

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# The Chains of Torah Transmission: Proof of Preservation or Cunning Concoction?

This is a cursory yet sufficient refutation of the appallingly weak claim that the chains of Torah transmission are unbroken. Only chains from tannaitic literature have been analysed, considering that chains written after the period of the Tannaim hinge on the chains composed during the tannaitic era.

Written by Abū Isrā'il  
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## Introduction

Jews claim there are uninterrupted chains of Torah transmission, which bear witness to the authenticity of the present day Torah. Countless websites, books and other material, produced by Jews, exhibit fanciful chains that extend from Moses to the present day. To the unkeen eye the chains give off the illusion of perfectly welded links, however, this is merely a deceptive façade. In this paper, we will discuss whether the chains of transmission are a construct designed to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Torah or whether they are genuine evidence of the Torah's preservation. We will conduct an analysis of every chain that exists in tannaitic literature and discover whether there are interlocking links or cosmic holes in the chains of transmission.

## Premise

To proceed, we will firstly layout the premise. The premise being: analysing the chains of transmission, in Jewish literature, using the methodology of Ḥadith Science. This science is unique to Islam and no other tradition can boast an equal discipline. In order to demonstrate the distinctiveness of this science we will reproduce a brief explanation regarding it, conveyed by the esteemed scholar Muḥammad Mustafa al-Azami:

Most past incidents escape our grasp and remain intangible, but if they do approach us indirectly (such as through written material) then the accuracy of the information becomes a key concern. When the Prophet passed into history, and preservation of the Book<sup>1</sup> and *sunna* came to rest on the Companions' shoulders, the community set up an intricate system to minimise the uncertainties inherent in the transfer of knowledge. This was based on the law of witness.

Consider this simple statement: *A* drank some water from a cup while standing. We know of this person's existence, but to verify this statement's truth based on reason is impossible. Perhaps *A* did not drink the water at all, or drank it by cupping his hands, or while sitting; none of these possibilities can be excluded by deduction. So, the case hinges on the truthfulness of the narrator and his accuracy as an observer. Thus *C*, a newcomer who has not seen the incident, must rely for his information on the eyewitness account of *B*. In reporting this event to others *C* must then specify his source, so that the statement's veracity depends on:

1. *B*'s accuracy in observing the incident, and his truthfulness in reporting it.
2. *C*'s accuracy in comprehending the information, and his own truthfulness in reporting it.

Venturing into the personal lives of *B* and *C* would not generally interest the critic or historian, but Muslim scholars viewed the subject differently. In their opinion anyone making statements about *A* was testifying, or bearing witness, to what *A* had done; likewise, *C* was bearing witness to *B*'s account, and so on with each

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<sup>1</sup> Quran.

person testifying about the preceding narrator in the chain. Validating this report meant a critical examination of each element within this chain.

This method was the genesis of the *isnād*<sup>2</sup> system. Originating during the Prophet's lifetime and developing into a proper science by the end of the first century A.H., its foundations lay in the Companions' custom of relating *ḥadiths*<sup>3</sup> to each other. [...]

The proliferation of *isnād* in the early centuries is electrifying. Suppose that in the first generation a single Companion was privy to a statement made by the Prophet. In the second generation there would presumably be at least two or three, perhaps ten, students of his transmitting this incident, such that by the fifth generation (the period of the classical authors) we may uncover thirty or forty people relating the same subject through different channels crisscrossing the entire Islamic world, with a few of them relating the information from more than one source. [...] Here is an example of a *ḥadith* relating to prayer:

*Abū Huraira<sup>4</sup> reported that the Prophet said: "The Imām<sup>5</sup> must be followed. So, recite takbir when he recites it, and bow down when he bows. And when he says, 'Allah hearkens to him who praises Him', say 'O Allah, our Lord, praise be to You'. And when he prostrates, you should prostrate. When he raises [his head] you should raise yours, taking care not to raise [your head] till he raises his. If he prays sitting, you should all pray sitting."*

This *ḥadith*, recorded at least 124 times, is reported by 26 third-generation authorities who unanimously trace its origin to Companions of the Prophet. [...] Limiting ourselves to just one Companion, Abū Huraira, we note that at least seven of his students transmitted this *ḥadith* from him; four of these belonged to Madīnah, two to Egypt, and one to Yemen. They in turn transmitted to at least twelve others: five from Madīnah, two from Makkah, and one each from Syria, Kūfa, Ta'if, Egypt, and Yemen. Similar patterns from the other Companions indicate that the *ḥadith* marked its presence in other lands (Baṣra, Hims, and Wasīṭ) while reinforcing itself in Madīnah, Makkah, Kūfa, Egypt, and Syria. The following figure, illustrating these massive chains of transmission, is of course for only one *ḥadith* out of tens of thousands.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Chain of transmission.

<sup>3</sup> Prophetic tradition containing the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.

<sup>4</sup> A companion of the Prophet.

<sup>5</sup> The individual that leads congregants in prayer.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Azami, *The History of the Quranic Text, from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, p. 167-169.

