

From the Rabbi's Desk  
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## Stories with a Twist [198]

### If they are not Prophets, they are the Sons of Prophets (A Story in Three Acts)

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 66a



#### 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 zuggot ("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 *Pesachim*, 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.

## **Bnei Bathyra (The Sons of Beteira)**



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bnei\\_Bathyra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bnei_Bathyra)

Bnei Bathyra (Hebrew: בני בתירא, lit. "*The Children of Bathyra*"; Also referred to in the Jerusalem Talmud as זקני בתירא, lit. "*The Elders of Bathyra*") were Jewish sages family that in a certain period of time, headed the religious leadership of the Jewish people, during the Destruction of the Second Temple, and in close proximity to the beginning of the era of the Tannaim. This family is known for its many important Jewish Sages over the course of many generations. A hundred-years before the Destruction of the Second Temple, the family's sages passed the torch of the Jewish leadership to Hillel the Elder, that made Aliya to the Land of Israel from Babylon and had studied at Sh'maya and Abtalion. The sages of the family are considered "Gedolei Hador", the intellectual giants of the religious world of these generations, even after the Destruction of the Second Temple, and are known to have held a prominent position among the Yavne Sages. The general consensus attributes some Tannaim to this family, and the most known of these attributions is Judah ben Bathyra, who resided in Nusaybin west to Babylon.

## **Hillel the Elder**



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillel\\_the\\_Elder](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillel_the_Elder)

Hillel (Hebrew: הלל; variously called *Hillel HaGadol*, or *Hillel HaZaken*, *Hillel HaBavli* or *HaBavli*; born according to tradition in Babylon c. 110 BCE, died 10 CE in Jerusalem) was a famous Jewish religious leader, one of the most important figures in Jewish history. He is associated with the development of the Mishnah and the Talmud. Renowned within Judaism as a sage and scholar, he was the founder of the House of Hillel school for *Tanna'im* (Sages of the *Mishnah*) and the founder of a dynasty of Sages who stood at the head of the Jews living in the Land of Israel until roughly the fifth century of the Common Era.

He is popularly known as the author of two sayings: (1) "If I am not for myself who is for me? And being for my own self, what am 'I'? And if not now, when?" and (2) the expression of the ethic of reciprocity, or "Golden Rule": "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn."

"As Hillel the Elder had stated, whosoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whosoever that saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world."

Hillel lived in Jerusalem during the time of King Herod and the Roman emperor Augustus. In the Midrash compilation *Sifre* (Deut. 357), the periods of Hillel's life are made parallel to those in the life of Moses. Both lived 120 years (Deut. 34:7), and at the age of forty Hillel went to the Land of Israel; forty years he spent in study; and the last third of his life he was the spiritual head of the Jewish people. A biographical sketch can be constructed; that Hillel went to Jerusalem in the prime of his life and attained a great age. His activity of forty years likely covered the period of 30 BCE to 10 CE.

## Nasi



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasi\\_\(Hebrew\\_title\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasi_(Hebrew_title))

Nāśī' (נָשִׂי') is a Hebrew title meaning prince in Biblical Hebrew, Prince (of the Sanhedrin) in Mishnaic Hebrew, or president in Modern Hebrew.

During the Second Commonwealth (c. 530 BCE - 70 CE), the *nasi* was the highest-ranking member and president of the Sanhedrin or Assembly, including when it sat as a criminal court. The position was created in c. 191 BCE when the Sanhedrin lost confidence in the ability of the High Priest to serve as its head. The Romans recognized the *nasi* as Patriarch of the Jews, and required all Jews to pay him a tax for the upkeep of that office, which ranked highly in the Roman official hierarchy.

Gamaliel VI was the last *nasi*. He died in 425 CE, after which Emperor Theodosius II suppressed the office of the patriarchate. The patriarchal tax was diverted to the Roman treasury from 426.

