

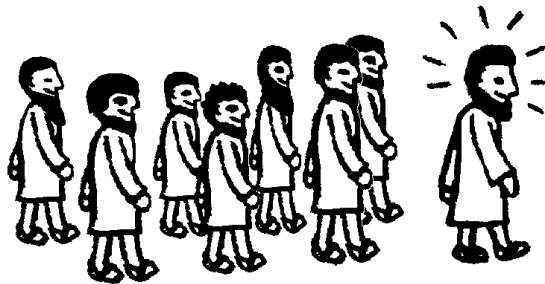
From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [196]

"Let the Descendants of the Nations Come in Peace"

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Yoma 71b



Background to Our Story

Shmaya (tanna)



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shmaya_\(tanna\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shmaya_(tanna))

Shmaya (Hebrew: שמעיה, or Shemaiah, Samaias or Sameas) was a rabbinic sage in the early pre-Mishnaic era who lived at the same time as Avtalyon. They are known as one of the *zugot* ("couples"): *Shmaya and Avtalyon*. Both Shmaya and Avtalyon were converts to Judaism and were both descendants of King Sancheriv of Assyria who destroyed the northern Kingdom of Israel.

He was a leader of the Pharisees in the 1st century BC; president of the Sanhedrin before and during the reign of Herod the Great. He and his colleague Abtalion are termed in *Pesahim*, 66a the *gedole ha-dor* (the great men of the age), and *darshanim* (exegetes) (*ibidem*, 70a).

Abtalion



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

Abht'alyon, also Avtalyon, Avtalion and Abtalion (Hebrew: אבטליון) was a [rabbinic](#) sage in the early pre-[Mishnaic](#) era who lived at the same time as [Sh'maya](#).

A leader of the [Pharisees](#) during the 1st century BC and by tradition vice-president of the great [Sanhedrin](#) of [Jerusalem](#). He was of [heathen](#) descent (*Bab. Yoma*, 71b; *'Eduy.* v.6; *Git.* 57b; *Yer. M. ק.* iii.81b; see Weiss, *Dor Dor we-Dorshaw*, i.1, and Landau, p. 319). Despite this fact, Abtalion, as well as his colleague, Shemaiah, the president of the Sanhedrin, was one of the most influential and beloved men of his time.

Aaron the Priest



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

Aaron אהרן was the older brother of Moses (Exodus 6:16-20, 7:7) and a prophet of God. Unlike Moses, who grew up in the Egyptian royal court, Aaron and his elder sister Miriam remained with their kinsmen in the eastern border-land of Egypt (Goshen). When Moses first confronted the Egyptian king about the Israelites, Aaron served as his brother's spokesman ("prophet") to Pharaoh. (Exodus 7:1) Part of the Law (Torah) that Moses received from God at Sinai granted Aaron the priesthood for himself and his male descendants, and he became the first High Priest of the Israelites.

The High Priest



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

High Priest (Heb. כהן גדול kohen gadol; with definite article הכהן הגדול hakohen hagadol, the High Priest; Aramaic kahana rabba) was the title of the chief religious official of Judaism from the early post-Exilic times until the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. Previously, in the Israelite religion including the time of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, other terms were used to designate the leading priests; however, as long as a king was in place, the supreme ecclesiastical authority lay with him. The official introduction of the term "high priest" went hand in hand with a greatly enhanced ritual and political significance bestowed upon the chief priest in the post-Exilic period, certainly from 411 BCE onward, after the religious transformations brought about by the Babylonian captivity and due to the lack of a Jewish king and kingdom.

The high priests belonged to the Jewish priestly families that trace their paternal line back to Aaron, the first high priest of Israel and elder brother of Moses, through Zadok, a leading priest at the time of David and Solomon. This tradition came to an end in the 2nd century BCE during the rule of the Hasmoneans.

Temple Service (Yom Kippur)



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



While the Temple in Jerusalem was standing (from Biblical times through 70 C.E.), the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) was mandated by the Torah to perform a complex set of special services and sacrifices for Yom Kippur to attain Divine atonement, the word "kippur" meaning "atone" in Hebrew. These services were considered to be the most important parts of Yom Kippur because through them the Kohen Gadol made atonement for all Jews and the world. During the service, the Kohen Gadol entered the Holy of Holies in the center of the Temple, the only time of the year that anyone went inside. Doing so required special

purification and preparation, including five immersions in a [mikvah](#) (ritual bath), and four changes of clothing.

Mishnah Yoma 7:4 (Artscroll Translation)

He washed his hands and feet, undressed, went down (into the mikveh) and immersed (himself), and came up and dried himself. They brought him white (linen) vestments; he dressed and washed his hands and feet.

He entered (the Holy of Holies) to take out the ladle and the shovel.

He washed his hands and feet, undressed, went down, immersed, came up, and dried himself.

They brought him golden vestments; he dressed, washed his hands and feet, and entered (the Holy) to burn the afternoon incense and light the lamps.

Then he washed his hands and feet and undressed. They brought him his personal clothing and he dressed. Then they accompanied him to his house, and he made a feast for his friends for having left the Temple safely.

