

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [191]

If You Remove Your Other Shoe I will destroy the World

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 24b



Background to Our Story

Judah bar Ezekiel



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judah_bar_Ezekiel

Judah bar Ezekiel (220–299 CE) (Hebrew: יהודה בן יחזקאל; also known as Rav Yehuda bar Ezekiel), was a Babylonian amora of the 2nd generation. He was the most prominent disciple of Rav (Abba Arika), in whose house he often stayed, and whose son Hiyya was his pupil (Er. 2b). After Rav's death Judah went to Samuel of Nehardea, who esteemed him highly and called him "Shinena" (= "sharpwitted"; Ber. 36a; Kid. 32a) or he with the long teeth (R' Hai Gaon in a responsa). He remained with Samuel until he founded a school of his own at Pumbedita. He died there in 299.

Judah possessed such great zeal for learning and such tireless energy that he even omitted daily prayer in order to secure more time for study, and prayed but once in thirty days ([R. H.](#) 35a). This diligence, together with a remarkably retentive memory, made it possible for him to collect and transmit the greater part of Rav's, as well as many of Samuel's, sayings; the [Talmud](#) contains about four hundred [haggadic](#) and [halakic](#) sayings by the former, and many by the latter, all recorded by Judah b. Ezekiel, while a number of other sayings of Rav's that occur in the Talmud without the name of the transmitter likewise were handed down by Judah ([Rashi](#) to [Hul.](#) 44a).

In recording the words of his teachers, Judah used extreme care, and frequently stated explicitly that his authority for a given saying was uncertain, and that his informant did not know positively whether it was Rav's or Samuel's ([Hul.](#) 18b). His own memory, however, never failed him, and the traditions recorded by him are reliable.

Judah was celebrated for his piety, and it is related that whenever he ordained a fast in time of drought rain fell (Ta'an. 24a). According to him, piety consists chiefly in fulfilling one's

obligations to one's fellow creatures and in observing the laws of "meum et tuum" ([Latin](#): "mine and thine", referring to the respect of private property) ([B. K. 30a](#)):

Wasting Bread

<http://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/57074/throwing-out-bread>

What is the nature of the prohibition to destroy bread? Why is it presented differently from other destruction (*bal tashchit*)?

Bread may be used for any purpose as long as it is not used in a disrespectful manner and the bread will not be ruined by what you are doing to it.

Regarding bread, however, the Rishonim disagree: According to the Tosafot, even if the bread will not become ruined as a result of throwing it, such as by throwing from side to side on a table, it is still forbidden to do so, for bread has a special significance and throwing is considered degrading towards it.

As far as why we would treat bread differently from other foods - I assume it has to do with the religious significance of bread in *halacha* (as seen in its roles in the *avodah* e.g. in the *menachot*, *lechem hapanim*, *shtei halechem*, etc.) and the fact that it is representative of food in general (which is presumably why the *hamotzi* blessing exempts the *brachot* of all other items eaten as part of the meal, i.e.: with the bread). Also, I believe there may be midrashic/kabbalistic analogies between man and bread.

Just to give a bit of context here - There are a number of *halachot* which relate to the idea of not wasting food, and not treating food in a disrespectful manner. This especially regards bread, *lechem*, considered in Jewish tradition to be the "staff of life" as far as food goes. And just like the English word "bread" is slang for "money", so too *lechem* is associated with money, livelihood, *parnasa*. So if you trample on your bread, it's as if you've trampled on your *parnasa*. If you throw it away, it's like throwing away your livelihood.

Taking off Shoes & Fasting

"...On the Day of Atonement it is forbidden to eat and to drink, to wash, to anoint, to lace on shoes, and to hold sexual intercourse..." (Mishnah Yoma 8:1)

On the historic day of mourning, Tisha b'Av, Jews are prohibited from wearing leather shoes. The same prohibition applies on Yom Kippur to show remorse and penance.

In the Book of Isaiah (20:2), Isaiah is commanded to remove his sandals as a sign of mourning. Shoes also play a part in the mourning period after a death. During the period of *shiva*, the seven days of mourning, leather shoes may not be worn. In Talmudic times, both the pall bearers and the mourners went barefoot.

Elijah the Prophet in the Aggadah

Jewish legends about Elijah abound in the aggadah, which is found throughout various collections of rabbinic literature, including the Babylonian Talmud. This varied literature does not merely discuss his life, but has created a new history of him, which, beginning with his death - or "translation" - ends only with the close of the history of the human race. The volume of references to Elijah in Jewish Tradition stands in marked contrast to that in the Canon. As in the case of most figures of Jewish legend, so in the case of Elijah, the Biblical account became the basis of later legend. Elijah the precursor of the Messiah, Elijah zealous in the cause of God, Elijah the helper in distress: these are the three leading notes struck by the aggadah, endeavoring to complete the Biblical picture with the Elijah's legends. His

career is extensive, colorful, and varied. He has appeared the world over in the guise of a beggar and scholar.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 24b