## Babylonia and Israel



## Halakha



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

The name "*Halakha*" is derived from the Hebrew *helekh* (הִלַּךְ) meaning "behavior" (in a different pronunciation, "halakh" - "to walk" or "to go"). Taken literally, therefore, "*halakha*" translates as "the way to behave" rather than "law". "*Halakha*" is used to refer to the corpus of rabbinic legal texts, or to the overall system of religious law.

## Paschal Lamb (Passover Sacrifice)



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passover\\_sacrifice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passover_sacrifice)



The Passover sacrifice (Hebrew: Korban Pesakh קרבן פסח), also known as the "sacrifice of Passover", the Paschal Lamb, or the Passover Lamb, is the sacrifice that the Torah mandates Jews to ritually slaughter on the eve of Passover, and eat on the first night of the holiday with bitter herbs and matzo. According to the Torah, it was first offered on the night of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt.

### Daily Offerings (Tamid) and Additional Offerings (Musaf)



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



Offerings were practiced from earliest times, particularly for over one thousand years in the tabernacle and during the eras of the Temple of Solomon and the Second Temple in Jerusalem when the Israelites lived in the Land of Israel until the destruction of Judea, Jerusalem, and the Temple by the Roman Empire in 70 CE. Every regular weekday, Sabbath, and many Jewish holidays had their own unique offerings. The priests performed the offerings first in the ancient Tabernacle and then in the Temple of Solomon (the first Temple in Jerusalem) and later in the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

### Numbers 28:1-11

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> Command the Israelite people and say to them: Be punctilious in presenting to Me at stated times the offerings of food due Me, as offerings by fire of pleasing odor to Me.

<sup>3</sup> Say to them: These are the offerings by fire that you are to present to the Lord:

As a regular burnt offering every day, two yearling lambs without blemish. <sup>4</sup> You shall offer one lamb in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. <sup>5</sup> And as a meal offering, there shall be a tenth of an ephah of choice flour with a quarter of a hin of beaten oil mixed in <sup>6</sup> —the regular burnt offering instituted at Mount Sinai—an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> The libation with it shall be a quarter of a hin for each lamb, to be poured in the sacred precinct as an offering of fermented drink to the Lord. <sup>8</sup> The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, preparing the same meal offering and libation as in the morning—an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the Lord.

<sup>9</sup> On the sabbath day: two yearling lambs without blemish, together with two-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in as a meal offering, and with the proper libation — <sup>10</sup> a burnt offering for every sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its libation.

## Talmudical Hermeneutics



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talmudical\\_hermeneutics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talmudical_hermeneutics)

Talmudical hermeneutics (**Hebrew**: מידות שהתורה נדרשת בהן) defines the rules and methods for the investigation and exact determination of the meaning of the **Scriptures**, both legal and historical. Since the **halakha**, however, is regarded simply as an exposition and explanation of the **Torah**, **Talmud hermeneutics** includes also the rules by which the requirements of the oral law are derived from and established by the written law. These rules relate to:

- grammar and exegesis
- the interpretation of certain words and letters and apparently superfluous and/or missing words or letters, and prefixes and suffixes
- the interpretation of those letters which, in certain words, are provided with **points**
- the interpretation of the letters in a word according to their numerical value (see **Gematria**)
- the interpretation of a word by dividing it into two or more words (see **Notarikon**)
- the interpretation of a word according to its consonantal form or according to its vocalization
- the interpretation of a word by transposing its letters or by changing its vowels
- the logical deduction of a halakhah from a Scriptural text or from another law

## A Fortiori Inference

*From: Koren Talmud Bavli, Tractate Pesahim, Part Two. The Noé Edition. Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd. Page 10*

One of the fundamental principles of rabbinic exegesis, the *a fortiori* inference appears in all of the standard lists of exegetical rules. In essence, it is a rule of logical argumentation by means of which a comparison is drawn between two cases, one lenient and the other stringent. It asserts that if the *halakha* is stringent in a case where we are usually lenient, then it will certainly be stringent in a more serious case; likewise, if the *halakha* is lenient in a case where we are usually not lenient, it will certainly be lenient in a less serious case. A *fortiori* argumentation is already found in the Bible, and lists of biblical verses containing a *fortiori* arguments are found in the Talmud. This is one of the most commonly encountered exegetical principles since *a fortiori* inferences can be drawn even without support from tradition, as opposed to the verbal analogy, for example. Sometimes, the Sages referred to a *fortiori* inferences as logical argumentation [*din*].