Mishnah Bava Metzia 4:8

As cheating is prohibited in buying or selling, so it is in words. (How so?) One must not ask the price of a thing when he does not intend to buy it. To a person who has repented one must not say, "Remember your former acts." To a descendant from proselytes one must not say, "Remember the acts of your parents." As it is written [Exodus 22:20]: "And a stranger you shall not vex, nor shall you oppress him."

Mishnah Avot 1:12

Hillel and Shammai received [the Torah] from them (from Shmaya and Avtalyon): Hillel says, "Be of the disciples of Aharon, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving the creatures and bringing them closer to Torah."

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Yoma 71b

רַבִּנּוּן: מַעֲשֵׂה בְכֹהֵן גְּדוֹל אֶחָד שֶׁיֵּצֵא
מִבֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, וְהוּוּ אֲזָלִי כּוֹלֵי עֲלָמָא
בְּתַרְיָה. בֵּיוֹן דְּחִזּוּיֹנְהוּ לְשִׁמְעִיָּה
וְאַבְטָלְיוֹן – שֶׁבְקוּוּהוּ לְדִידִיָּה וְאֲזָלִי בְּתַר
שִׁמְעִיָּה וְאַבְטָלְיוֹן.

לְסוּף אָתּוּ שִׁמְעִיָּה וְאַבְטָלְיוֹן לְאַיְפִטוּרֵי
מִיַּיְנָה דְּכֹהֵן גְּדוֹל. אָמַר לְהֵן: יִיתוֹן בְּנֵי
עַמְמִין לְשָׁלָם! אָמְרוּ לֵיהּ: יִיתוֹן בְּנֵי
עַמְמִין לְשָׁלָם – דְּעֵבְדִין עוֹבְדָא דְאַהֲרֹן,
וְלֹא יִיתֵי בֵר אַהֲרֹן לְשָׁלָם – דְּלֹא עֵבִיד
עוֹבְדָא דְאַהֲרֹן.

There was an episode involving one High Priest who exited the Holy Temple and everyone followed him.

When they saw Shemaya and Avtalyon, they left him [the High Priest by himself] and walked after Shemaya and Avtalyon.

Eventually, Shemaya and Avtalyon came to take leave of the High Priest before returning to their homes.

He [the High Priest] said to them: Let the descendants of the gentile nations come in peace.

They [Shemaya and Avtalyon] said to him [to the High Priest]: Let the descendants of the gentile nations come in peace, who perform the acts of Aaron the Priest, who loved and pursued peace; and let not a descendant of Aaron come in peace, who does not perform the acts of Aaron.



Explaining the Structure of the Story

What is the sequence of events in the story?

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Bonus ? Why is the High Priest referred to in our story as “one High Priest”?

? Why did everybody follow the High Priest when he exited the Holy Temple?

Bonus ? Why did everybody leave the High Priest and follow Shemaya and Avtalyon?

? Why did Shemaya and Avtalyon come to take leave of the High Priest?

? Who in our story are “the descendants of the nations”?

? Who in our story is “the descendant of Aaron”?

Bonus ? How do “the descendants of the nations” perform the acts of Aaron?

Bonus ? How is “the descendant of Aaron” not performing the acts of Aaron?

Extra Bonus ? Why did the High Priest call Shemaya and Avtalyon “the descendants of the nations”?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Extra Bonus ? Why did Shemaya and Avtalyon reply to the High Priest the way they did?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

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

Proverbs 16:18

לִפְנֵי שֹׁפָר גָּאוֹן וְלִפְנֵי כִשְׁלוֹן גְּבוּהַ רוּחַ:

Presumption precedes destruction, a haughty spirit goes before a fall.

טו:יח לִפְנֵי־שֹׁפָר גָּאוֹן וְלִפְנֵי כִשְׁלוֹן גְּבוּהַ רוּחַ:

16:18 PRESUMPTION PRECEDES DESTRUCTION; A HAUGHTY SPIRIT GOES BEFORE A FALL.

This is a difficult verse to translate because its common translation into English is well-known. Gaon, from the root gaah (to be high), is often translated as “pride.” In many contexts (see Ezekiel 16:56 and Hosea 5:5; 7:10), the word has the meaning of “presumption,” as we have chosen to translate it here. Shever (destruction) comes from the root shavar (to break). Thus, it refers to something already broken, hence “destruction.” Govah ruach (literally, “big of wind/spirit”) is translated as “a haughty spirit.” Chishalon (fall), from the root kashal (stumble, trip), seems to have the sense of being tripped by something. Gaon, something high, is what is brought low and smashed. Something puffed up, a “high wind,” is what trips you up.

! Pride comes before a fall (and usually before a nasty comment)

Sages taught in a *baraita*: There was an incident involving one High Priest who exited the Holy Temple and everyone followed him. When they saw Shemaya and Avtalyon, the heads of the Sanhedrin, walking along, in deference to them they left the High Priest by himself and walked after Shemaya and Avtalyon.^N

Eventually, Shemaya and Avtalyon came to take leave of the High Priest before returning to their homes. Envious of the attention they received, he angrily said to them: Let the descendants of the gentile nations come in peace.^N Shemaya and Avtalyon descended from converts, and he scornfully drew attention to that fact. They said to him: Let the descendants of the gentile nations come in peace, who perform the acts of Aaron, who loved and pursued peace; and let not a descendant of Aaron come in peace, who does not perform the acts of Aaron and who speaks condescendingly to descendants of converts.