

From the Rabbi's Desk
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What Leads People to Change? - Stories of Transformation, Awareness, Repentance, and Forgiveness.



"If you believe breaking is possible, believe fixing is possible."
Rabbi Nachman of Breslov

Rabbi Nachman (1772–1810) reminds us, in the same way that breaking is an inevitability, fixing is also an inevitability. We know the former is true; we don't always believe the latter. Join Rabbi Kogan as he unpacks two rabbinic stories in which change and forgiveness take center stage and learn how change and forgiveness can also be part of your life.

1st Story

What Leads People to Change?

Fittingly Did that Pious Person Tell Me...

Insights into the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Kamma 50b (Stories # 164)

2nd Story

The Harsh Road to Forgiveness

King Solomon and the Ark

Insights the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 107b (Stories # 2)

3rd Story

Awareness of Sin

Rabbi Elazar and the Ugly Man

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 20a (Stories # 13)

4th Story

Learning the Hard Way" (Part 1)

The Test

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 107a (Stories # 3)

5th Story

Learning the Hard Way (Part 2)

Peleimu and the Unexpected Visitor

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 81a – 81b

6th Story

The Awareness of Being Blessed

How Many Bundles of Nard Must I Give the Master of this Wind?!

Insights into the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 86a

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1st Story

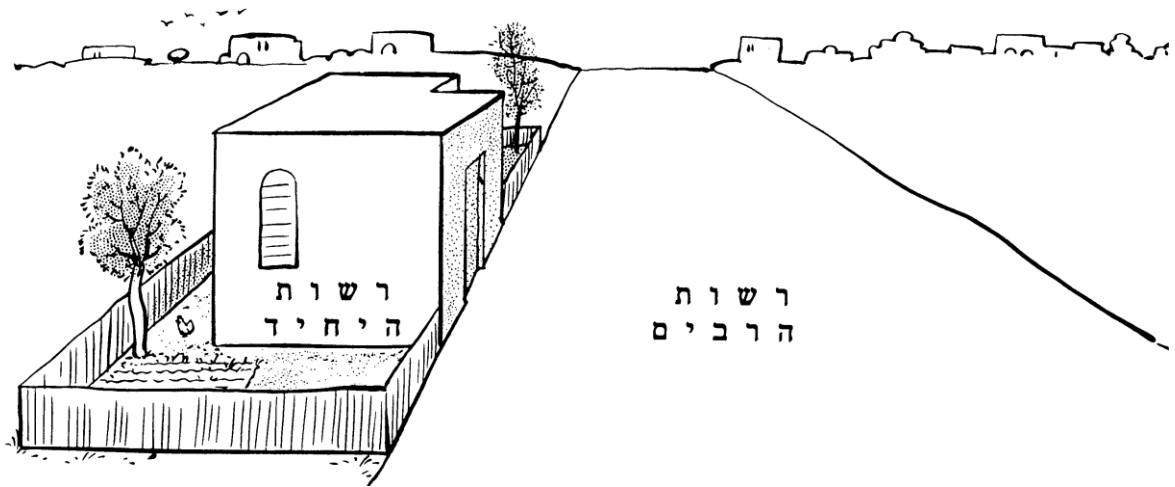
What Leads People to Change?

"Fittingly Did that Pious Person Tell Me..." (Insights into the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Kamma 50b)



Background to Our Story

Public Domain and Private Domain



The Text: Babylonian Talmud Bava Kamma 50b

לצדיקים ולרשעים: ת"ר *לא יסקל אדם
מרשותו לרה"ר *מעשה באדם אחד שהיה
מסקל מרשותו לרה"ר ומצאו חסיד אחד
אמר לו ריקה מפני מה אתה מסקל מרשות
שאינה שלך לרשות שלך לגלג עליו
לימים נצרך למכור שדהו והיה מהלך
באותו רה"ר ונכשל באותן אבנים אמר
יפה אמר לי אותו חסיד מפני מה אתה
מסקל מרשות שאינה שלך לרשות שלך:

An incident occurred with a certain person who was clearing stones from his own domain into the public domain, and a certain pious person found him doing this.

He [the pious person] said to him: "Empty one! Why are you clearing stones from a domain that is not yours into a domain that is yours?"

He [the person who was clearing stones] scoffed at [the pious person].

After some days, he needed to sell his field, and he was walking in that public domain and tripped over those stones.

He said: "Fittingly did that pious person tell me, 'Why are you clearing stones from a domain that is not yours into a domain that is yours!'"



Explaining the Story

What's going on in our story? (The sequence of events).

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why was the person clearing stones from his own domain into the public domain?

? Why did the pious person call the person clearing stones "empty one!"?

? What do you think is the meaning of "empty one"?

Bonus ? What did the pious person mean by asking the person clearing stones "Why are you clearing stones from a domain that is not yours into a domain that is yours?"