## Verbal Analogy

*From: Koren Talmud Bavli, Tractate Pesahim, Part Two. The Noé Edition. Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd. Page 10*

Verbal analogy: A fundamental Talmudic principle of biblical interpretation, appearing in all standard lists of exegetical principles. If the same word or phrase appears in two places in the Torah, and a certain *halakha* is explicitly stated in one of these places, one may infer on the basis of a verbal analogy that the same *halakha* must apply in the other case as well. Consequently, the inferences drawn on the basis of verbal analogy rely on verbal identity, rather than on conceptual similarity. For example, the Torah states that those convicted of certain types of sorcery "shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones; their blood shall be upon them" (Leviticus 20:27). Since this verse uses the expression: "Their blood shall be upon them," when speaking of death by stoning, the Talmud infers by verbal analogy that in all cases where this expression is used, capital punishment is inflicted by stoning. Usually inferences can be drawn through verbal analogy only if the identical word or phrase appears in both of the verses being compared, although a verbal analogy may occasionally be drawn even if the words being compared are not identical, provided that their meanings are similar.

## Kareth



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

The Hebrew term *kareth* ("cutting off") is derived from the Hebrew verb *karat* ("to cut off"). In the Talmud *kareth* means not necessarily physical "cutting off" of life but extinction of the soul and denial of a share in the world to come.

In the Hebrew Bible to "cut off" ([Hebrew](#): כרת *karath*), is a form of punishment which may mean killing or excluding from the people. The [Book of Numbers](#) (15:30-31) states that anyone who sins deliberately or high-handedly is to be cut-off from the community:

*But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.*

Examples of sins incurring *kareth* include breaking the fast on the [Day of Atonement](#), sexual violations, and ritual impurities. Anyone who refused to join with [Abraham](#) in being circumcised as a sign of the [covenant](#) being made by God with Abraham and his descendants was to be cut off from the people.

According to the [Mishnah](#) in [Kerithoth](#) (1:1 there are a total of 36 offenses punishable by *kareth*. These are the 36 offenses as enumerated in that Mishnah. Where the offense is sexual intercourse *kareth* applies to both parties:

1. Sexual intercourse with one's mother
2. Sexual intercourse with one's father's wife
3. Sexual intercourse with one's son's wife
4. A male having sexual intercourse with another male
5. A male having sexual intercourse with an animal
6. A female having sexual intercourse with an animal
7. Having sexual intercourse with both a mother and her daughter within the span of his lifetime
8. Sexual intercourse with a married woman
9. Sexual intercourse with one's sister
10. Sexual intercourse with one's father's sister
11. Sexual intercourse with one's mother's sister
12. Sexual intercourse with the sister of one's wife
13. Sexual intercourse with one's brother's wife
14. Sexual intercourse with the wife of one's father's brother

15. Sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman, known as a *nida* (נדה)
16. Cursing God using the appropriate holy name, known as *megadef* (מגדף)
17. Worshiping a deity other than God, known as *Avodah Zarah* (עבודה זרה)
18. Sacrificing one's child to *Moloch* (מלך)
19. Consulting with a spirit through a process known as *ohv* (אוב)
20. Violating the *Shabbat* (שבת) by doing one of the [39 categories of activities prohibited on Shabbat](#)
21. Eating of an offering while in a state of *ritual impurity*, known as *tumah* (טומאה)
22. Entering the temple or *Tabernacle* while in a state of ritual impurity, known as *tumah* (טומאה)
23. Eating of a form of animal fat known as *chelev* (חלב)
24. Eating or drinking blood
25. Eating of an offering after the allowable time for the eating of that offering has expired. An offering in this state is known as *notar* (נותר)
26. Eating of an offering that was offered with the intention of eating of it after the allowable time for the eating of that offering has expired. Such an offering is known as *pigul* (פיגול)
27. Slaughtering an offering outside the boundaries of the temple or Tabernacle
28. Offering up an offering upon an altar outside the boundaries of the temple or Tabernacle
29. Eating (a ketzayith (olives measure) of) *chametz* on [Passover](#)
30. Eating or drinking on [Yom Kippur](#)
31. Violating [Yom Kippur](#) by doing one of the 39 categories of activities that are prohibited on [Shabbat](#)
32. Creating a replication of the [holy anointing oil](#) (שמן המשחה) that was used for the anointment of high priests and kings of the house of David that was made by Moses, using the same ingredients and precise measurements, and creating it in the same volume as created by Moses
33. Creating a replication of the [incense offering](#), known as the *Ketoret* (קטרת), using the same ingredients and precise measurements of the *Ketoret*
34. Anointing oneself with the [holy anointing oil](#) that was created by Moses
35. [Failure to bring the Passover offering](#)
36. [Failure to circumcise oneself](#)

### Carrying on Shabbat

<http://www.chabad.org/>

One of the 39 categories of creative work is "transferring from domain to domain" (also called "carrying").

Basically this means that we do not carry any object -- anything from a piano to a house key -- from a "private domain" (an enclosed area such as a house or a fenced yard) out into a "public domain" (e.g., a city street), or vice versa. We also do not carry an object in a "public domain" for a distance of more than four cubits (about 6 feet).

## The Text: Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 66a

### Act I

This law was forgotten by the sons of Beteira, who were the leaders of their generation. The fourteenth of Nisan once occurred on Shabbat, and they forgot and did not know whether the Paschal lamb overrides Shabbat or not. They

[the sons of Beteira] said: Is there any person who knows whether the Paschal lamb overrides Shabbat or not?

They [the people] said to them: There is a certain man in Jerusalem who came up from Babylonia, and Hillel the Babylonian is his name. He served the two eminent scholars of the generation, Shemaya and Avtalyon, and knows whether the Paschal lamb overrides Shabbat or not.

[The sons of Beteira] sent messengers and called for him.

They [the sons of Beteira] said to him [to Hillel]: Do you know whether the Paschal lamb overrides Shabbat or not?

He [Hillel] said to them: Have we one Paschal lamb during the year that overrides Shabbat? Do we not have many more than two hundred Paschal lambs, i.e., *sacrifices*, during the year that override Shabbat?

They [the sons of Beteira] said to him [to Hillel]: from where do you know this?

He [Hillel] said to them: "*Its appointed time*" is stated with regard to the Paschal lamb and "*its appointed time*" is also stated with regard to the daily offering, for the verse says: "Command the children of Israel and say to them, My offering, the provision of My sacrifice made with fire, for a sweet savor to Me, shall you observe to offer Me at its appointed time" (Numbers 28:2). From here we learn that the daily offering is brought even on Shabbat. Thus, the daily morning and afternoon offerings are brought on more than fifty *Shbbatot* over the course of the year, and two sheep are offered every Shabbat as additional offerings, for a total of more than two hundred sacrifices a year that override Shabbat. Just as the expression "*its appointed time*", which is stated with regard to the daily offering, indicated that it overrides Shabbat, so too "*its appointed time*," which is stated with regard to the Paschal lamb, indicates that it overrides Shabbat.

And furthermore, it is an a *fortiori* inference: If the daily offering, the neglect of which is not punishable by *kareth*, overrides Shabbat, is it not right that the Paschal lamb, the neglect of which is punishable by *kereth*, should override Shabbat?

