So I arose in haste, just as dawn brake, and I beheld wine and bread and viands before me, and a lamp burning in the man's hand, whereof the light shone into every corner. Then I spake and said, "What may these be, good sir?" "My wine," he replied, "and my bread and my viands. Sit thee down, and eat and drink with me, for I love thee as thou wert of my mother's sons."

But after that I had thanked him for the kindness of the honor he did me, for his love and for the generosity of his hand, I said, "Sir, I may neither eat nor drink until that I have prayed to Him that discerneth my way and maketh my footsteps firm and vouchsafeth unto me all my needs. For indeed the choicest of the prophets and the chief of them that were called, our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace, hath said (Leviticus 19:26): 'Ye shall not eat anything with the blood: neither shall ye use enchantment nor observe times.' Thereby did he admonish the children of Israel that they should not eat until that they had prayed for their souls, for in truth *the blood* signifieth *the soul*. And so hath Saul said (I Samuel 14:34): 'Slay them here and eat; and sin not against the Lord in eating with the blood.' Furthermore he that doth eat before he have offered prayer and supplication is called fellow to the Destroyer and a worker of divination.

"Aristotle too was asked whether prayer or victuals should have first place. 'Prayer,' he replied, 'for prayer is the life of the spirit and victuals are but the life of the body.' Furthermore, prayer and study are not possible for a creature that is sated and a paunch that is stuffed. 'Which is better,' a philosopher was asked, 'victuals or prayer?' 'Abundance of prayer is helpful,' he replied, 'abundance of victuals harmful.' And a certain wise man hath said, 'Prayer doth result in victuals.'

Lastly a certain sage of the Sages hath said, 'Prayer is like as the spirit which goeth upward, whereas victuals are like as the flesh which descendeth downward, even into the earth.' "

Then said the stranger, "Pray, if such be thy desire; do as is good in thy sight." So I bathed my hands and face, and prayed before the Lord. Then I ate of all that was before me, for his soul was become dear in my sight. In the midst of the food I would drink of the water of the fountain, but he rebuked me and said, "Drink of the wine, for compared to it even pearls are nothing worth, and it is indeed a delight to the eyes." "But," I said, "I take no delight in it nor do I desire to drink it, for indeed I fear it." And he said to me, "Wherefore dost thou hate it in thine heart? Surely it maketh glad and rejoiceth the heart of man."

And I replied and said, "I cannot drink it; for he that drinketh of it doth become drunken until that he is stranger to his own brethren. Wine blindeth the eyes, darkeneth the whiteness of teeth, causeth forgetfulness, and rendereth the wise soul foolish. It maketh the faithful speechless and robbeth the elders of their wisdom. It weakeneth the powers of the body and paralyzeth the members in their functions, for it doth disturb the sinews which control them. It occasioneth many maladies, such as paralysis and stuttering and apoplexy, which doth corrupt all the members of the body and their functions. It revealeth the secrets of bosom friends and causeth dissension between brothers. Yea, wine is treacherous and doth strip a man's garments upon a cold day. And so hath the poet sung for any man that lusteth after wine:

Friend, let not thine heart incline
To the sweet seductive savor
Of smoothly flowing ruddy wine,
For bitter is its flavor.

You may cherish it now above fine gold,
It is but a treacherous friend;
It will desert and forsake you in shivering cold,
Your coat from your back will it rend.

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Again :

Guard thee well, beloved friend,
Lest to Bacchus thy neck thou bend ;
Else thy competitor will drive thy trade
While yet thou slumberest in noonday shade.

And also :

Of pomegranate juice mayst thou sip ;
It is sweet and gentle and mild.
But keep red wine far from thy lip ;
It is raging and fiery and wild.

“Further, our master Moses, may he rest in peace, forbade the Nazarites all wine and strong drink, in order that they might not become unclean and desecrate the vows by which they were hallowed all the days of their separation. Furthermore the priests were forbidden to drink wine when they came into the sanctuary to minister.”