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why did the person clearing stones scoff at the pious person?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why was the person clearing the stones in need of selling his field?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why was the person clearing stones walking in the public domain? **?**
Why did he trip on the stones?

Bonus ? The person clearing stones, after tripping on the stones concluded: *"Fittingly did that pious person tell me, 'Why are you clearing stones from a domain that is not yours into a domain that is yours!'"* How did he understand the pious person's words?

Extra Bonus ? Both the person clearing stones and the pious person seem to have reached the same conclusion at the end. What is the difference between them?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text



• When the "public" domain becomes the "private" domain!



• Tripping on stones: The average person's learning experience versus the pious persons's learning experience!

2nd Story
The Harsh Road to Forgiveness
King Solomon and the Ark
Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 107b
(Revised September 2020)



Background to Our Story

The Biblical Story: II Samuel Chapter 11

1. And it was, at the return of the year, at the time of the going out of kings [to battle], and David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed in Jerusalem. **2.** And it came to pass, at the time of evening, that David arose from his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house, and he saw a woman bathing, from the roof; and the woman was very beautiful. **3.** And David sent, and inquired about the woman. And he said: "Is this not Batsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" **4.** And David sent messengers, and he took her and she came to him and he lay with her: and she was purified from her uncleanness; and she returned to her house. **5.** And the woman conceived; and she sent, and she told David, and she said: "I am pregnant." **6.** And David sent to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. **7.** And Uriah came to him, and David inquired concerning the welfare of Joab, and the peace of the people, and the welfare of the war. **8.** And David said to Uriah: "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." And Uriah departed from the king's house, and there followed him the king's food. **9.** And Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. **10.** And they told David saying: "Uriah did not go down to his house. " And David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" **11.** And Uriah said to David: "The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open field; and shall I come to my house to eat and to drink and to live with my wife? By your life and by the life of my soul, if I will do this thing." **12.** And David said to Uriah: "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you off." And Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the morrow. **13.** And David called him, and he ate before him, and he drank, and he made him drunk; and he went out in the evening to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but to his house he did not go down. **14.** And it came to pass, in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and he sent it by the hand of Uriah. **15.** And he wrote in the letter saying: "Place Uriah at the forefront of the fiercest battle, and go away from him, so

that he will be hit and will die." **16.** And it came to pass, when Joab kept watch upon the city that he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew that there were valiant men. **17.** And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab and some of the people of the servants of David fell; and Uriah the Hittite also died. **18.** And Joab sent and told David all the facts concerning the war. **19.** And he charged the messenger saying: 'When you have finished telling the king all the facts concerning the war. **20.** And it shall be if the king's anger is aroused, and he says to you: "Why did you approach [so near] the city to wage battle? Did you not know that they would shoot from upon the wall? **21.** Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubesheth? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone upon him from upon the wall, and he died [there] at Thebez? Why did you approach the wall?" And you shall say: "Also your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead." **22.** And the messenger went, and he came and told David all that Joab had sent him for. **23.** And the messenger said to David, "When the men prevailed over us and came out against us to the field, then we came upon them as far as the entrance of the gate. **24.** And the shooters shot at your servants from upon the wall, and some of the king's servants died, and also your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead." **25.** And David said to the messenger, "So shall you say to Joab; Let not this thing displease you, for the sword devours many time this number; strengthen your battle against the city, and destroy it, and encourage him." **26.** And the wife of Uriah the Hittite heard that Uriah her husband was dead, and she mourned over her husband. **27.** And the mourning [period] passed, and David sent and gathered her to his house. And she became his wife, and she bore him a son. And the thing that David did was displeasing to the Lord.

? Why did King David encourage Uriah to go back to his home and be with his wife?

Bonus ? How do we know that King David knew his actions were reprehensible?

The Text: Babylonia Talmud Sanhedrin 107b

אמר לפניו: "רבוננו של עולם, מחול לי על אותו עון". "מחול לך". "עשה עמי אות לטובה, ויראו שונאי ויבשו פי אתה ה' עזרתני ונתמתני". אמר ליה: "בתיך איני מודיע, אבל אני מודיע בתי שלמה בך".

בשעה שבנה שלמה את בית המקדש ביקש להכניס ארון לבית קדשי הקדשים. דבקו שערם זה בזה. אמר שערם וארבעה רגלות ולא נענה. אמר: "שאו שערם ראשיכם והנשאו פתחי עולם ויבוא מלך הכבוד מי זה מלך הכבוד ה' עוז וגבור ה' גבור מלחמה", ונאמר: "שאו שערם ראשיכם ושאו פתחי עולם ויבוא מלך הכבוד" וגו'. ולא נענה.

כיון שאמר: "ה' אלהים אל תשב פני משיחך זכרה לחסדי דויד עבדך", מיד נענה. באותה שעה נהפכו פני שונאי דוד כשולי קדירה, וידעו כל ישראל שמחל לו הקדוש ברוך הוא על אותו העון.

David said before Him [God]: Master of the Universe, pardon me for this sin.

