

From the Rabbi's Desk
Rabbi Manes Kogan
Hillcrest Jewish Center
183-02 Union Turnpike, Flushing, NY 11366
rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org

Stories with a Twist

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The Gifts

Insights into Jerusalem Talmud, Megilah 6b



Background to Our Story

Esther Chapter 9:20-23

Mordechai wrote down everything that happened and sent letters to all the Jews in all the countries of King Achashveirosh, near and far. ²¹He told them to celebrate the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar every year. ²²Those were the days when the Jews rested from their enemies, and that was the month that had been changed for them from sorrow to gladness, and from sadness to a holiday. Therefore, they should celebrate them as days of feasting and gladness, and of sending food to their friends and gifts to the poor. ²³The Jews promised to celebrate every year just as they began to do then – just as Mordechai had written to them.

Mishlo'ach Manot — Sending of Edibles

Every person is obligated to send on Purim day, at least two portions of foods e.g. cake and wine, to at least one other person. A man should send to another man, and a woman should send to another woman. (ש"ע ס"א תרצ"ה סע"ד)

It is customary to send the portions with a messenger. The messenger may be a minor. (ע"א מ"ב שם, ע"א נטע גבריאל ס"א ל"א)

Young children should send to their friends. (פמ"ג בא"א סי' תרצ"ה, ועי' נטעי גבריא אל סי' ל')

Matanot Le'evyonim — Gifts to the Poor

Every person is obligated to give on Purim day at least two presents to two poor people (i.e. one to each). (שו"ע סי' תרצ"ד סעי' א')

The present can be money or food. (מ"ב, שם)

A man may give a present to a poor woman. (שו"ע סי' תרצ"ד סעי' ד')

Young children, too, should be trained to do this mitzvah. (שערי הלכה ומנהג ח"ב ע' רצ"ו)

The money given as matanot le'evyonim should not be from ma'aseir funds. This should at least be the case with the money used for the basic fulfillment of the mitzvah, i.e. one gift to two people. (באר היטב סי' תרצ"ב סק"ב ועי' נטעי גבריא אל סי' כ"ה:ג')

If there are no poor people present, one should put the money aside, and give it to the poor when he has an opportunity. (שו"ע סי' תרצ"ד סעי' ד')

A person who gives many portions of food to friends and presents to the poor is praiseworthy. It is, however, preferable to give generously to the poor rather than to prepare a lavish Purim feast or to give many portions to one's friends. For there is no greater and more beautiful happiness than to bring joy to the hearts of the poor, the orphans, and the widows. Such a person resembles Hashem, Who is praised by the prophet (Isaiah 57:15) for, "Reviving the spirit of the lowly and reviving those with crushed hearts." (רמב"ם הל' מגילה פ"ב הל"ז)

Rabbi Yehuda Nesia



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Eruvin Part 2. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 91

Rabbi Yehuda Nesia was the son of Rabban Gamliel, who was the son of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. He was called Nesia to differentiate him from his illustrious grandfather, the editor of the Mishna. One of the earliest *amora'im* in Eretz Yisrael, he was a colleague of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's great students. His own students included Rabbi Yoĥanan and Reish Lakish. Rabbi Yehuda Nesia's court enacted various decrees. It was considered the great Torah center in the Jewish world, to the extent that even the great *amora* Rav deferred to its authority.

Rabbi Yehuda Nesia served as *nasi* for many years and was probably the last *nasi* to have outstanding Torah knowledge and to serve as the head of the Sanhedrin. In his honor, he, like his grandfather, is sometimes referred to simply as Rabbi (especially in the Jerusalem Talmud). He succeeded as *nasi*, but not as head of the Sanhedrin, by his son, Rabban Gamliel.

Rabbi Hoshaiah Rabbah (Hoshaiah the Great)

JewishEncyclopedia.com

Palestinian amora of the first amoraic generation (about 200 C.E.); compiler of baraitot explaining the Mishnah-Tosefta. He was closely associated with the successors of Rabbi, as was his father with Rabbi himself. Hoshaiah's father, Ḥama, lived in Sepphoris, the residence of Rabbi and the seat of the patriarchs.

Hoshaiah's yeshibah, also, was for many years located at Sepphoris, where pupils crowded to hear his lectures. Johanan, one of his greatest disciples, declared that Hoshaiah in his generation was like R. Meïr in his: even his colleagues could not always grasp the profundity of his arguments ('Er. 53a). And the esteem in which Hoshaiah was held by his pupils may be gaged by the statement that, even after Johanan had himself become a great scholar and a famous teacher and no longer needed Hoshaiah's instruction, he continued visiting the master, who in the meantime had grown old and had removed his school to Cæsarea (Yer. Sanh. xi. 30b).

The Text: Jerusalem Talmud Megilah 6b

ר' יודן נשייא שלח לרבי הושעיה רבה חדא עטם וחד לגין דחמר
שלח וא"ל קיימת בנו ומתנות לאביונים
חזר ושלח ליה חד עיגל וחד גרב דחמר
שלח וא"ל קיימת בנו ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו.

Rabbi Yudan Nesia sent to Rabbi Hoshaiah the Great one bone [with meat] and one flask of wine.

[Rabbi Hoshaiah] sent to tell him [to Rabbi Yudan]: You have fulfilled the commandment "gifts to the poor."

[Then] He [Rabbi Yudan] sent him again [to Rabbi Hoshaiah] one calf and a barrel of wine.

[Rabbi Hoshaiah] sent to tell him [to Rabbi Yudan]: You have fulfilled the commandment "sending food to the friends."



Explaining the Story (What is the sequence of events that take place in the story?)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? What are the two specific Purim commandments involved in our story?

Bonus ? Which specific commandment did Rabbi Yudan Nesia expect to fulfill by sending Rabbi Hoshaiah the Great one bone [with meat] and one flask of wine?

Bonus ? The bone [with meat] and the flask of wine were perfectly fine gifts to fulfill the commandment "sending food to the friends." Why did Rabbi Hoshaiah send to tell Rabbi Yudan Nesia: You have fulfilled the commandment "gifts to the poor?"

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Bonus ? Why did Rabbi Yudan Nesia send again a gift to Rabbi Hoshaiah, this time one calf and a barrel of wine?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Bonus ? Why did Rabbi Hoshaiah send to tell Rabbi Yudan Nesia after receiving the calf and the barrel of wine, you have fulfilled the commandment "sending food to the friends?"

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

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

! Friendship and the gifts of openness, repentance, repairing, and forgiveness.

Our short and somehow puzzling story is, on the surface, about sending gifts in the context of the holiday of Purim. However, those familiar with the two characters of the story, Rabbi Yudan Nesia and Rabbi Hoshaiah, can find between the lines of our short story, a lesson in friendship.

Rabbi Yudan Nesia and Rabbi Hoshaiah, the greatest Sages of their generation, are colleagues and friends. Although they share the same Torah, their financial realities are very different. Rabbi Yudan Nesia is very wealthy, while Rabbi Hoshaiah struggles to make ends meet.

One Purim, Rabbi Yudan Nesia sends Rabbi Hoshaiah a gift of food to friends (Mishloach Manot), which the latter decodes as a small gift akin to charity.

Rabbi Hoshaiah, instead of resenting his old-time friend, conveys to Rabbi Yudan Nesia the way he feels ("you treated me like a beggar, not a friend").

Rabbi Yudan Nesia understands he hurt his friend, and immediately, without trying to justify or explain himself, repairs the relationship by sending a significantly more important gift.

On his end, Rabbi Hoshaiah accepts the nonverbal apology and conveys back to his old friend, that the friendship has been fully reestablished.