Then did the man's wrath kindle, and he said, “Wherefore and why dost thou reproach wine and revile it and slander it, not slightly but with vehemence, and recall its defects and deny its virtues? Dost thou not know, hast thou not heard, that wine begetteth gladness and banisheth sorrow and sighing? If any one be afflicted in soul, he may drink and forget his misery. Wine assisteth, furthermore, in the digestion of food, and availeth to assuage pain better than doth rest, it causeth diseases of the nose to depart, and is salutary for maladies of the intestines. It causeth the urine to flow, if it be restrained, it maketh a weak heart firm, and riddeth the kidneys and the veins of humors. It is excellent for arousing appetites, and awakeneth generosity in the heart of a niggard. It prolongeth a man's prime and deferreth his old age; it sharpeneth the wits, maketh the face to shine, and brighteneth the senses. And furthermore our sages — may their memory be for a blessing — have said, ‘Wine and spices make a man open-minded.’ And because of the sin which he sinned against his own soul in vowing abstinence from wine, Scripture commanded the Nazarite to offer two turtles or two young pigeons

to expiate for his sin in afflicting his own person. Yea, and the poet hath sung :

Two fires there be of foaming liquids holden,
Of warfare grim the one, the other in chalice golden.
This one compounded of blood and tears,
A hero's glory, a mother's fears.
The other a sweet essence with genial flame
Kindled by friendship and love's great name.

And again :

As rise in heaven the shining planets
So in our hands rise shining goblets ;
But setting stars to westward descend
While descending cups in our bellies end.

And also :

They shall miserably moan and grievously sigh
For despising the fruit of the vine ;
The abstaining Rechabites shall wretchedly die
Of diseases fell and malign.

Like profitless water shall they be neglected
This gloomy folk, dour, severe ;
In disdain, yea blasphemy, have they rejected
What God and man doth cheer.

Then said I unto him, "Seeing thou hast freely proffered thy kindness, let not thy wrath be kindled. The ancient physicians, who were wise and prudent, prescribed that water be drunk at the time of eating for that it is heavier than wine, and by its weight causeth the food to descend to the uttermost parts of the stomach, whereby digestion is improved by reason of the proximity of the heat of the liver, which lieth underneath and lendeth its aid. But an hour or two after eating they prescribed that a little wine unmixed with water be drunk, to augment the natural heat and assist the digestive powers."

"Truly hast thou spoken," said he, "and I too adhere to thy discourse, for in truth little availeth little and much harmeth little."

thy counsel will be goodly; for lust and desire are foes to reason.' Plato was asked 'Wherefore is everyman's counsel better for others than for himself?' 'Because another's counsel is without the bias of his own desires,' he replied. The choicest among men is he that ruleth over his desires and serveth not his own pleasure. If choice were given to a lustful man, he would choose not to lust. Plato hath said, 'May I not survive the day that I despise what I have praised or praise what I have despised; for then, upon that day, desire would have prevailed over reason.' Therefore praise not a thing, except thou hast known it; then it were true love.

"Hippocrates hath said, 'Let no man trust in his wisdom until his reason have prevailed over his desire.' As a stone will not retain water until it be rendered like unto a sponge, so will wisdom not retain itself to those who pride themselves thereon. Just as wisdom prospereth not with one that is silent, so do reason and wisdom not prosper for a soul that is sated. And just as the lamp furnisheth no light in the midst of the water, so doth wisdom shed no light among the proud and haughty of spirit. So hath Solomon said (Proverbs 11:2): 'When pride cometh, then cometh shame; but with the lowly is wisdom.' "

"Good sir," said I, "I see that thy slave lad is wanton and rebellious, or perhaps some mischance hath befallen him. Bid him let the food be till the morrow, for lo, the morning star hath risen." So he called his slave again, and did rebuke him, and arose from his place to smite him, and he besought my mercy, but I believed him not, for seven abominations were in his heart.

Then did the slave hasten and bring a sheep, roasted entire, head, knees, entrails, and all. Quoth Enan, "As my soul liveth and the soul of my grandfather, all my admonitions to beware of thy desire I gave thee only for thine own benefit and thine own good." But I replied to him, "Thy love is as the love of the demon for his son: he doth embrace him and care's him until that he doth strangle him."