God said to him: It is forgiven for you.

David requested: *"Perform on my behalf a sign for good, that they that hate me may see it and be put to shame" (Psalms 86:17)*; show me a sign in my lifetime so that everyone will know that You have forgiven me.

God said to him: In your lifetime I will not make it known that you were forgiven, but I will make it known in the lifetime of your son, Solomon.

The Gemara describes the event through which David's forgiveness was made known:

When Solomon built the Temple and sought to bring the Ark into the Holy of Holies, the gates clung together and could not be opened.

Solomon uttered twenty-four songs of praise, and his prayer was not answered. He said: *"Lift up your heads, you gates, and be you lifted up, you everlasting doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle" (Psalms 24:7-8)*. And it is stated: *"Lift up your heads, you gates, yea, lift them up, you everlasting doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who then is the King of glory? The Lord of hosts; He is the King of glory. Selah" (Psalms 24:9-10)*, and he was not answered.

Once he said: *"O Lord God, turn not away the face of Your anointed; remember the good deeds of David Your servant" (II Chronicles 6:42)*, he was immediately answered, and the gates opened (II Chronicles 7:1).

At that moment, the faces of all of David's enemies turned dark like the charred bottom of a pot. And all of the Jewish people knew that the Holy One, Blessed be He, had forgiven him for that sin.



Explaining the Story

What is the sequence of events that take place in the story?

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Bonus  From our story, how do we know that King David's repentance was sincere?

? King David asked for a sign that God forgave him. God answered him that this sign would come after his death. Why do you think such a sign would be important after his death?

? Why do you think King Solomon didn't invoke his father's name from the beginning?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? From our story, what can we learn about the relationship between King Solomon and his father?

? What lesson do you think God wanted to teach King Solomon? How did King Solomon learn it?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! If God can forgive, so can you!

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3rd Story

Awareness of Sin

Rabbi Elazar and the Ugly Man (Insights into Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 20a)



Background to Our Story

Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Simeon



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elazar_ben_Simeon

Elazar b. Simeon (or Elazar ben Simeon or Rabbi Elazar son of R. Simeon) was a Jewish Tanna sage of the fifth generation, contemporary of Rabbi Judah haNasi.

He was the son of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and appears in many of the stories concerning his father. According to these stories, Elazar spent his youth with his father in a cave, studying Torah while hiding from the Roman persecutors who sought his father's life. After the death of Hadrian, when events took a somewhat more favorable turn for the Jews, father and son left the cave and returned to the busy world. Elazar, grown too zealous during his long seclusion, often cursed those who devoted their time to things secular, and his father found it necessary to interfere, appeasing them and mollifying him.

After Shimon's death Elazar entered the academy of the Patriarch Simeon ben Gamaliel II, and became the colleague of the patriarch's son, Judah HaNasi; but there was rivalry between the two. Nevertheless, after Elazar's death, Judah HaNasi devoted himself to caring for Elazar's wayward son Yosei.

There are various legendary stories concerning Elazar's unusual physical size.

Though wanted in his youth by the Roman government, later on Elazar worked on behalf of the Roman government as a security and public order commissioner. This made him very unpopular.

Later in life he regretted the part he had taken under the hated government, and is said to have imposed on himself the most painful penance. His wife even divorced him because the financial cost of caring for his ailments was draining her family.

wealth, though after this Elazar was able to support himself due to the timely arrival of sixty sailors bearing gifts for him.

Elazar and his wife seem to have reunited by the time of his death. As Elazar lay dying, worrying that resentment over his government work would lead the rabbis to deny him a proper burial, he enjoined his wife to preserve his remains under her roof rather than burying him immediately. He died at [Akbara](#), and his wife did as instructed. Legend relates many miracles performed by the dead rabbi, one of which was that litigants plead their cases in the rabbi's house, and the verdict was pronounced from the mortuary chamber. After many years his former colleagues resolved to bury him, but a new difficulty arose. The inhabitants of Akbara, believing that the sage's remains miraculously protected them against incursions of wild beasts, refused permission to remove the body. Ultimately, however, in compliance with the request of the rabbis, people from the nearby town of [Birya](#) carried it off by stealth, and it was deposited at Meron beside that of his father.

Due to his varied learning, his surviving colleagues cited the Scriptural verse "Who is it that comes out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant? and answered, "It is Elazar ben Simon, who united in himself all noble qualities, he having been well versed in Scripture and in traditional law, and having been a [liturgical] poet, a leader in prayers, and a preacher".

