

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 [214]



“And Even So, His Mind Was Not at Ease”

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sota 40a

Background to Our Story

And furthermore...The Humility of Rabbi Abbahu. A Prequel: Babylonia Talmud Sota 40a (Stories with a Twist #213)

And Rabbi Abbahu says: At first, I would say to myself that I was humble. Since I saw that Rabbi Abba of Akko himself stated one reason for a matter, and his interpreter stated one other reason of his own rather than delivering the reason that Rabbi Abba stated, and yet Rabbi Abba did not mind, I say to myself that I am not humble.

And what was the humility of Rabbi Abbahu?

The Gemara relates that Rabbi Abbahu's interpreter's wife said to Rabbi Abbahu's wife: This one of ours, i.e., my husband, has no need for your husband.

And the fact that he bends over to listen to Rabbi Abbahu, and then stands up above him, and repeats his words to the congregants is merely to show respect for him.

[Rabbi Abbahu's] wife went and told this to Rabbi Abbahu.

He [Rabbi Abbahu] said to her [to his wife]: And what difference does it make to you? Through me and through him the One above will be exalted, and it does not matter which one of us is teaching.

Abbahu

JewishEncyclopedia.com

A celebrated Palestinian amora of the third amoraic generation (about 279-320), sometimes cited as R. Abbahu of Cæsarea (Kisrin). His rabbinic education was acquired mainly at Tiberias, in the academy presided over by R. Johanan, with whom his relations were almost those of a son (Yer. Ber. ii. 4*b*; Git. 44*b*; B. B. 39*a*). He frequently made pilgrimages to

Tiberias, even after he had become well known as rector of the Cæsarean Academy (Yer. Shab. viii. 11a; Yer. Pes. x. 37c). He was an authority on weights and measures (Yer. Ter. v. 43c). He learned Greek in order to become useful to his people, then under the Roman proconsuls, that language having become, to a considerable extent, the rival of the Hebrew even in prayer (Yer. Soṭah, vii. 21b); and, in spite of the bitter protest of Simon b. Abba, he also taught his daughters Greek (Yer. Shab. vi. 7d; Yer. Soṭah, ix. 24c; Sanh. 14a). Indeed, it was said of Abbahu that he was a living illustration of the maxim (Eccl. vii. 18; compare Targum), "It is good that thou shouldst take hold of this [the study of the Law]; yea, also from that [other branches of knowledge] withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all" (Eccl. R. to vii. 18).

Abba of Acre



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

Abba of Acre (**Hebrew**: אבא דמן עכו, **translit**: *Abba d'min Akko*), was an *amora* from **Acre** who flourished at the end of the 3rd century. He was greatly respected by Rabbi **Abbahu** and praised as an example of modesty.

Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba



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

Hiyya bar Abba or Rabbi Hiyya was a third generation *amoraic* sage of the Land of Israel, of priestly descent, who flourished at the end of the third century.

In the Jerusalem Talmud he is also called *Ḥiyya bar Ba* or *Ḥiyya bar Wa* (Yer. Berakhot iii.6a, iv.7d); in both Talmuds he is frequently called merely *R. Ḥiyya*. He may have briefly studied with Samuel of Nehardea (Weiss, "Dor," iii.94) in Babylon, his native land. When he was still very young, Hiyya migrated to Israel where he studied under Ḥanina and Joshua ben Levi. He may also have been influenced by Simeon bar Laḳish. Hiyya was also a disciple of Rabbi Johanan. After Rabbi Johanan's death, Hiyya and his friends Ammi and Assi became recognized as some of Palestine's brightest Halakah scholars.

Ḥiyya was distinguished for the care with which he noted the sayings of his masters (Ber. 38b). When questions arose about being faithful to tradition, Ḥiyya's interpretation was widely accepted (Ber. 32b, 38b). Though he was the author of many aggadot, he denounced every attempt to collect and commit his tales to writing. Whenever he came upon such a collection, Hiyya cursed the hand that wrote it (Yer. Shab. xvi.15c). His focus was squarely on Halakhah.

With the help of Ammi and Assi, Hiyya formed a court of law. One day a woman named Tamar came before the court. Her case was a difficult one. The sentence handed down was controversial; Ḥiyya and his associates might have suffered disastrous consequences if Abbahu himself had not come to their assistance (Yer. Meg. iii.74a).

Hiyya was forced to lecture from town to town in an effort to make ends meet. He even had to leave Palestine temporarily (Yer. Ma'as. Sh. v.56b). During these travels, when another lecturer on aggadah drew a bigger crowd than he did, Hiyya couldn't hide his annoyance (see Jew. Encyc. i.36, s.v. Abbahu). To improve his circumstances, Hiyya accepted a commission from Judah II to collect money to help rebuild the decaying patriarchate.