Said Enan, "Knowest the five things of which Aristotle said, 'They are wasted and avail naught?' " "Nay," said I, "I know not. Prithee tell me what they may be." Quoth he, "Rain upon an ass, a lamp by the light of the sun, a virgin wedded to one that is impotent, savory pottage placed before one that is drunk, and a kindness done to one who doth not perceive it." He continued, "All that I have said thou hast weighed in the balance of blame, and hast recognized neither kindness nor goodness. Nevertheless, inasmuch as thou art become my guest, and art come unto my house, it is my duty to watch over thee and to guard thy body and thy soul; but if thou accept not my admonition, then is thy blood upon thine own head. Therefore, beware of the eating of flesh; as Hippocrates hath said, 'Guard ye from eating flesh and make not your bellies burial places for cattle.' And Galen hath said, 'There is no fool as the man who filleth his belly with whatever he find, and doth rely that the red bile will digest the things that are sour, and the white bile the things that are salt, and the black bile the things that are greasy and fat.' For red bile is as the eagle: a stork may appease it, yet a heron may provoke it; and the black bile is as an ox: a mere lad may lead it, but when it is in rut, even a strong man may not stand before it; and white bile is like the lion: if it be not slain it slays. Therefore master the white bile as thou dost master thy slave, and make thy peace with the black bile as thou makest peace with an enemy, and humble thyself to the red bile as thou dost humble thyself to one that is greater than thee. The combination of many diverse victuals, inasmuch as they are not of a simple sort, doth restrain the stomach from digesting them, and render it unable to transmute them into blood. Eat no hard substances, for they do destroy the teeth and corrupt the digestion. Divide thine eating into thirds: a third for food, a third for drink, a third for rest. It availeth not if the belly become swollen or if thou visit the latrine oft."

So he purposed to refrain me from food by his words, as he had done continually, and to deceive me with his discourse.

Wherefore I put my hands forth to the shoulders of the mutton, that I might eat of them; but he said to me, "Beware lest thou eat of them, for they do contain the humors of the heart." So I reached for the breast, but he said, "Touch it not, even in thy dreams, for it delayeth digestion in the stomach." I raised my hands to the kidneys, whereupon he said, "They are the source of the urine, and the refuse of the blood." I lifted my hands to the knees; but said he, "They are very near the bowels, whence issueth the dung." So I turned my hand back to take of the tail, which continueth the spine. "Of no good is the spine," said he, "for it is filthy and bad and doth kill the wicked desire of him that taketh it. Therefore do the Chaldaeans call it *lekinah* for that it causeth weeping and lamentation."

Then said I, "Inasmuch as thou wouldst not that I eat of it, wherefore hast thou served it, or wherefore roasted it?" "Eat," said he, "of the portions that profit, as the hind legs and forelegs, which have naught of evil." So I stretched my hand forth to take of the legs which were nearest me, but he said, "Take not of the forelegs, but of the hind legs, for they are better; and take not the right, for the left is better, for that it is nearer the heart and the source of natural warmth; or better, take what portion I give thee, and leave the rest, and thereby be delivered from its evil." So he reached forth for the left leg, which was dry and scorched, and gave it me, and I ate it as a dog eateth a bone. Then he hastened and said to his servant, "Speedily remove the mutton, lest aught of its evil nature escape." But when I saw this shameful deed, I said in my heart, "It is but left me that I make my face brazen toward this niggard, whose soul doth mourn over a little flesh"; so I cried with a loud voice and a bitter soul, "Am I a dog that thou givest me bones? Is it written in any of the books of wisdom that men are to be fed on the bones of beasts and cattle? Give me flesh, for my soul doth long for it, else I take it by violence." And I reached forth and seized of the flesh ere it was removed from before me. Enan spoke up,

"Against whom criest thou, and speakest words of boldness?" And I said, "It is not mine to abide this."

Then said he to his household, "Have ye seen this lunatic that hath come unto my table to plunder and to rob my substance? All that was before me he did snatch and devour. Truly sayeth the proverb, 'We have purchased a cock, but he remaineth as partner in our domicile.' "

Then did he glower upon me with his eyes, and gnash his teeth, and swore an oath saying, "Hadst thou not come under the shelter of my roof beam and wert thou not in my house, I would chastise thee with rods and reprove thee as one of the fools." He continued in his speech to me, "Truly hath the Parsee sage said, 'The departure of a fool is better than the company of a wise man.' "

Then did I fear in my heart from before the sound of his words, and my soul nigh went from me when I heard his speech; I strengthened my heart, though no spirit was in me, and said, "Thou dost indeed not know who I may be, in that thou dost threaten to chastise me with rods; surely, I am Joseph, the Mighty, who did smite the lion within the pit."

But he replied, "Woe to the season when sheep and kidlets slay mighty lions." Then he continued, "Lo, I see thou takest pleasure in roast flesh, and dost disregard all diseases and maladies; do thou then eat thy fill of it, nor give thy stomach aught of rest; perhaps then there will befall thee what befell the king, whose joy was turned to sorrow and sighing." I asked, "And what did befall him?" He spake:

"Once a gardner came unto his garden in the winter season and there found lilies, and his heart rejoiced exceedingly when he saw them. So he gathered them, and disposed them in a handsome bowl, and brought them to the king, and placed them before him. The king marveled at them, and they were pleasing in his eyes, and he commanded that a hundred pieces of silver be given the gardner.