Rabbis' Distinctive Attire



Studying Torah in the Time of the Talmud

Cedars, Reeds, and Quills



Migdal Gedor

The location of Migdal Gedor is unclear. Some contend that it was a small settlement between Ĥamat Gader and Gader. According to this opinion, the river referred to in the Gemara was apparently the Yarmouk.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 20a

תנו רבנן: לעולם יהא אדם רך כקנה ואל יהא קשה כארז. מעשה שבא רבי אלעזר ברבי שמעון ממגדל גדור מבית רבו, והיה רכוב על חמור ומטייל על שפת נה. ר ושמוח שמחה גדולה, והיתה דעתו גסה עליו מפני שלמד תורה הרבה, נזדמן לו אדם אחד שהיה מכוער ביותר אמר לו: שלום עליך, רבי. ולא התזיר לו. אמר לו: ריקה, כמה מכוער אותו האיש! שמא כל בני עירך מכוערין כמותך? אמר לו: איני יודע, אלא לך ואמור לאומן שעשאני: כמה מכוער כלי זה שעשית! כיון שיגיע בעצמו שחטא, ירד מן החמור ונשתטח לפניו, ואמר לו: נענית לך, מחול לי! אמר לו: איני מוחל לך עד שתלך לאומן שעשאני ואמור לו: כמה מכוער כלי זה שעשית! היה מטייל אחריו עד שהגיע לעירו. נצאו בני עירו לקראתו, והיו אומרים לו: שלום עליך, רבי, רבי, מורי, מורי. אמר להם: למי אתם קורין: רבי, רבי? אמרו לו: לזה שמטייל אחריך. אמר להם: אם זה רבי, אל ירבו כמותו בישראל! אמרו לו: מפני מה? אמר להם: כך וכך עשה לי. אמרו לו: אף על פי כן, מחול לו, שאדם גדול בתורה הוא. אמר להם: בשבילכם הריני מוחל לו, ובלבד שלא יהא רגיל לעשות כן. מיד נכנס רבי אלעזר ברבי שמעון ודרש: לעולם יהא אדם רך כקנה ואל יהא קשה כארז. ולפיכך זכה קנה ליטול הימנה קולמוס לכתוב בו ספר תורה, תפילין, ומזוזות.

An incident occurred in which Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, came from Migdal Gedor, from his rabbi's house, and he was riding on a donkey and strolling on the bank of the river. And he was very happy, and his head was swollen with pride because he had studied much Torah.

He happened upon an exceedingly ugly person, who said to him: Greetings to you, my rabbi, but Rabbi Elazar did not return his greeting. Instead, Rabbi Elazar said to him: Worthless person, how ugly is that man. Are all the people of your city as ugly as you?

The man said to him: I do not know, but you should go and say to the Craftsman Who made me: How ugly is the vessel you made.

When Rabbi Elazar realized that he had sinned, he descended from his donkey and prostrated himself before him, and he said to the man: I have sinned against you; forgive me.

The man said to him: I will not forgive you go until you go to the Craftsman Who made me and say: How ugly is the vessel you made. He walked behind until they reached Rabbi Elazar's city. The people of his city came out to greet him, saying to him: Greetings to you, my rabbi, my rabbi, my master, my master.

The man said to them: Who are you calling my rabbi, my rabbi?

They [the people of Rabbi Elazar's city] said to him: To this man, who is walking behind you.

He [the man] said to them: If this man is a rabbi, may there not be many like him among the Jewish people.

They [the people of Rabbi Elazar's city] asked him: For what reason do you say this?

He [the man] said to them: He did such and such to me.

They [the people of Rabbi Elazar's city] said to him: Even so, forgive him, as he is a great Torah scholar.

He [the man] said to them: For your sakes I forgive him, provided that he accepts upon himself not to become accustomed to behave like this.

Immediately, Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, entered the study hall and taught: A person should always be soft like a reed and he should not be stiff like a cedar. And therefore, due to its gentle qualities, the reed merited that a quill is taken from it to write with it a Torah scroll, phylacteries, and *mezuzot*.



Explaining the Story

What's going on in our story? (The sequence of events)

Comprehension Questions

? Why did the ugly man greet Rabbi Elazar?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? How did the ugly man know Rabbi Elazar was a rabbi?

? Who is "the craftsman" the ugly man is referring to?

? Why do the people go out to greet Rabbi Elazar?

? What is the process of repentance described in the story?

Analysis Questions

? What is your opinion about the quality of the “Torah” Rabbi Elazar studied?

? The people of Rabbi Elazar’s city said to the ugly man: “Even so, forgive him, as he is a great Torah scholar.” Why would they say so after learning what Rabbi Elazar did?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

Bonus ? After the incident, Rabbi Elazar enters (the Beit Midrash) immediately to teach: “A person should always be soft like a reed and he should not be stiff like a cedar.” Whom was he referring to? **?** Who is soft as a reed in our story? Who is hard as a cedar?

Bonus ? After the incident, Rabbi Elazar enters (the Beit Midrash) immediately to teach: “A person should always be soft like a reed and he should not be stiff like a cedar.” Why was this Rabbi Elazar’s first official lesson?

“The Question”

? Why did Rabbi Elazar do such a shocking thing?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! "If you believe that you can destroy, believe that you can repair!"

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov

! Repentance and Forgiveness: "not suitable for cedars."