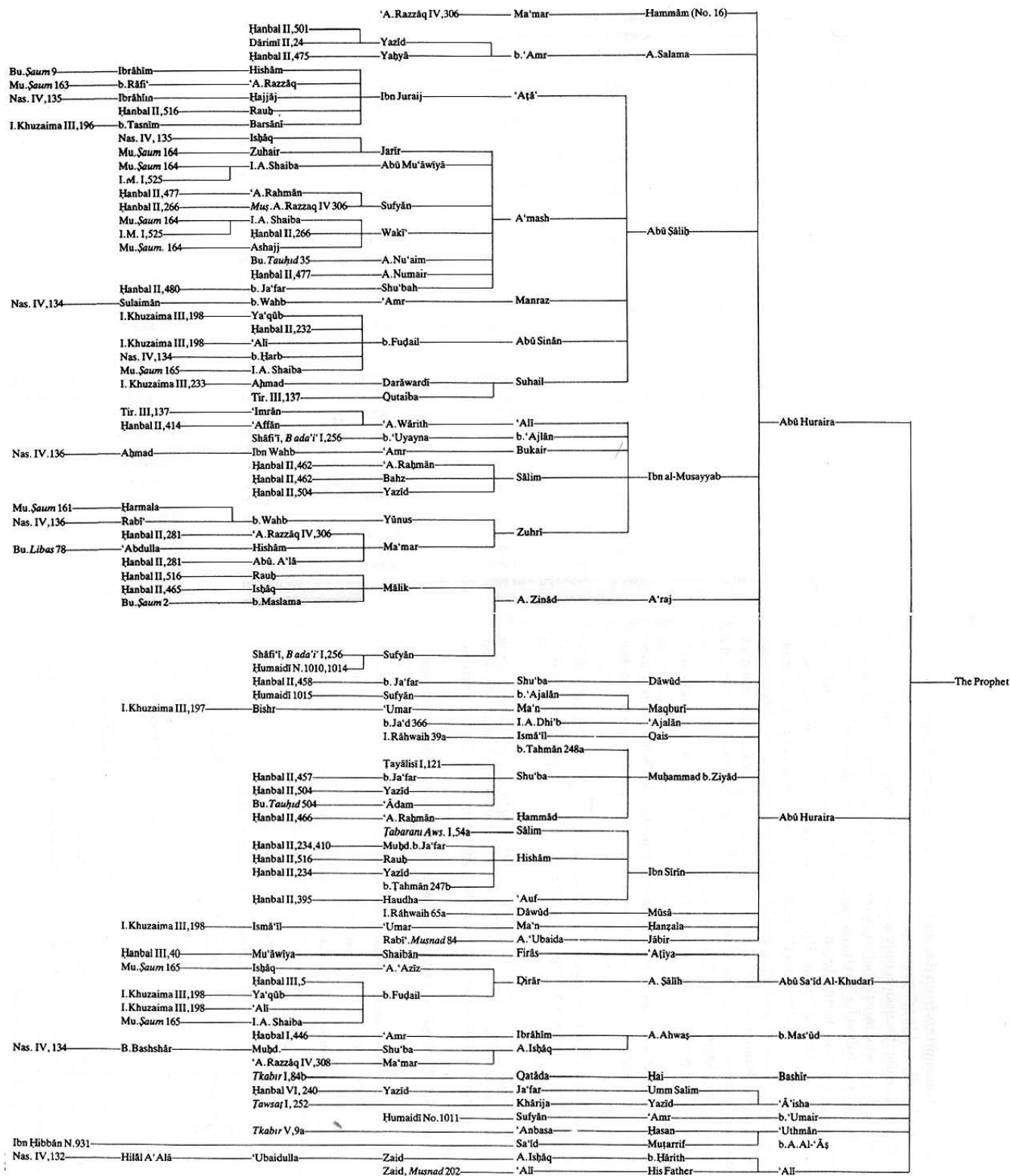


Figure 1: Chart of the transmission chains for the prayer hadith, source: Al-Azami, *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, p. 158-59.

As demonstrated in Figure 1, above, chains of transmission within the Islamic tradition interweave through countless avenues, where each *hadith* stems from thousands of different Companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to the present day. However, with such a network of chains purely for one *hadith*, how can we rely on the narrators and the substance of the *hadith* they have transmitted? This is where *Hadith Science* reveals its

purpose. Each chain in the Islamic tradition is evaluated by *muḥaddithīn* (critical *ḥadith* scholars), whose speciality is determining the authenticity of the chains of transmission – a meticulous task. Here are just three, out of an ocean of criteria, for determining whether a *ḥadith* is authentic:

- Trustworthy, morally upright, and identifiable narrators
- Precision in transmission with no ambiguity
- Connected chains without gaps between transmitters

If any of the abovementioned criteria are not met, the chain is deemed faulty. For example,<sup>7</sup> if there is a narrator within a chain whose biographical information is unknown, we are unable to establish the trustworthiness of this person. Merely ascending the academic ladder and being termed a “Rabbi” or “Imām” is not a reason to wave away criticism, because the individual may have indulged in dubious or morally reprehensible activities.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, *muḥaddithīn* would not rely on such a chain of transmission and dismiss it as unreliable or an outright forgery.

In humiliating comparison, chains of transmission within Judaism are completely linear, lacking chains stemming from a diverse number of Moses’ Companions, and deficient of interconnected links, as we shall soon observe. At this juncture we must pose some questions to our fellow Jews: Can Jews boast the same level of due diligence given to authenticating their chains of transmission, like within the Islamic tradition? Do Jews have chains of transmission for every *mishnah*, that trace their authority back to Moses, like in the Islamic tradition (where every *ḥadith* has an individual chain stemming from the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions)? Have rabbis dared to critically analyse the chains of transmission that exist within Jewish literature, like *muḥaddithīn*? The simple answer is no.