The esteem in which Ḥiyya was held is evident in a letter of introduction Eleazar ben Pedath provided for him: "Behold, we have sent you a great man, our envoy. Until his return he possesses all the powers that we do." According to another version, the

introduction read: "Behold, we have sent you a great man. His greatness consists in this, that he is not ashamed to say 'I know not' " (Yer. Hag. i.76d; Yer. Ned. x.42b).

Hiyya, Ammi, and Assi visited various communities in Israel at the behest of Judah II who entrusted them with reawakening interest in the study of Jewish Law (Yer. Hag. i.76c).

Hiyya had several brothers: R. Nathanha-Kohen, also known as R. Kohen (or R. Nathan) b. Abba; Rabbannai, or R. Bannai; and R. Simeon ben Abba. He had several children, including R. Abba, R. Kahanah, and R. Nehemiah.

Aggadah



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

Aggadah refers to non-legalistic exegetical texts in the classical rabbinic literature of Judaism, particularly as recorded in the Talmud and Midrash. In general, Aggadah is a compendium of rabbinic texts that incorporates folklore, historical anecdotes, moral exhortations, and practical advice in various spheres, from business to medicine.

Halakhah



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

Halakha ([Hebrew](#): הלכה; also [transliterated](#) as *halacha*, *halakhah*, *halachah* or *halocho*) is the collective body of [Jewish religious laws](#) derived from the [Written](#) and [Oral Torah](#). It includes the [613 mitzvot](#) (commandments), subsequent [Talmudic](#) and [rabbinic law](#) and the customs and traditions compiled in the [Shulchan Aruch](#) (literally "Prepared Table", but more commonly known as the "Code of Jewish Law").

Halakha guides not only religious practices and beliefs, but numerous aspects of day-to-day life. Halakha is often translated as "Jewish Law," although a more literal translation might be "the way to behave" or "the way of walking." The word derives from the [root](#) that means "to behave" (also "to go" or "to walk").

The Text: Babylonia Talmud Sota 40a

Furthermore, in another example of his humility, the Sages were counted and reached a decision to appoint Rabbi Abbahu to be the head of the yeshiva. Since he saw that Rabbi Abba of Akko had many creditors, he [Rabbi Abbahu] said to them: There is a man who is greater than me, Rabbi Abba.

Rabbi Abbahu and Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba happened to come to a certain place. Rabbi Abbahu taught matters of *aggada*, and at the same time Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba taught *halakha*. Everyone left Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba and went to Rabbi Abbahu instead. Rabbi Hiyya was offended.

[Rabbi Abbahu] said to him: I will tell you a parable: To what is this matter comparable? To two people, one who sells precious stones and one who sells

small inexpensive items. Upon whom do the customers spring? Don't they spring upon the one who sells small items? Similarly, you teach lofty and important matters that do not attract many people. Everyone comes to me because I teach minor matters.

Every day Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba would escort Rabbi Abbahu to his lodging place out of respect for the house of the emperor, with which Rabbi Abbahu was associated. On that day, Rabbi Abbahu escorted Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba to his lodging place, and even so, his [Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba's] mind was not at ease.



Explaining the Story

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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why did the Sages reach a decision to appoint Rabbi Abbahu to be the head of the Yeshiva?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus Question ? Why did Rabbi Abbahu reply to the Sages that there was someone greater than him?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why did Rabbi Abbahu teach matters of *aggada* and Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba matters of *halakha*?

? Why did people leave Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba and run to listen to Rabbi Abbahu?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Extra Bonus Question ? Why was Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba offended?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why did Rabbi Abbahu tell Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba the parable about the precious stones and the inexpensive items?

? What else did Rabbi Abbahu do to appease Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba?

Extra Bonus Question **?** Why wasn't Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba appeased?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

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

! It is what it is, so get over it!

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings"
(Julius Caesar Act 1, scene 2, 135–141)

EPILOGUE

Our story begins with a recount of Rabbi Abbahu's humility. One day, Rabbi Abbahu and Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba happened to come to a certain place and taught matters of *aggada* and matters of *halakha* respectively. Everyone left Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba and went to listen to Rabbi Abbahu instead. We don't know whether this was a result of the Sages' different personalities or the different subject matter they were teaching, but Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba felt insulted. Rabbi Abbahu went out of his way to appease Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba but to no avail. What should Rabbi Abbahu and the community have done to appease the offended party? The open ending of our story seems to imply that nothing else should be done. Rabbi Hiyya's proclivity to feeling insulted, a product probably of his history and personality, can only be changed by Rabbi Hiyya himself.