In this story, we find an obnoxious, mean, even cruel Rabbi Elazar. The story is even more shocking if we consider that Rabbi Elazar had just completed his formal Torah studies, and that his father, Rabbi Shimon bar Yoachai, was one of the greatest Rabbis of all times. The main question the reader has is: why would Rabbi Elazar do such a terrible thing. However, as important as this question is for the reader, it is not central to the author of our story, who is more interested in exploring how to repair a mess than to explain it. Rabbi Elazar's lesson - A person should always be soft like a reed and he should not be stiff like a cedar- is directed to himself, to the ugly man, and to his students (and by extension to us, the readers), reminding all of us that repentance and forgiveness are impossible without flexibility.

4th Story
Learning the Hard Way" (Part 1)
The Test
Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 107a



Background to Our Story

The Biblical Story: II Samuel Chapter 11

1. And it was, at the return of the year, at the time of the going out of kings [to battle], and David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed in Jerusalem. **2.** And it came to pass, at the time of evening, that David arose from his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house, and he saw a woman bathing, from the roof; and the woman was very beautiful. **3.** And David sent, and inquired about the woman. And he said: "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" **4.** And David sent messengers, and he took her and she came to him and he lay with her: and she was purified from her uncleanness; and she returned to her house. **5.** And the woman conceived; and she sent, and she told David, and she said: "I am pregnant." **6.** And David sent to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. **7.** And Uriah came to him, and David inquired concerning the welfare of Joab, and the peace of the people, and the welfare of the war. **8.** And David said to Uriah: "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." And Uriah departed from the king's house, and there followed him the king's food. **9.** And Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. **10.** And they told David saying: "Uriah did not go down to his house. " And David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" **11.** And Uriah said to David: "The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open field; and shall I come to my house to eat and to drink and to live with my wife? By your life and by the life of my soul, if I will do this thing." **12.** And David said to Uriah: "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you off." And Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the morrow. **13.** And David called him, and he ate before him, and he drank, and he made him drunk; and he went out in the evening to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but to his house he did not go down. **14.** And it came to pass, in the morning, that David wrote

a letter to Joab, and he sent it by the hand of Uriah. **15.** And he wrote in the letter saying: "Place Uriah at the forefront of the fiercest battle, and go away from him, so that he will be hit and will die." **16.** And it came to pass, when Joab kept watch upon the city that he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew that there were valiant men. **17.** And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab and some of the people of the servants of David fell; and Uriah the Hittite also died. **18.** And Joab sent and told David all the facts concerning the war. **19.** And he charged the messenger saying: 'When you have finished telling the king all the facts concerning the war. **20.** And it shall be if the king's anger is aroused, and he says to you: "Why did you approach [so near] the city to wage battle? Did you not know that they would shoot from upon the wall? **21.** Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubesheth? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone upon him from upon the wall, and he died [there] at Thebez? Why did you approach the wall?" And you shall say: "Also your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead." **22.** And the messenger went, and he came and told David all that Joab had sent him for. **23.** And the messenger said to David, "When the men prevailed over us and came out against us to the field, then we came upon them as far as the entrance of the gate. **24.** And the shooters shot at your servants from upon the wall, and some of the king's servants died, and also your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead." **25.** And David said to the messenger, "So shall you say to Joab; Let not this thing displease you, for the sword devours many time this number; strengthen your battle against the city, and destroy it, and encourage him." **26.** And the wife of Uriah the Hittite heard that Uriah her husband was dead, and she mourned over her husband. **27.** And the mourning [period] passed, and David sent and gathered her to his house. And she became his wife, and she bore him a son. And the thing that David did was displeasing to the Lord.

? What were King David's sins according to II Samuel, Chapter 11?

Bonus ? How do we know that King David knew his actions were reprehensible?

The Amidah (the first blessing)

PATRIARCHS

בְּרוּךְ You, LORD our God and God of our fathers,
 God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob;
 the great, mighty and awesome God, God Most High,
 who bestows acts of loving-kindness and creates all,
 who remembers the loving-kindness of the fathers and will bring
 a Redeemer to their children's children
 for the sake of His name, in love.

? Why do you think we invoke the names of our forefathers in the first blessing?

Abraham's Tests (Avot 5:4 and Avot D'Rabbi Natan Chapter 33)

"Our father Abraham was tested with ten trials and he withstood them all. This demonstrates our father Abraham's great love of G-d" (Avot 5:4)

? What was Abraham's first test? What was his last test?

The Text: Babylonia Talmud Sanhedrin 107b

Rabbi Yehuda said in the name of Rav: A person should never bring himself to a test, for David, King of Israel, brought himself to a test – and he stumbled.

[David] said before [God]: - Master of the Universe! – “Why do [people] say in their prayers: ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob,’ – and do not say, ‘the God of David’?”

[God] said to David: - “They (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) were tested by Me and withstood the tests, - whereas you have not been tested by Me.”