## The Chains

The earliest chains of transmission, in Jewish literature, appear during the period of the Tannaim when the Mishnah was redacted. There are only “four chains of transmission in tannaitic literature, three in the Mishnah and one in the Tosefta” (Tropper, 2013, p.35-36). Interestingly, all four chains are for independent rabbinic customs, whereas the chain mentioned in Pirkei Avot is a generalised chain to establish the authority of the sayings of the Mishnaic Sages, in an attempt to prove that the *masekhet* (tractate) was not an invention fabricated by the Rabbis, but a tradition stemming from Moses.<sup>9</sup> This is problematic in and of itself, since it suggests that the chains were not originally meant for the transmission of the written Torah itself, rather they served as evidence solely for a handful of *halākhic* ordinances and rabbinic ethics. In essence, no chain in tannaitic literature is exclusively for the transmission of the Torah itself.

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<sup>7</sup> For an example see: *The History of the Quranic Text, from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, p.172-174.

<sup>8</sup> Such as being inclined to lie, steal, forge stories, miss prayers, etc.

<sup>9</sup> Ovadiah Bartenura’s commentary on Pirkei Avot, 1:1.

Regardless of this issue, for the sake of highlighting the immense pettiness of the chains of transmission in the Jewish tradition in comparison to chains in the Islamic tradition, we will continue. The four chains appearing in tannaitic literature are as follows:

1. Mishnah Peah 2:6
2. Tosefta Yadayim 2:7
3. Mishnah Yadayim 4:3
4. Mishnah Eduyyot 8:7

[Since Pirkei Avot deviates from the common literary style of the other *masekhtot* (tractates) of the Mishnah, we will regard it as an entirely independent book to the Mishnah, therefore, we have not listed it above, but we will analyse the chain of transmission contained within Avot separately at the end of this paper].

Before analysing the chains above, we need to identify which chain is the earliest chain of transmission. The underlying reason is to illustrate how chains of transmission in Jewish literature evolved through the ages and how chains written earlier in history, in their primitive forms, were refined by later scribes to cement gaping holes they had discovered.

But how do we establish which one of the four chains listed above is the earliest in light of what the Gamera says? The Gamera states<sup>10</sup> that the Mishnah was not compiled with any particular sequence (the Tosafists<sup>11</sup> also confirmed this), which suggests that the Mishnah in its contemporaneous form is not the arrangement it was formerly in. Therefore, it is almost impossible to ascertain which chain is the earliest when reading the Mishnah, thus, the only reliable method of determining the earliest chain is to rely on philology.

Philologists deduce that shorter forms of a text are earlier than their lengthier counterparts, which is attested to by chains that developed later.<sup>12</sup> For example, the chain Maimonides mentions in his *Mishneh Torah* is longer than the chain mentioned in Pirkei Avot, because he mentions transmitters that are absent from the earlier chain of transmission. From this, we understand that the chain in the *Mishneh Torah* is a later concoction, created to compensate for the deficiency in the earlier chains of transmission.

Based on this philological premise, Amram Tropper concludes that Mishnah Peah 2:6 is the earliest chain.<sup>13</sup> The second earliest chain is Tosefta Yadayim 2:7.<sup>14</sup> The third earliest

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<sup>10</sup> Talmud Bavli, Bava Kamma 102a.

<sup>11</sup> Tosafot on Bava Kamma 102a.

<sup>12</sup> Tropper, Amram. *Simeon the Righteous in Rabbinic Literature: A Legend Reinvented*, BRILL, 2013, p.35.

<sup>13</sup> Tropper states, "Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, who features prominently in Avot (and in the other tannaitic chains), is missing from Nahum the Scribe's chain but his absence is well warranted since Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai's star only rose after the destruction of the temple and this story is said to have taken place during temple times." (Ibid, p.38-39).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.45.

chain is Mishnah Yadayim 4:3, and the fourth chain is Mishnah Eduyyot 8:7.<sup>15</sup> The final chain to be penned was Pirkei Avot, based on the philological premise above.

## Chain Analysis

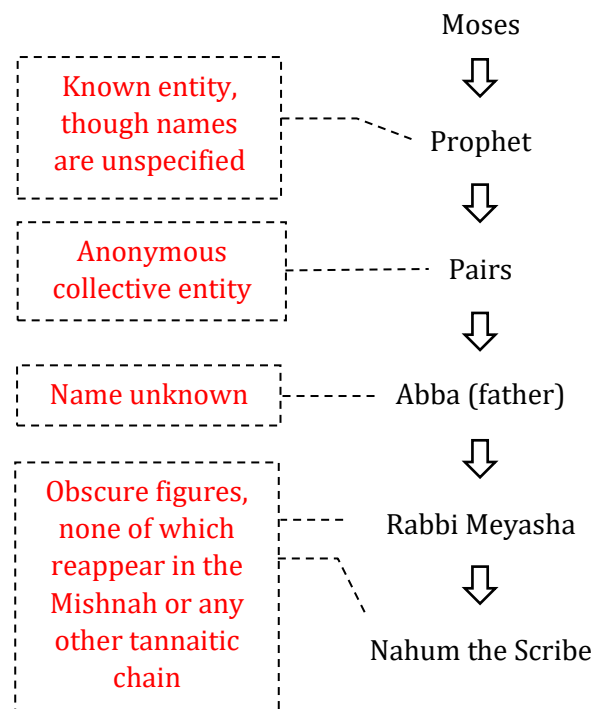
**Chain One:** Now that we have established the chronology of the chains (earliest to latest), we can begin to analyse each chain and identify their inconsistencies, using the methodology of Ḥadith Science. We commence by quoting the earliest chain, Mishnah Peah 2:6. The chain is as follows:

