

Stories with a Twist [217]



**“But if the water is bad and the land causes bereavement,
what is pleasant about it?”**

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sotah 47a

Background to Our Story

Elisha



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

Elisha's story is related in the Book of Kings in the Hebrew Bible (in Judaism, part of the Nevi'im). He was a prophet and a wonder-worker of the Northern Kingdom of Israel who was active during the reign of Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Jehoash (Joash). Elisha was the son of Shaphat, a wealthy land-owner of Abel-meholah; he became the attendant and disciple of Elijah.

Grace



a: a charming or attractive trait or characteristic **b:** a pleasing appearance or effect. **c:** ease and suppleness.

II Kings 2:19-22

¹⁹ *The men of the town said to Elisha, "Look, the town is a pleasant place to live in, as my lord can see; but the water is bad and the land causes bereavement."*

²⁰ *"Bring me a new bowl," he said, "and put salt in it." So they brought it to him.*

²¹ *Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, "This is what the LORD says: 'I have healed this water. No longer shall death and bereavement come from it.'" ²² And the water has remained pure to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken.*

? What is puzzling in this short story?

The Text: Babylonia Talmud Sotah 47a

”וַיֹּאמְרוּ אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר אֶל אֵלִישָׁע הֲנֵה נָא
מוֹשָׁב הָעִיר טוֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר אֲדַנִּי רֵאָה” וְגו’.
וְכִי מֵאַחַר דְּמִים רָעִים וְאַרְץ מְשֻׁבֶּלֶת, אֵלֶּא
מֵה טוֹבָתָהּ? אָמַר רַבִּי חֲנִינִי: חֵן מְקוֹם עַל
יוֹשְׁבָיו. אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן, שְׁלֵשָׁה חֲסוֹנוֹת הֵן:
חֵן מְקוֹם עַל יוֹשְׁבָיו, חֵן אִשָּׁה עַל בַּעְלָהּ, חֵן
מְקַח עַל מְקַחוֹ.

“And the men of the city said to Elisha: Behold, please, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees, but the water is bad and the land causes bereavement” (II Kings 2:19).

But if the water is bad and the land causes bereavement, what is pleasant about it?

Rabbi Hanin says: The grace of a place is upon its inhabitants, i.e., people are fond of their hometown despite its shortcomings.

Rabbi Yohanan says: There are three graces that have a similar impact: The grace of a place upon its inhabitants; the grace of a woman upon her husband, despite her faults; and the grace of a purchased item upon its buyer.



Explaining the Story

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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why do the inhabitants of the city find its situation pleasant?


? What are the inhabitants of the city asking Elisha?


? Why do the inhabitants of the city tell Elisha, who is not from that city, “as my lord sees”?

Bonus Question ? What do your city, your spouse, and your purchased item have in common?


Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Bonus Question  The Merriam Webster dictionary also defines grace as: *unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration or sanctification*. How does this additional definition of grace help us understand our story?

 How can our story help us in our interpersonal relationships?

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

 The inexplicable preferences, priorities, predilections, and concerns of those we come in contact with... and ourselves.

EPILOGUE

This short story sheds light over an important fact of life and interpersonal relationships: People tend to value (and many times overvalue) what belongs to them and what is already close to their hearts. Being aware of this fact will help us navigate the challenging world of interpersonal relationships, and make our family, work, and social experience more rewarding and pleasant.