[David] said before [God]: - “Master of the Universe! – Try me and test me!” - As it is stated (Psalms 26:2): “*Try me, HASHEM, and test me, etc.*”

[God] said to David: – “I will test you, - and I will do something with you that I did not do with the Patriarchs. – For I did not inform them in advance that they would be tested, - whereas I am informing you – that I will test you in a matter of physical temptation.” – Thereupon, *“it came to pass at evening time, that David arose from his bed, etc.” (II Samuel 11:2).* – Rav Yehudah said: - David arose from his bed at evening, for he had changed his night-bed into a day-bed, - forgetting the rule: - “There is a small organ in the man; - when he satiates it, it is starved, - and when he starves it, it is satiated.” – The Scriptural account continues: *“And he walked upon the roof of the king’s palace, and from the roof saw a woman bathing; the woman was of exceedingly beautiful appearance” (II Samuel 11:2).* – Bathsheba was shampooing her head underneath a large cone that hid her from view. – Satan came and appeared to [David] in the form of a bird. – [David] shot an arrow at it, - but [the arrow] struck and tore open the cone. – Thus, [Bathsheba] was exposed to view, - and [David] saw her. – Immediately, - *“David sent and inquired about the woman, and was told, ‘Why, this is Bathsheba the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite!’ – David sent messengers and he took her; she came to him and he lay with her – she had been*

purified of her state of impurity– and she returned to her house” (II Samuel 11:3-4).

And this incident is the subject of that which is written by David (Palms 17:3): -
"You examined my heart, searched by night, refined me but did not find [me pure]."

The Gemara expounds the end of the verse just cited:

- *"Let my scheming (zamosi) not cross my lips."* (Psalms 17:3) – [David] said:
- Would that a muzzle (zemama) had fallen upon the mouth of my enemy (a reference to himself), - and that he had not said such a thing as a request to be tested.



Explaining the Story

What is the sequence of events that take place in the story?

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why did David request to be tested by God?

Bonus ? In the story in Tractate Sanhedrin, God gives David some hints to help him give up his request to be tested. What are they?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? What was David's sin according to the story in Tractate Sanhedrin?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text



The "small" sin, "father" of all other sins.

5th Story

Learning the Hard Way (Part 2)

Peleimu and the Unexpected Visitor (Insights into Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 81a – 81b)



Background to Our Story

Peleimu



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Kiddushin. Koren publishers Jerusalem.
Page 459

Peleimu – קלימו: The Sage Peleimu was one of the great disciples of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. The Gemara records that he would ask his teacher incisive questions in matters of *halakha*, and his legal rulings appear in *baraitot*. He also had disputes with Rabbi Eliezer, son of Rabbi Shimon, the colleague of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. Many stories attest to Peleimu's great righteousness.

Yom Kippur



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom_Kippur

Yom Kippur, also known in English as the *Day of Atonement*, is the most solemn and important of the Jewish holidays. Its central themes are atonement and repentance. Jews traditionally observe this holy day with a 25-hour period of fasting and intensive prayer, often spending most of the day in synagogue services.

Satan



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satan>

Satan is a term that originates from the Abrahamic faiths, being traditionally applied to an angel in Judeo-Christian belief, and to a jinn in Islamic belief.

Where Satan does appear in the Bible, he plays the role of the Accuser.

According to the article on 'Satan' in the Jewish Encyclopedia, Satan's role as the accuser is found in the prologue to the Book of Job, where Satan appears, together

with other celestial beings before the Deity, replying to the inquiry of God as to whence he had come, with the words: 'From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.' (Job 1:7) Both question and answer, as well as the dialogue which follows, characterize Satan as having the evil purpose of searching out men's sins and appearing as their accuser. He is, therefore, the celestial prosecutor, who sees only iniquity; for he persists in his evil opinion of Job even after the man of Uz has passed successfully through his first trial by surrendering to the will of God, whereupon Satan demands another test through physical suffering. (ib. ii. 3-5.)

Yet it is also evident from the prologue that Satan has no power of independent action, but requires the permission of God, which he may not transgress. He cannot be regarded, therefore, as an opponent of the Deity; and the doctrine of monotheism is disturbed by his existence no more than by the presence of other beings before the face of God. This view is also retained in Zech. 3:1-2, where Satan is described as the adversary of the high priest Joshua, and of the people of God whose representative the hierarch is; and he there opposes the 'angel of the Lord' who bids him be silent in the name of God.

Satan and the Evil Inclination



<http://www.beingjewish.com/>

The Hebrew word "Satan" means "Hinderer." To hinder someone means to hold him back, to try to prevent him from doing something. G-d created the Hinderer to give us work to do in this world. Satan is here to make things difficult for us, so we can overcome our evil temptations, and pass the test. That is the purpose of Satan. Satan is an angel whose purpose has been determined by G-d.

Temptation is there to try and deter us. It gives us the ability to do the wrong thing. More importantly, it gives us the ability to look at evil and refuse to do it. By presenting us with the opportunity to do evil, it gives us the ability to choose between good and evil.