*Nahum the scribe said: I have a tradition from Rabbi Meyasha, who received it from Abba, who received it from the pairs, who received it from the prophets, a halākhah of Moses from Sinai...*

אָמַר נְחוּם הַלֵּבֶר, מִקְּבֵל אֲנִי מֵרַבִּי מֵיֶאֱשָׁא  
 נִשְׁקָבֵל מֵאַבָּא, נִשְׁקָבֵל מִן הַזּוּגוֹת, נִשְׁקָבֵלוּ מִן  
 הַנְּבִיאִים, הַלֵּכָה לְמֹשֶׁה מִסִּינַי

Instantaneously there is a problem. Rabbi Meyasha and his father (Abba) do not appear in any other chain of transmission from tannaitic literature, neither does Nahum the scribe. Thus, all three transmitters are obscure figures,<sup>16</sup> not to mention the so called “pairs” who are an anonymous entity, about whom we will elucidate later. So, this begs the question, how can we trust a chain that has unknown transmitters, whose biographical information is non-existent, whose contemporaries have not vouched for their credibility, hence we cannot determine their reliability or trustworthiness?

In conclusion, this chain is defective, according to Ḥadith Science standards, because it is impossible to determine



<sup>15</sup> Why did Tropper conclude that Mishnah Eduyyot 8:7 is a later chain than Mishnah Yadayim 4:3, even though both are carbon copies of one another? Isn't it conceivable that both chains were written simultaneously or in the same period? Tropper explains his conclusion convincingly by stating: "Since the chains in Mishnah Eduyyot and Mishnah Yadayim are the same, word for word, it stands to reason that one is earlier and more original than the other but at first glance, it is not clear which chain is the original and which the later copy. However, comparisons to the respective parallel halakhot in the Tosefta seem to clarify that the chain of transmission in Mishnah Eduyyot was copied from Mishnah Yadayim." (Tropper, n12, p.43).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p.38-39; Maimonides lists thirty-seven individuals who never reappear in the Mishnah, except once. Among the thirty-seven are Nahum the scribe and Rabbi Meyasha (Maimonides Introduction to the Mishnah 29:3-4).

the trustworthiness of at least three men<sup>17</sup> within this chain. This conclusion is detrimental to all the other chains that appear after this particular chain, since they are essentially derived from this chain, the earliest chain in existence in all of Jewish literature.

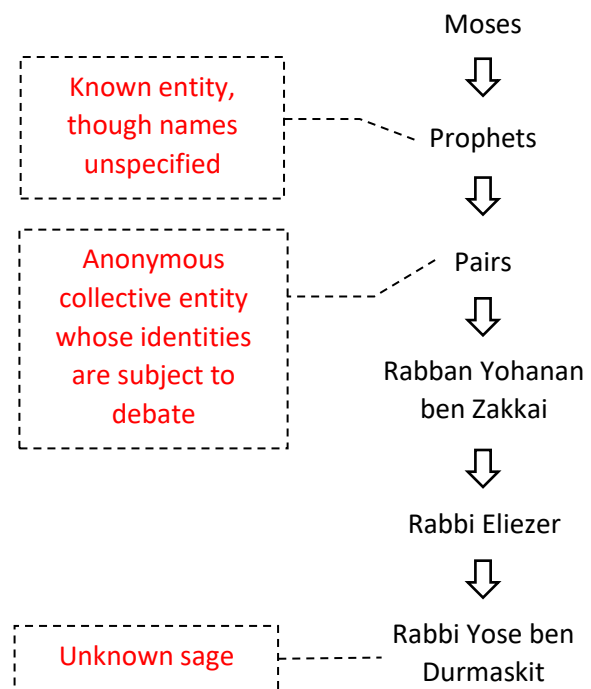
**Chain Two:** We will now analyse the second earliest chain, Tosefta Yadayim 2:7. The chain is as follows:

*Rabbi Yose ben Durmaskit said... [that Rabbi Eliezer said]: thus, I received from Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, he received it from the Pairs, and the Pairs from the Prophets, from Moses, a law from Sinai...*

א"ר יוסי בן דורמסקית... כך מקובלני מרבן יוחנן בן זכאי שקיבל מן הזוגות והזוגות מן הנביאים ממשה הלכה למשה מסיני

Firstly, the narrator of this chain, Rabbi Yose ben Durmaskit, is a relatively unknown sage,<sup>18</sup> so how can we rely on him to have accurately transmitted this chain from Rabbi Eliezer? As we mentioned previously,<sup>19</sup> being called a Rabbi is not a valid argument to accept what an individual says, nor is it a justifiable reason to wave away criticism.

Secondly, Yohanan ben Zakkai receives from the “Pairs” (*zugot*), who are supposedly a collective entity. The narrator of this chain presupposes that we are aware of the identities of the Pairs, yet their identities are not revealed to us prior to the composition of Pirkei Avot, which is a later insertion to the Mishnah (as we have already established),<sup>20</sup> and even then, Avot does not refer to them as *zugot* (זוגות). Jews may argue that the identities of the Pairs are mentioned in Mishnah Chagigah 2:2. However, they are not called *zugot* there either. One may argue that since they appear in pairs in Mishnah Chagigah, we can infer they are the Pairs being referred to. However, such an assumption would be problematic since



other pairs are also mentioned in the Mishnah, who were contemporaries of Yohanan ben Zakkai and some who preceded him. For example, Admon and Hanan ben Avishalom,<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> As stated by Maimonides in his Introduction to the Mishnah, Nahum the scribe and Rabbi Meyasha do not reappear, therefore they are obscure individuals. As for Meyasha’s father (Abba), he is an entirely anonymous figure.

