

# POWER TO HURT

adapted from David Basch's

## *The Shakespeare Codes: The Sonnets Deciphered*

There can be no doubt that Shakespeare was familiar with Jewish teaching. This he makes evident in the content and encoding in some of the 154 poems of his majestic *Sonnets*. One of these, *Sonnet 94*, presents the teaching of two *Talmudic* sages. The following analysis illustrates this point, revealing not only the poet's great artistry but some of his methods for conveying his thoughts. Below is the full sonnet, presented in the words, spelling, and approximate layout of its original 1609 printing. A facsimile appears on the last page.

*Sonnet 94* with its dramatic opening — “*They that have powre to hurt, and will doe none*” — is one of the most powerful of the sonnets in its serious tone and oracular import. Yet, the sonnet remains puzzling and an odd fit in the context of the other poems of the *Sonnets*.

First, there is the problem of who is being addressed. If it is the poet's young friend that is called on to practice restraint — the young man conventionally thought to be the central focus of the poems of the *Sonnets* — he is portrayed as someone powerful

### *Sonnet 94*

**T**hey that haue powre to hurt, and will doe none,  
That doe not do the thing, they most do shoue,  
**W**ho mouing others, are **themselues** as stone, \*  
**V**nmooued, could, and to temptation **slow**:  
**T**hey rightly do inheritt heauens **graces**, \_ 5  
And husband natures ritches from **ex**pence,  
They are **the** **Lords** and owners of **thei**r faces,  
Others, but **stewards** of their excellence:  
The **sommers** flowre is to **the** **sommer** sweet,  
**T**hough to it selfe, it **onely** **li**ue and die, \_ 10  
**B**ut if that flowre with **base**, **i**nfection meete,  
**T**he basest weed out-braues **h**is dignity:  
**F**or **sweetest** things turne sowrest **by** their deedes,  
**Lillies** that fester, **smell** far worse **then** weeds.

\* **w-ill s-s-ac-x'p-eir**

indeed. In fact, this is of a degree far greater than is likely from someone of a merely socially prominent family, a lineage suggested on the dedication page of the *Sonnets* by the title “Mr.” before his unidentified initials, “W.H.” The poem seems more appropriate as an address to a very high aristocrat with real influence over life and death, as many commentators have found themselves forced to conclude by the scale of power described.

But, even then, the poem’s elevated language about power and “*heaven’s graces*” appear to greatly outstrip and transcend an application to any particular person or any conflict that would have personally engaged the poet. Rather, it suggests the poem has a broader meaning as a deep, general meditation on the human condition. So why would such a poem be intruded among the others sonnets that discuss more personal themes?

Commentators have taken note of the great poetic artistry of this sonnet, the lines of which enact its themes within the human realm as “*power*” and within the metaphor of nature’s vegetative realm as “*flower*,” observing how these separate, rhyming realms are artfully brought together in the closing couplet. However, the

same commentators seem to miss the mark when they would attempt to apply the seriousness of the sonnet’s declarations to a hypothetical personal relationship that failed the poet.

The mysteries of this sonnet’s meaning and intent become abundantly clear when it is read as the poet’s intended companion to the Bible’s *Psalms 94*. This psalm begins with a ringing cry to the L-rd, calling on *Him* in His attribute as “*G-d of vengeance*.” The psalm is a passionate appeal to G-d to avenge the wrongdoing of the powerful against powerless victims — “*widows*,” “*orphans*,” “*strangers*,” and “*Your nation*” — *a besieged Israel*. Seen in this context, Shakespeare’s poem is not at all about a personal affair of the heart but is directed at persons whose great power could make them ruthless oppressors on a grand scale, hardly applicable to a personal friend of the poet however sinful.