The ability to choose between good and evil is what gives us free will.

The truth is that Satan has a job to do, just like every other angel. And angels have no free will. They do as Hashem commands them.

A man once came to a great Rabbi, very troubled. He said to the Rabbi, "Please pray to Hashem to take away my Evil Inclination. I do so many sins, and I want to stop sinning!"

The Rabbi answered, "Then what would be your purpose in this world, if you had no Evil Inclination? Your purpose in life is to overcome your personal Evil Inclination. That is what you were created for! Hashem has enough angels in heaven. He doesn't need one more. He created you human, so that you could improve yourself."

And how do we do it? By constant battle with the Evil Inclination.

So now we have to revise our understanding of Satan. Satan is not a fallen angel. Satan is merely an angel with a dirty job. Satan does not have a rival kingdom.

Satan is not in competition with G-d, and Satan does not want followers or worshipers. He's not even happy when people obey him and sin.

Satan is the angel who tempts us, and the angel who prosecutes us in Heaven. He is also the Angel of Death. The angel who tries to make us sin is the same angel who accuses us in the Heavenly Court, and the same angel who carries out the death sentence.

So, no, Satan does not wear a red suit, or carry a trident. Nor does he wear a business suit. Satan is a force of evil in the world that we must resist. Satan most often appears as a desire within *you*. Of course, there is no shortage of things in the world to tempt us to sin.

And Satan has many "helpers," many of whom don't even know they are helping him. A shady-looking character in the street walks over to you and offers to sell you some stolen property, for example.

None of us are capable of destroying Satan. What we are expected and commanded to do is to gain the upper hand over our personal Satans. And Hashem helps us do this, constantly. The Talmud says that the Evil Inclination constantly attempts to destroy us spiritually, and Hashem constantly helps us and gives us the means with which to overcome our Evil Inclinations.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 81a – 81b

פְּלִימוֹ הָיָה רָגִיל לְמִימַר כָּל יוֹמָא: גִּירָא בְּעִינָיָה דְּשִׁטָּן. יוֹמָא חַד מִעָלֵי יוֹמָא דְּכִיפּוּרֵי הָיָה, אִידְמִי לִיהָ כְּעִנְיָא. אֵתָא קָרָא אַבְבָּא, אִפִּיקוּ לִיהָ רִיפְתָּא. אָמַר לִיהָ: יוֹמָא כִּי הָאִידְנָא כּוּלִי עֲלָמָא גְּוָאִי וְאַנָּא אַבְרָאִי? עֵיילִיָּהּ, וּקְרִיבּוּ לִיהָ רִיפְתָּא. אָמַר לִיהָ: יוֹמָא כִּי הָאִידְנָא, כּוּלִי עֲלָמָא אֵתָפָא וְאַנָּא לְחִידָאִי? אֲתִיוָּהּ אוֹתְבוּהּ אֲתָפָא. הָיָה יְתִיב מְלָא נִפְשִׁיָּהּ שִׁיחָנָא וְכִיבִי עָלֶיהָ, וְהָיָה קַעֲבִיד בֵּיהּ מִיֵּלֵי דְּמִאִיס. אָמַר לִיהָ: תִּיב שְׂפִי. רַ אָמַר לִיהָ: קְבוּ לִי כֶּסֶא. יְהָבוּ לִיהָ כֶּסֶא. אֲכַמֵּר שְׂדָא בֵּיהּ כִּיחֹ, נִחְרוּ בֵּיהּ. שְׁקָא וּמִית. שְׁמַעוּ דְּהוּ קְאָמְרִי: פְּלִימוֹ קָטַל גְּבָרָא! פְּלִימוֹ קָטַל גְּבָרָא! עָרַק וְטָשָׂא נִפְשִׁיָּהּ בְּבֵית הַכֶּסֶא. אָזִיל בְּתַרִּיָּה, נִפְלַל קָמִיָּה. כִּי דְּחִזְיָהּ דְּהָיָה מִצְטַעֵר – גָּלִי לִיהָ נִפְשִׁיָּהּ. אָמַר לִיהָ: מָאִי טַעֲמָא אָמַרְתָּ הָכִי? וְאַלָּא הִכִּי אֵימָא? אָמַר לִיהָ: לֵימָא מָר "רַחֲמָנָא נִגְעֵר בֵּיהּ בְּשִׁטָּן".

Peleimu had the habit to say every day: An arrow in the eye of Satan, mocking the temptations of the evil inclination.

One day, it was the eve of Yom Kippur, and Satan appeared to him as a pauper who came and called him to the door, requesting alms. Peleimu brought out bread to him. Satan said to him: On a day like today, everyone is inside eating, and shall I stand outside? Peleimu brought him inside and gave him bread.

He [Satan] said to him: On a day like today, everyone is sitting at the table, and shall I sit by myself? They brought him and sat him at the table. He was

sitting and had covered himself with boils and pus, and he was doing repulsive things at the table.