<sup>18</sup> Joshua Kulp’s commentary of Mishnah Yadayim 4:3

<sup>19</sup> See page 5.

<sup>20</sup> See page 6.

<sup>21</sup> Mishnah Ketubot 13:1



Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel,<sup>22</sup> Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Judah ben Bathyra,<sup>23</sup> all appear in pairs.<sup>24</sup> So how are we to distinguish whether the Pairs being alluded to in this chain referred to those listed above or to those mentioned in Pirkei Avot?

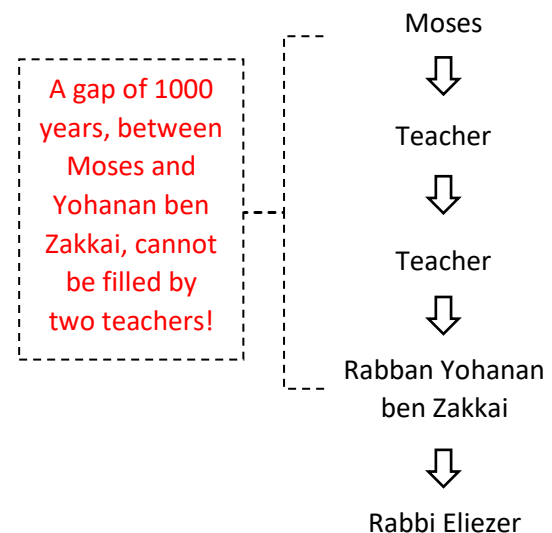
In conclusion, this chain is also dubious. If we recall the premise we established at the beginning of this paper, using the methodology of Ḥadith Science, narrators must be morally upright and identifiable. Accordingly, since Yose ben Durmaskit cannot be identified, his trustworthiness cannot be established either. Therefore, we cannot depend on him to relate a chain authentically. Moreover, according to the Science of Ḥadith, there should be precision in transmission without ambiguity, yet this chain is very vague, as it does not reveal the identities of the Pairs (who supposedly span five generations),<sup>25</sup> leaving us to speculate as to who they were.

Chains Three and Four: Finally, we will analyse the final two chains, Mishnah Yadayim 4:3 and Mishnah Eduyyot 8:7. However, we will only quote Mishnah Yadayim since the chain in Mishnah Eduyyot is a carbon copy of Mishnah Yadayim's chain of transmission. The chain in Mishnah Yadayim 4:3 is as follows:

*I received a tradition from Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai who heard it from his teacher, and his teacher from his teacher, and so back to a halakhah given to Moses from Sinai...*

מִקַּבֵּל אֲנִי מֵרַבֵּן יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכַּי, וְשִׁשְׁמֵעַ מֵרַבּוֹ, וְרַבּוֹ מֵרַבּוֹ עַד הַלְכָה לְמֹשֶׁה מִסִּינַי

The word אֲנִי (*I*) in this chain refers to Rabbi Eliezer, a student of Yohanan ben Zakkai, who was mentioned in the previous chain we critiqued. In this particular chain, we notice how it is even vaguer than before. Whilst it is conceivable that Rabbi Eliezer received from Yohanan ben Zakkai (because of their teacher-student relationship), what is perplexing is how only two teachers could have bridged the gap between Yohanan ben Zakkai and Moses, a gap of one thousand years or more!



Since one of the prerequisites for a chain of transmission to be considered authentic is to have connected chains without gaps, we can conclude that this chain does not meet the criteria due to a massive hole between its links. Tropper suggests that the two identical chains (Mishnah Yadayim 4:3 and Mishnah

<sup>22</sup> Mishnah Ketubot 5:5

<sup>23</sup> Mishnah Eduyyot 8:3

<sup>24</sup> Other pairings are also mentioned in the following sources: Mishnah Eduyyot 7:1 and Mishnah Bekhorot 1:6.

<sup>25</sup> According to Pirkei Avot.

Eduyyot 8:7) were actually simplified versions of the chain mentioned in Tosefta Yadayim 2:7,<sup>26</sup> hence its brevity. Regardless, we conclude that this chain is utterly unreliable, according to Ḥadith Science standards.

In summary, we have established that the four chains analysed above do not meet the high standards required by Ḥadith Science to be considered authentic, as some chains have anonymous transmitters, others are outright vague, and worse still, two have cavernous gaps. Hence, all four chains are unreliable, or at most, fabrications.