After Hillel brought these proofs, they immediately seated him at the head and appointed him *Nasi* over them, and he expounded the laws of Passover that entire day.



## Explaining the Structure of the Story

What is the sequence of events in the story?

### Comprehension and Analysis Questions

**?** The son sof Beteira “forgot” and “did not know.” What is the difference between these two terms?

**?** Why did the sons of Beteira look for a person who knew whether the Paschal lamb overrides Shabbat or not?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** What could have sons of Beteira done if they didn’t want to look for a person who knew whether the Paschal lamb overrides Shabbat or not?

**Bonus ?** Why did Hillel study under Shemaya and Avtalyon and not the son sof Beteira?

**Bonus ?** Why did the people know about Hillel and not the sons of Beteira?

**?** Why is Hillel known as “the Babylonian” in our story?

**?** Why do the sons of Beteira ask Hillel to provide proof for his assertion that the Paschal lamb overrides Shabbat?

**?** What is the appointed time with regard to the Paschal lamb?

**?** Why did Hillel provide two explanations why the Paschal lamb overrides Shabbat?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** Why do you think Hillel stressed the fact that neglecting to bring the paschal lamb at its apointed time was punishable by kareth?

**Bonus ?** Why was Hillel appointed Nasi over the sons of Beteira?

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



Let those who know be in charge!

### Act II

In the course of his teachings, he [Hillel] began taunting them with words. He [Hillel] said to them: What caused this to happen to you, that I should come up from Babylonia and become *Nasi* over you? It was the laziness in you that you did not serve the two most eminent scholars of the generation, Shemaya and Avtalyon.

They [the people] said to him [to Hillel]: Our teacher, if one forgot and did not bring a knife on the eve of Shabbat and cannot slaughter his Paschal lamb, what is the law? Since he could have brought the knife before Shabbat, he cannot bring it on Shabbat; but what should he do in this situation?

He [Hillel] said to them: I heard this *halakha* from my teachers but I have forgotten it.



### **Explaining the Structure of the Story**

What is the sequence of events in the story?

### **Comprehension and Analysis Questions**

**Bonus ?** Why did Hillel taunt his new students?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** Why do you think Hillel forgot the Halacha regarding someone who forgot a knife?

**Bonus ?** Both Hillel and the sons of Beteira forgot laws in our story. However, the sons of Beteira lost their preminence and Hillel didn't. What was the difference between them?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

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

! "Pride comes before a fall" and arrogance makes you forget things! – The Lesson Hillel learned the hard way.

### Act III

They [the people] said to him [to Hillel]: Our teacher, if one forgot and did not bring a knife on the eve of Shabbat and cannot slaughter his Paschal lamb, what is the law? Since he could have brought the knife before Shabbat, he cannot bring it on Shabbat; but what should he do in this situation?

He [Hillel] said to them: I heard this *halakha* from my teachers but I have forgotten it. But leave it to the Jewish people; if they are not prophets to whom God has revealed His secrets, they are the sons of prophets, and will certainly do the right thing on their own.

The next day, on Shabbat that was the eve of Passover, one whose Paschal offering was a lamb took the knife and stuck it in its wool; and one whose Paschal offering was a goat, which does not have wool, stuck it between its horns.

He [Hillel] saw the incident and remembered the *halakha* that he once learned and said: This is the tradition I received from the mouths of Shemaya and Avtalyon.



#### Explaining the Structure of the Story

What is the sequence of events in the story?

#### Comprehension and Analysis Questions

**Bonus ?** When Hillel saw how those who have forgotten to bring their knives before Shabbat “fixed” the problem, he remembered the law. Why did he confirm the practice by saying: “this is the tradition I received from the mouths of Shemaya and Avtalyon”?

**Bonus ?** Why was it necessary to give a seal of approval to the practice if the people were already doing the right thing?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

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

**!** Common sense practice, good ideas, and smart solutions should be rewarded and granted a seal of approval by those in charge!