"Then said the king in his heart, 'This is a joyous and glad-some day': so he made a great feast, and sat him to eat and to

drink with his faithful ministers, and to rejoice in the festival of lilies. And the king had an only daughter, who happened to be big with child; so he said unto his servants, 'Call the young woman, that she may rejoice with us.' So his daughter came and sat before him; and he set before her the bowl of lilies, and to her it was more precious than pearls. Then she put forth her hand to take one of the lilies to smell of it, and there sprang up upon her face a serpent which was amongst the lilies. Her heart went out and she trembled, and she cried in her pains, for her travail was come upon her. But the child came forth from her womb and died, and the joy was turned to sorrow and sighing."

When Enan perceived that I regarded not all that he had spoken, and that I remained stiff-necked despite all his words, he said unto me, "Eat thou all the sheep; take no pity upon it nor spare it, for oftentimes a single eating restraineth many eatings." So he said to his slave, "Bring all that thou hast." The slave then brought a great bowl, like as a hogshead, filled with the flesh of an ox. As soon as it reached me, I reached forth my hand and my knife and began to eat of it.

But Enan said to me, "Beware of eating beef, for it is the source of every pain and doth beget maladies of the hands and of the feet and of the joints which do bind the members together, and it causeth diseases of the mouth and paralysis and constipation. Therefore fill not thy belly more, which indeed is open like a gate to devour all, but rather hearken to my counsel, and let not thine evil inclination beguile thee; put not into thy mouth that which will corrupt thy flesh." So he called to his servant and said, "Remove far from him this despised and rejected food and cause this death to depart from us."

Then did I take a joint of the meat into my hand and eat it to satisfy my soul. When he perceived that I was eating to satiety, his wrath was kindled so that he was well nigh seized of an evil spirit, and he cried out and said, "Who hath made thee to have dominion in my house? Meseemeth 'tis of thee

that the poet hath sung:

Lo this dull and witless wight
Beguiled me by his tongue's smooth might
Craving of food but a single bite.

Like Eden's garden my board in haste
I arrayed, but like Sahara's waste
His gluttony left it, bare and chaste.

And again:

The fellow hath charged upon my board
In panoply full, like a warrior lord.
He did eat
My bread and meat;
Victuals he devoured all my hoard.

Then he continued, "O thou who art wanting in heart, what will it profit thee if thou be surfeited and grow fat? Mayhap disease will leave its mark in thy bowels, and thou wilt rue thy gluttonous eating when thy malady is great, and thou wilt return to thy leanness and thy poverty and wilt bewail thy lust and thy appetite when thy flesh and body fail thee. Aye, what befell the fox will surely befall thee also." "And what befell the fox?" I inquired. He said:

"A certain fox was lean and poor of flesh. Ever did his food fail, and by reason of dire want was he reduced to the proportions of a hare. On a day his heart moved him to depart from his surroundings, so he turned hither and thither, and saw a certain garden, at whose goodliness and comeliness he marveled. He rejoiced in its fruits and delicious foods, but its walls were high, so that he availed not to overleap them and enter into the garden. So he went about the garden walls until that he found a certain breach, whereby he entered; and when he was come into the garden he did eat and become satisfied and grow fat: all the day he did but eat and sleep. But when harvest time came, there came the master of the garden to gather in his grapes from the vineyard which was in the garden. When the fox beheld the harvesters he was seized

with great pain and agony, 'For,' said he, 'now will they discover me and will surely slay me for to take my skin.' So he returned to the breach in the wall to depart as he had entered, but could not because of his excess of flesh and his fat; wherefore his agony and sorrow waxed greater. He fasted for three days and three nights, and afflicted his soul until that he returned to his pristine poverty and leanness; then did he depart by that same breach by which he had entered, weeping and wailing: 'Woe betide me! What availed it me that I did eat and drink and grow fat and gross? Lo, I have returned to poverty, even as I was aforetime.'

"Therefore," said Enan, "hearken unto my counsel and rebuke thy lust that it persuade thee not, and guard thee from diseases occasioned by change of habits."

But I said to him, "Utter no word of ill omen! Nay, I fear rather for my desire, lest it wane and diminish."

prayer, the Lord knoweth my meaning." "I know," said I, "the meaning of thy heart and its intent; yet the curse causeless shall not come."