## Pirkei Avot

In this final section, we will analyse the chain mentioned in Pirkei Avot. Avot's chain is said to be written after the four aforementioned chains, due to its length and detail.<sup>27</sup> The chain of transmission in Pirkei Avot<sup>28</sup> is as follows:

*Moses received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly...*

מֹשֶׁה קָבַל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי וּמָסְרָהּ לַיהוֹשֻׁעַ  
וַיהוֹשֻׁעַ לְזִקְנִים, וְזִקְנִים לְנָבִיאִים, וְנָבִיאִים  
מִסְרֻוֹהָ לְאַנְשֵׁי כְנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה

*Shimon the Righteous was among the last surviving members of the Great assembly...*

שִׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק הָיָה מִשִּׁירֵי כְנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה

*Antignos of Socho received the tradition from Shimon the Righteous...*

אַנְטִיגְנוֹס אִישׁ סוּכּוֹ קָבַל מִשִּׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק

*Yossei the son of Yoezer of Tzreidah, and Yossei the son of Yochanan of Jerusalem, received the tradition from them...*

יוֹסֵי בֶן יוֹעֶזֶר אִישׁ צְרֵידָה וַיֹּסֵי בֶן יוֹחָנָן אִישׁ  
יְרוּשָׁלַיִם קָבְלוּ מֵהֶם

*Joshua the son of Perachia and Nittai the Arbelite received from them...*

הוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה וְנִתַּי הָאֶרְבֵּלִי קָבְלוּ מֵהֶם

*Judah the son of Tabbai and Shimon the son of Shotach received from them...*

יְהוּדָה בֶּן טַבַּאי וְשִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן שְׁטַח קָבְלוּ מֵהֶם

*Shmaayah and Avtalyon received from them...*

שְׁמַעְיָה וְאַבְטָלְיוֹן קָבְלוּ מֵהֶם

*Hillel and Shammai received from them...*

הִלֵּל וְשַׁמַּי קָבְלוּ מֵהֶם

*Rabban Yochanan the son of Zakkai received the tradition from Hillel and Shammai.*

רַבָּן יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכַּאי קָבַל מֵהִלֵּל וּמִשַּׁמַּי

<sup>26</sup> Tropper, n12, p.45.

<sup>27</sup> Tropper states: "However, there are four chains of transmission in tannaitic literature, three in the Mishnah and one in the Tosefta, which bear a striking resemblance to Avot's chain of transmission and most likely antedate it." (Ibid, p.35-36).

<sup>28</sup> Mishnah, Pirkei Avot, Chapter 1-2

[In the above-mentioned chain, the wisdom sayings that are attributed to some transmitters have been omitted for the sake of brevity].

The chain of transmission begins by saying, "Moses received the Torah from Sinai" (מִשֵּׁה (קִבְּלַת תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי), however, there's contention regarding the word Torah (תּוֹרָה). Medieval commentators on Avot disagreed as to whether the word Torah referred to both the written and oral laws or whether it was a reference exclusively to the oral.<sup>29</sup> Regardless, for the sake of argument, since two separate chains do not exist (one for the written law, the other for the oral law), we will take the most charitable opinion, that Torah here refers to both written and oral laws.<sup>30</sup>

What is interesting about this chain is that several new figures appear within it that were not present in the previous four chains. The additional figures are as follows: Joshua, the Men of the Great Assembly (*Anshei Knesset HaGedolah*), Shimon the Righteous, Antigonus of Socho, and the list of the names from the collective entity – the Pairs. This suggests that Avot inserted additional individuals into the chain to serve as an elaboration and refinement of the previous vague chains.<sup>31</sup>

The first difficulty that arises is attempting to identify who the men of the Great Assembly were. Maimonides, in his Introduction to the Mishnah,<sup>32</sup> states that the Great Assembly comprised of one hundred and twenty individuals. However, this claim is unsubstantiated since no tannaitic source reveals the identities of the hundred and twenty. Just as in previous chains where the Pairs were an anonymous entity, so too are the men of the Great Assembly within Avot's chain. The reality is, the Tanakh makes no mention of the Great Assembly,<sup>33</sup> nor is there any trace of them within Second Temple literature, nor does any early material exist regarding their activities. Tannaitic sources, contemporary to Avot, do not provide any additional insight, besides parroting what has already been mentioned within Avot.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the Great Assembly is an institution shrouded in mystery and Avot is our earliest and sole source of its existence. The only sources that attribute numerous activities to the Great Assembly are later sources from the Amoraim, which have no historical basis.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the Great Assembly is likely a non-existent institution, a figment of Avot's imagination, inserted to bridge a gap between the links in the chain of transmission.

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<sup>29</sup> See medieval commentaries on Avot by Simeon ben Zemah Duran and Menahem ben Solomon Meiri (who consider תּוֹרָה to only refer to the oral law), Jacob ben Samson (who considers תּוֹרָה to refer to both oral and written laws).

<sup>30</sup> Jonah ben Abraham Gerondi's commentary on Pirkei Avot, 1:2.

<sup>31</sup> Tropper, Amram. *Simeon the Righteous in Rabbinic Literature: A Legend Reinvented*, BRILL, 2013, p.39.

<sup>32</sup> Maimonides' Introduction to the Mishnah, Chapter 8.

<sup>33</sup> Tropper, n15, p.26.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.23.

<sup>35</sup> Tropper states, "The Great Assembly appears in tannaitic literature only twice outside of Avot, once in the Mekhilta deRabbi Ishmael and once in Sifre Deuteronomy, and on both occasions, the Midrashic works merely cite Avot 1, 1. 33. Thus, Avot 1, 1- 2 is our earliest source for the Great Assembly and the sole evidence for the tannaitic conception of this institution". Tropper continues: "Later amoraic sources are also of no assistance because even though they attribute various activities to the Great Assembly, there is no reason to assume that these late attributions were based on ancient traditions or other historical evidence." (Ibid, p. 33).