Peleimu said to the pauper: Sit properly.

Satan then said to him: Give me a cup. They gave him a cup. He coughed up his phlegm and spat it into the cup. They berated him, at which point Satan pretended to sink down and die.

They heard people around them saying: Peleimu killed a man! Peleimu killed a man!

Peleimu fled and hid himself in the bathroom. Satan followed him and fell before him. Upon seeing that Peleimu was suffering, he revealed himself to him. Satan said to him: What is the reason that you spoke this way, provoking me by saying: An arrow in the eye of Satan?

He [Peleimu] replied: But what then should I say?

Satan said to him: Let the Master, i.e., Peleimu, say: Let the Merciful One rebuke Satan.



Explaining the Story - What's going on in our story? (The sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? What did Peleimu mean by the words: "An arrow in the eye of Satan!"?

? Why did Satan appear to Peleimu? Why did he choose Yom Kippur to appear to him?

? *What is the subtle difference between "An arrow in the eye of Satan!" and "Let the Merciful One rebuke Satan"?*

"G-d created Satan to give us work to do in this world. Satan is here to make things difficult for us, so we can overcome our evil inclination, and pass the test. That is the purpose of Satan." (from www.beinhjewish.com)

? What is the test Peleimu didn't pass?

“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from These Texts

! And the father of all sins is.....



Peleimu had the habit to say every day: *An arrow in the eye of Satan*, bragging of his ability to overcome the evil inclination. Our story comes to teach us that every time we brag, we invite trouble. Peleimu’s trouble came in the guise of a repulsive pauper who showed up to disturb his preparation for the holiest day of the year. Peleimu learned the *hard way* that the process of being cleansed from our transgressions begins by working on getting rid of arrogance, the father of all sins.

From the Rabbi's Desk
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6th Story

The Awareness of Being Blessed

How Many Bundles of Nard Must I Give the Master of this Wind?!

(Insights into the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 86a)

Background to Our Story

Nard



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spikenard>

Spikenard (*Nardostachys jatamansi*); also called nard, nardin, and muskroot is a flowering plant of the Valerian family that grows in the Himalayas of Nepal, China, and India. It is used in the manufacture of an intensely aromatic amber-colored essential oil. The oil has, since ancient times, been used as a perfume, as a medicine and in religious contexts, particularly in connection with historical Judaism. The Bible contains several references to the spikenard.



Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta



http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112350/jewish/Rabbi-Shimon-ben-Chalafta.htm

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Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta was one of the last Tanaim. He was a friend of Rabbi Judah the Prince, the compiler of the Mishnah, who compiled and arranged the 6 volumes of the Mishnah about 1800 years ago.

Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta belonged to a family of Torah scholars, who were friendly with the Nassi (Prince). He lived in a village called "Ein Teanah" between Zippory and Tiberias (in Galilee). Rabbi Judah, the Prince, lived in Zippory and later in Tiberias, where he conducted his great Yeshiva. Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta used to visit him from time to time, and also studied under him. Previously, Rabbi Shimon had been a pupil of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Judah, the Prince, showed great honor and love for Rabbi Shimon. Once, as Rabbi Shimon was leaving Rabbi Judah's house, the Nassi sent his son after Rabbi Shimon to ask his blessing. Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta blessed the

Prince's son thus: "The Almighty should help you never to shame others and never to be shamed by others".

? *"The Almighty should help you never to shame others and never to be shamed by others"*. Why this is considered a blessing? Shouldn't this be a commandment, a normal expectation?



Let's Read the Story

The Text: Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 86a

רבי שמעון בן הלפתא בעל
בשר הנה. ⁸ יומא חר הנה
חמימא ליה, ⁹ הנה סליק ויתיב
אשינא דטורא. ¹⁰ אמר לה
לברתיה: ¹¹ "בת, הניפי עלי
במניפא ואני אתן לך כפרין
דגיד." ¹² אדהכי נשבא זיקא
אמר: ¹³ "כמה כפרין דגיד למרי
דיכי?" ¹⁴ "הכל כמנהג המדינה,

Rabbi Shimon ben Halafta was a fat man.

One day he felt very hot, so he went up and sat on the peak of a mountain.

He said to his daughter: My daughter, if you fan me with a fan, I will reward you with bundles of nard."

Just as he [Rabbi Shimon ben Halafta] was speaking, a gust of wind blew, and he remarked: How many bundles of nard must I give the Master of this wind?

Comprehension Questions

? Why did Rabbi Shimon go up and seat on the peak of a mountain?

? Why did Rabbi Shimon ask his daughter to fan him?

? Why did Rabbi Shimon offer a reward to his daughter? Why did he offer bundles of nard?

? Who is "the Master of the wind"?

Analysis Questions

? “How many bundles of nard must I give the Master of this wind?” How do you understand Rabbi Shimon’s last remark?

The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

- !** Rewarding the “Master of the wind” – an humbling task.