Then went I for to see mine ass, and I came to the crib, but found it empty of straw and provender; nor could he complain of his sad estate; nay, I found him nigh strangled, for in such wise had the base slave muzzled his mouth that he bray not. Then came I nigh unto him to remove the muzzle, but when I had removed it he bit me, and came nigh to trampling me underneath his hoofs. So I took my cane and did belabor him until that his cries ascended the very heavens. Then did the Lord open the ass's mouth, and he said, indignant and wroth, "Wherefore smitest thou me, seeing that I be of the race of Balaam's ass?"

I was amazed at his speech and affrighted at his wrath, and thought, "Perhaps Satan speaketh from the ass's gullet"; but to the ass I said, "Wherefore should I not smite thee, seeing thou hast bitten me and nigh trampled me underneath thy hoofs?" Then said the ass, "Thyself thou satest down with that shameful man to thy pleasures and thy food, whereas I, being muzzled, watched through the night in hunger and thirst and great want." But I replied, "Am I a Balaam that understandeth sorcery? Whence should I know thou wert in hunger and in thirst, seeing that the base slave did declare unto me that thou hadst eaten sumptuously and wert satisfied, that thou hadst reclined and wert lying at ease in the corner-crib?"

Then did I cry out upon the slave saying: "Wherefore wert thou about to slay mine ass with hunger and thirst, and why didst thou afflict him thus exceeding cruel?" But the slave made answer and swore that he had put straw and provender before the beast, which had then eaten and become satisfied; but that the belly of the ass was like as that of his master, for that he left nothing remaining.

"But," said I, "if thou hast indeed given him provender in sufficiency, wherefore didst thou muzzle him that I should not hear his braying?" He replied, "Because that he is an ass of

evil habits, and is turbulent and doth cry out all the night. Further I was in fear lest he bite me with his tusks." "True is the saying," said I, "like slave like master. And the Arab hath said, 'The slave is but a crumb of his master's clay.' "

His master Enan overheard these remarks, and forged his tongue against me, and spake, "Wherefore dost thou set a snare for me by thy words and why hast thou reviled me, these three times?" But I answered him, "Is it for this that thou has brought me out of my city, that thou mightest slay me and mine ass with hunger?"

"Accursed be that day," said he, "whereon I brought thee out; let it not come into the reckoning of months! For I have brought thee to mine house only as a reproach and a disgrace unto myself, and as a punishment for my transgression and my guilt. Yet as my soul liveth and the soul of my grandfather Asmodeus, I will make thee cry 'Hold!' to thy folly, and I will take thee with my little finger and cut thee off and cause thee to perish utterly."

Then I looked upon him, and lo! his countenance was flames of fire and his eyes flashing sparks; and smoke issued from his nostrils as from a furnace. I inquired in a gentle voice, my soul being in great confusion, "My lord, let me but ask of thee and be not wroth, which Asmodeus was thy grandfather?" "The great prince Asmodeus," he replied, "who did lift King Solomon from his kingdom upon his pinion, and carried him afar from his country."

Then said I, "Woe betide my soul! I considered thee a dear friend and now I discover thee one of the demons, who do ensnare the spirits of mortals. Is this thy kindness to thy comrade? Wherefore didst not tell me thy race, wherefore didst thus deceive me, and bring me forth from my native country?" Said he, "And where was thine understanding and thy discernment, thy knowledge and thy wisdom? Did I not tell thee my name was 'Enan Hanatas, son of Ornan Hades?' Turn it about and thou wilt find it Enan the Satan, son of Ornan the demon*; son of Deathcourt, son of Mightydeath, son of

* The inversion is obvious in the original.

Deathshade, son of Dread, son of Confusion, son of Terror, son of Bereftment, son of Malady, son of Pestilence, son of Destruction, son of Minish, son of Evilname, son of Alvan, son of Javan, son of Scorn, son of Mishap, son of Plague, son of Brazen, son of Haughty, son of Sheram, son of Guilt, son of Deceiver, son of Stenchdom, son of Perish, son of Crooked, son of Curse, son of Abdai, son of Asmodeus, king of the demons, unto whom they were all servants."

When I heard all these names howling desolation seized upon me, dread and terror fell upon me; my heart forgot all joy and gladness, and tremors seized my flesh. And I cried, "Woe is me for my destruction, for here will my grave be. Truly have the sages said, 'A man's feet are pledged to bring him where fate would have him.' "

But he said unto me, "Fear not nor be dismayed, and let thy speech be calm, for, as live all the souls I have mentioned, I will not forsake thee until that I have accomplished that which I spake. Arise and walk in the land, in the length of it and in the breadth of it, and behold its beauty and its goodness; nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land."