רב יהודה חזא הנהו בי תרי דהוו קא פּרְצִי
ברִיפּתָא, אָמַר: שְׁמַע מִינָהּ אִיכָא שְׁבַעא בְּעַלְמָא.
יְהִיב עֵינֵיהּ, הָוּה פּפְנָא. אָמְרוּ לִיהּ רַבֵּנן לְרַב פְּהֵנָא
בְּרִיהּ דְּרַב נְחוּנְיָא שְׁמַעִיהּ: מַר, דְּשִׁבְיַח קַמֵּיהּ,
נִיעַשְׂנָה דְּלִיפּוּק בְּפִתְחָא דְּסַמוּךְ לְשׁוּקָא. עֲשִׂינָה
וּנְפַק לְשׁוּקָא. חֲזָא בְּנוֹפְיָא.

אָמַר לְהוּ: מַאי הָאִי? אָמְרוּ לִיהּ: אַבּוּסְפָא דְּתַמְרֵי
קַיִמִי דְּקָא מְזַדְּבֵן. אָמַר: שְׁמַע מִינָהּ פּפְנָא בְּעַלְמָא.
אָמַר לִיהּ לְשַׁמְעִיהּ: שְׁלוּף לִי מִסְאֲנִי. שְׁלַף לִיהּ חַד
מִסְאֲנָא, וְאִתָּא מִיטְרָא. כִּי מְטָא לְמִישְׁלַף אַחְרִינָא,
אִתָּא אֱלִיהּ וְאָמַר לִיהּ: אָמַר הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא:
אִי שְׁלַפְתָּ אַחְרִינָא, מַחְרִיבְנָא לְעַלְמָא.

Rav Yehuda saw two people wasting bread. He said: I learn from the fact that people are acting like this that there is plenty in the world. He cast his eyes angrily upon the world, and there was a famine.

The Sages said to Rav Kahana, son of Rav Nehunya, the attendant to Rav Yehuda: The Master, who is frequently present before Rav Yehuda, should persuade him [Rav Yehuda] to leave by the way of the door nearest the market. [Rav Kahana] persuaded Rav Yehuda, and he went out to the market, where he saw a crowd.

He [Rav Yehuda] said to them: What is this gathering?

They [the people] said to him: We are standing by a container (kuspa) of dates that is for sale.

He [Rav Yehuda] said: I learn from this that there is a famine in the world.

He said to his attendant: remove my shoes.

He [Rav Yehuda's attendant] removed one of his shoes and rain came. When he [Rav Yehuda's attendant] began to take off the other shoe, Elijah came and said to him: The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: If you remove your other shoe, I will destroy the entire world.



Explaining the Structure of the Story

What is the sequence of events in the story?

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why were two people wasting bread?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

? Why was Rav Yehuda upset?

Bonus ? Do you think Rav Yehuda intended to bring a famine to the world? If not, why did a famine ensue?

Bonus ? Our story indicates that Rav Yehuda was unaware that there was a famine in the world? How is it possible for Rav Yehuda not to know that there is a famine in the world?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

Bonus ? Why did the Sages approach Rav Kahana (Rav Yehuda's attendant) with their request instead of approaching Rav Yehuda directly?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

? Why did the Sages want Rav Yehuda to leave the House of Study through the door near to the market?

? Rav Yehuda infers from the people's gathering that there is a famine in the world and he shows his disposition to fast and pray to relieve the fast. Why didn't the Sages or his attendant tell him directly what the situation was and ask for his help?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

? Why did Rav Yehuda ask his attendant to remove his shoe?

? Why did rain come?

? Why did Rav Yehuda's attendant start removing his second shoe?

? Why did Elijah the Prophet appear?

? How was God planning to destroy the world if Rav Yehuda had taken off his second shoe?

Bonus ? Why was God planning to destroy the world if Rav Yehuda had taken off his second shoe?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

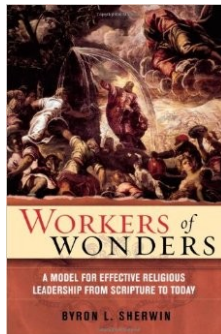
Answer 3 _____

More Analysis Questions

Note to our story in the Adin Steinsaltz edition

I will destroy the world – **מִחְרִיבָנָא לְעָלְמָא**:
Elsewhere this phrase expresses God's readiness to destroy the world so that a certain righteous man will not have to suffer from its continued existence. Here the meaning of the expression is less clear. Some commentaries suggest that God threatened to destroy the world due to Rav Yehuda's repeated requests, first for a famine and later to bring plenty to the world. If Rav Yehuda was not satisfied with the rain that had already begun to fall as soon as he took off his first shoe, God would destroy the world (Maharsha; see Rabbi Elyakim).

Bonus ? How does the Mahrasha reflect (in a veiled way) on the personality of Rav Yehuda?



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

! "Workers of Wonders" – With great power comes great responsibility!