The second issue is regarding Shimon the Righteous, who was allegedly the only remaining member of the Great Assembly. Shimon had two sons, of whom he wanted the youngest to succeed him as High Priest. However, the older son, Shimei, protested against this. Since none of Shimon's sons appear within this chain of transmission, it is safe to assume that none of his sons succeeded him.<sup>36</sup> In lieu of his sons, Avot asserts that Antigonus of Socho, whose name is of Greek origin,<sup>37</sup> inherited the Torah from Shimon. However, Jewish sources admit that Antigonus never met Shimon the Righteous, because he lived several generations after Shimon's death, so how could Antigonus have received the Torah from Shimon?<sup>38</sup> The latest conceivable date of Shimon's death is 270 BCE, whereas Antigonus lived around 190 BCE – an 80 year gap!<sup>39</sup>

Additional evidence suggests that Antigonus and Shimon are intruders in the chain to fill the gap between the Great Assembly and the two Yosseis – a 100 year gap! In Avot's chain, the first Pair (Yossef ben Yoezer and Yossef ben Yochanan) received the Torah "from them" (1:4). This wording is peculiar because it is in the plural, whilst Antigonus is mentioned solitarily. This phrase was highly problematic for ancient scribes, such that some manuscripts have the singular, "from him", rather than the plural, "from them". Therefore, we can infer that the plural "from them" was originally a reference to the Men of the Great Assembly, not Antigonus. Consequently, both Shimon and Antigonus are later insertions into the chain (introduced by later scribes).<sup>40</sup> Even if we disregard this conclusion, one cannot deny that we know little to nothing about Shimon and Antigonus, except for the maxims attributed to them, and even then, there's no way of verifying whether those attributions are authentic.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, both are obscure figures within this chain.

Another issue, which is no longer regarding obscure and anonymous personalities, is about the large periodic gap between two Pairs. As Humphrey Prideaux points out,<sup>42</sup> Jewish writers only credited Shmaayah and Avtalyon with six years of office in the Sanhedrin, whilst their predecessors, Judah ben Tabbari and Shimon ben Shetach, enjoyed one hundred and one years in office. Such a lengthy time in office, Prideaux says, is a "stretch beyond credibility" (Prideaux, 1858, p.441). From this, we gather that Jewish Chronologers were forced to credit Judah ben Tabbari and Shimon ben Shetach with a lengthy-term to fill a gaping hole within the chain of transmission and to give an illusion

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<sup>36</sup> Bader, Gershom. *The Jewish Spiritual Heroes*, Volume I; The Creators of the Mishnah, Simon the Just.

<sup>37</sup> Tropper, n31, p.56.

<sup>38</sup> Gershom, n20, Volume I; The Creators of the Mishnah, Antigonus of Socho.

<sup>39</sup> Lauterbach, Jacob. *Midrash and Mishnah: A Study in the Early History of the Halakah*, p. 39-40.

<sup>40</sup> Bickerman, E.J. *Studies in Jewish and Christian History*, p.556.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.555; The historical Shimon's life is mostly skewed. The Talmud (Talmud Bavli, Yoma 39a) attributes several miracles performed by Shimon, however, they are later interpolations, since the accounts mentioned in the Talmud are not found in Ben Sira – an earlier source. Ben Sira's account of Shimon's life, written a century after Shimon's death, is completely oblivious of the miracles that Shimon allegedly did. In summary, rabbinic literature does not accurately portray Shimon's life, as it is mostly based on speculation and conjecture. Therefore, there is no way of knowing who Shimon transmitted the Torah too, though it is understandable why he would have been added to the chain of transmission at a later date.

<sup>42</sup> Prideaux, Humphrey. *An historical connection of the Old and New Testaments*, Volume 2, p.441.

that the pairs of transmitters were connected,<sup>43</sup> when in reality Shmaayah and Avtalyon did not receive from their predecessors Judah ben Tabbar and Shimon ben Shetach.