Interestingly, Shakespeare’s sonnet focuses on the impact of power *righteously used*, the very *opposite side* of the power wielded on behalf of the ruthlessness and evil that was described in the psalm. The poet pays tribute to the mighty ones who curb the temptation to misuse their great power. He describes such persons



line 9 of the word “*sommer*” (summer) and as transliterated through the letters “*sme*” in the word “*smell*” (line 14) and the letters, read right to left, “*smeh*,” in the word “*themselves*” (line 3). These letter strings are read with vowels assumed as is done in Hebrew writing, giving *s[o]’me* and *s[o]’meh*, reasonable versions of *Zoma*. In the same way, the sage’s name can be read once more in a combination, horizontal/vertical alignment, running as “*som-a*” on lines 2 to 3.

The part of the sage’s name as *ben*, meaning “*son of*,” also appears in the text in various transliterated forms. It is read as “*b-n*” and “*b-h-n*” in vertical alignments within lines 12-14 and in combination, horizontal/vertical instances as “*b-hen*” and “*b-n*” — the latter occurring between lines 10-12. The many repetitions make these most credible.

In other lines, Shakespeare goes on to suggest the personal penalty of failing to heed the teaching of *ben-Zoma*. Not only is such a person reduced in moral stature to a creature of self absorption who is to be compared with a flower that “*to it selfe, it onely liue and die*,” but this person, even if high born, becomes even less than the least: though he be like a glorious flower

among the beautiful “*lillies*,” he is diminished below the lowly “*weeds*” and to be abhorred to a degree far greater than were he of a lesser social rank. The implication is that ordinary persons who restrain their limited power are thereby ennobled and, therefore, may “*out-brave*” — exceed in courage — the so-called great ones when these latter fail.

In the above discussion, the poet has introduced another famous teaching of the *Talmud*. Thus, in *Pirke Avoth 1.14*, the sage, *Hillel*, questioned the moral status of selfish persons who live only for themselves — “*He used to say, if I am not for myself, who will be for me? And being solely for my own self, what am I?*” Note that the sense of the last part of *Hillel*’s saying is applied in Shakespeare’s words — “*to it selfe, it onely live and die.*”

This reference is given further support in the transliterations of *Hillel*’s name within the sonnet. This occurs at least four times in combination, horizontal/vertical devices, which approximate it as “*he L-e-l*,” “*h-i-i-lyl*,” “*h[i]-lyl*,” and “*h-el[e]l*” (some given assumed vowels in the Hebrew manner). The embedded transliterations noted are shown on the previous page, extracted but holding their configurations in the

**T**hey that haue powre to hurt, and will doe none,  
**T**hat doe not do the thing, they most do showe,  
 Who mouing others, are themselues as stone,  
 Vnmoued, could, and to temptation flow:  
 They rightly do inheritt heauens graces,  
 And husband natures ritches from expence,  
 They are the Lords and owners of their faces,  
 Others, but stewards of their excellence:  
 The sommers flowre is to the sommer sweet,  
 Though to it selfe, it onely liue and die,  
 But if that flowre with base infection meete,  
 The basest weed out-braues his dignity:  
     **F**or sweetest things turne sowre by their deedes,  
     **L**illies that fester, smell far worse then weeds.

Note the use of “*the long ‘s’*” at word beginning and mid word — a letter resembling the “*f*” but without the horizontal fully crossing its stem.

text. Note the vertical version of the poet’s surname “*s-s-a-xp-eir*” beginning on line 3 — “*s-s*” sounded “*sh*” as in “*mission*” — and of his name “*w-ill*” appearing on lines 13-14.

What make these readings persuasive is that, along with the poet’s full name, the teachings of the sages are presented in conjunction with numerous transliterations of their names — a complex, interrelated orchestration that challenges the idea that

all this could occur by chance.

Note the devices (in bold, page 1) that sound God’s name as *haTov* (*The Good*) — read as *HT-W-F* (lines 1-3), *h[a]T[o]-B* (lines 10-11, 12-11) and *h[a]T[o]-F* (lines 12-13), alluding to the Good Lord who inspires such behavior.

These abundant communications are among those presented in *The Shakespeare Codes*, a book devoted to revealing them and exploring the significance of their meaning.

For additional information, check the internet at

**[www.davidbasch.net](http://www.davidbasch.net),**

***Basch’s Shakespeare Codes*, and *Hidden Shakespeare***