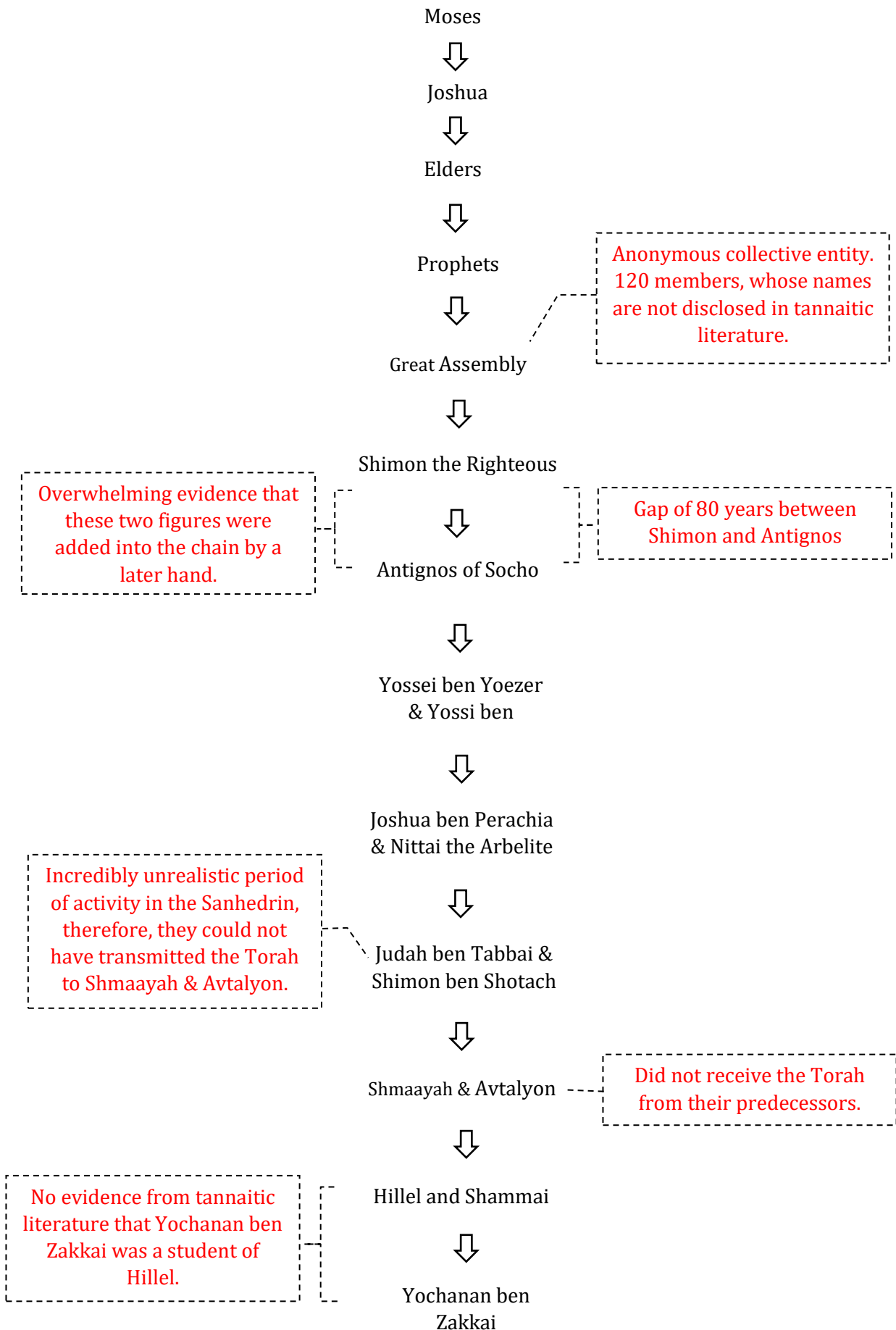
Lastly, there is no indication in Tannaitic or early Amoraic sources that the last transmitter, Yohanan ben Zakkai, was a student or even contemporary of Hillel. Only later texts, based on the presumptuous assignment of a direct successive link between Hillel and Yohanan ben Zakkai in Avot, assigned a teacher-student relationship between the two.<sup>44</sup> Although some may dismiss this protruding fact, if we, for the sake of argument, accept the claims of later sources that Yohanan ben Zakkai was a disciple of Hillel, we find, according to their admission, that he was the weakest of Hillel's students.<sup>45</sup> If this was so, why was he inserted into the chain? Why is there not a single early chain of transmission in existence that contains the names of Hillel's worthier students, such as Yonatan ben Uziel, who excelled above and beyond all other students? Could it be that these chains are actually later forgeries?

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<sup>43</sup> There is likely no uncertainty that Shmaayah and Avtalyon succeeded Judah ben Tabbar and Shimon ben Shetach, however, the doubt is whether they received direct ordinance from Judah ben Tabbar and Shimon ben Shetach and inherited the Torah from them, since the dates when Judah ben Tabbar and Shimon ben Shetach died are unknown (Gershom, n38, Judah ben Tabbar and Simeon ben Shetach).

<sup>44</sup> Neusner, Jacob. *The Rabbinic Traditions About the Pharisees before 70*, Part 1, p.14-15.

<sup>45</sup> Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 134a; Avot D'Rabbi Natan 14.



## Conclusion

In summary, we have demonstrated how the earliest chains in the Mishnah and Tosefta are scattered with obscure and anonymous transmitters, such as Nahum the scribe and Rabbi Meyasha and his father. We have also explained how the members of the collective entities, the Great Assembly and the Pairs, are anonymous, whose identities cannot be concretely established using Tannaitic literature. Furthermore, by examining the wording in Avot's chain, we were able to determine how Shimon and Antigonus were later additions to the chain to fill a one hundred year gap between the Great Assembly and the first set of Pairs – evidence of a yawning hole. To add insult to injury, we found no corroborative evidence from Tannaitic literature to substantiate the claim that Yohanan ben Zakkai was a student of Hillel – another break in the chain. Such inconsistencies and ambiguity, according to Ḥadith Science standards, deems the chains of transmission utterly undependable or even an invention by perturbed Rabbis, fabricated to conceal their miserable failure to preserve the Torah of *Moshe Rabbeinu* (lit. Moses our Rabbi).

We could divulge a wealth of other inconsistencies; however, this paper's main objective has been achieved – to prove the chains were a construct designed to demonstrate the Torah's preservation. We will close this discussion by repeating the questions we asked previously:

- 1) Why don't thousands of chains of transmission exist in Jewish literature, stemming from numerous disciples of Moses?
- 2) Why do the chains exclusively stem from the Great Assembly and the Pairs but not from other rabbis who were their contemporaries?
- 3) Why aren't there chains of transmission for individual *mishnayot*, like in *ḥadith* literature?
- 4) Why do weak students, such as Yohanan ben Zakkai, appear in the chains of transmission, as a pose to stronger students, such as Yonatan ben Uziel?

In conclusion, the assertion that the chains of Torah transmission are unbroken and untampered is a boisterous and utterly fictitious claim. To continue to insist that the chains of transmission in the Jewish tradition are seamless is a claim made out of disingenuousness and whimsical fancy – a glaring reflection of denial.