

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [224]



“Do Not Be Distressed, Sir, For I Myself Have Seen the Book of Adam...”

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Bava Metzia 85b-86a

Background to Our Story

Shmuel Yarhina'ah

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ומצוות

Shmuel was one of the most famous of the Amoraim of “Bavel” (Babylonia) and he flourished in the first generation of Amoraim. His greatest expertise in Torah matters was deemed to be in the area of monetary law. That is why the general rule is laid down in the Talmud that in his disputes with his great contemporary, friend and Torah adversary, Rav, the halachah is according to the opinion of Rav in ritual matters and according to the opinion of Shmuel in monetary matters.

Shmuel is also referred to occasionally as “Shvor Malka,” which is the Aramaic form of the name of the Persian king, Shapur, with whom Shmuel was quite friendly. Because of this friendship, many advantages were gained for the Jewish Community.

In the opinion of Shmuel, the Torah prohibits the Jew from deceiving any human being, Jew or otherwise (Chullin 94a), because “Before the throne of the Creator, there is no difference between Jews and non-Jews.” (Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh HaShanah 57a)

Shmuel was also an expert physician and astronomer. Because of his skill in astronomy, and his expertise in determining the new-moon, he was given the name Yarchina'a, based on the word “yerach,” meaning moon. He once said (Berachot 58b), “The paths in heaven are as clear to me as the streets of Nehardea.” After the death of Shila, he was appointed Head of the Yeshiva of Nehardea, one of the great institutions of Torah learning in Bavel.

Shmuel was often quite literal in his interpretation of the Torah's Laws. For example, the Torah commands that a robber return a stolen object. Shmuel ruled that a robber who'd stolen a beam and built it into his palace, if he wished to repent and fulfill the Command of the Torah to return the stolen object, he must dismantle his entire palace and retrieve the

stolen beam. (This is not necessarily the halachah in this case, especially if the aggrieved party is willing to accept payment for the beam or another beam).

Shmuel was, for others, a "meikil," a lenient interpreter of the halachah. For example, in Eruvin 79b, Shmuel declared that it was permissible to kindle a fire on Shabbat for a woman in childbirth, or for one who was seriously ill. Regarding the question about rending a garment upon the simultaneous deaths of one's father, mother, brother and sister, Shmuel ruled that one tear was sufficient (Moed Katan 26b). For himself, however, he was a "machmir," a stringent interpreter of the Law. When he heard of the death of Rav, his beloved friend and Torah adversary, Moed Katan 24a records that he tore twelve of his own garments, and said, "Gone is the one before I stood in awe."

Judah the Prince



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

Judah the Prince (Hebrew: יהודה הנשיא, Yehudah HaNasi) or Judah I, also known as Rabbi or Rabbenu HaQadosh (Hebrew: רבנו הקדוש, "our Master, the holy one"), was a 2nd-century CE rabbi and chief redactor and editor of the Mishnah. He was a key leader of the Jewish community during the Roman occupation of Judea . According to the Talmud he was of the Davidic line, the royal line of King David, hence the title nasi, meaning prince. The title nasi was also used for presidents of the Sanhedrin. Judah died on 15 Kislev around 217 CE.^[4]

Judah the Prince was born in 135 CE. According to the Midrash, he came into the world on the same day that Rabbi Akiva died a martyr's death. The Talmud suggests that this was a result of Divine Providence: God had granted the Jewish people another leader of great stature to succeed Rabbi Akiva. His place of birth is unknown; nor is it recorded where his father, Shimon ben Gamliel II, sought refuge with his family during the persecutions under Hadrian. He is the only tanna known as Rabbeinu haQadosh, "our holy teacher" due to his deep piety.

Upon the restoration of order in the Land of Israel, Usha became the seat of the academy and Judah spent his youth there. His father presumably gave him the same education that he himself had received, including Greek language. This knowledge of Greek enabled him to become the Jews' intermediary with the Roman authorities. He favored Greek as the language of the country over Syriac (Aramaic). It is said that in Judah's house, only Hebrew was spoken, and even the maids spoke it.

"During Rabbi's career, not only did the scope of rabbinic jurisdiction increase, but the power of the central rabbinic office increased as well. In contrast with his predecessors, Rabbi assumed the responsibilities of a communal functionary by appointing and deposing local leaders and by checking the family purity of Jews in a distant locale. Similarly, he made unprecedented efforts to create a more popular halakhic system. In this vein, he permitted the use of produce immediately following the end of the sabbatical year, the import of produce into the Holy Land, and the acquisition of land from a sikarikon. Thus, while Rabbi strengthened his ties with the wealthy, he also broadened his power base by becoming a more popular figurehead."

According to the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 10a-b), Judah haNasi was very wealthy and greatly revered in Rome. He had a close friendship with "Antoninus", possibly the Emperor Antoninus Pius, though it is more likely his famous friendship was with Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus who would consult Judah on various worldly and spiritual matters.

The Talmud records the tradition that Judah haNasi was buried in the necropolis of Beit She'arim, in the Lower Galilee.

Conditions for Classical Rabbinical Ordination (Semicha)



From: What Is a Rabbi? A Brief History of Rabbinic Ordination (Semicha) By **Yehuda Shurpin**

This first form of ordination could only be granted under very specific conditions:

- The one granting the *semicha* had to do so while accompanied by two others. For *semicha* cannot be conveyed by less than three "judges." However only one of these three, namely the person conveying the *semicha*, had to be ordained himself.
- Both the ordaining rabbi and the one receiving ordination had to be present in the Land of Israel. But they were not required to be in each other's presence. Ordination could be granted through an oral or written message.
- While a person could be ordained to rule only in a specific area of Jewish law, he was required to be expert and qualified to rule in all areas. Ordination to rule in matters relating to *kashrut* was referred to as "*Yoreh Yoreh*," "May he decide? He may decide!" To rule regarding monetary issues, one required "*Yaddin Yaddin*" "May he judge? He may judge!"
- Not only could a person be ordained to rule only in a specific area, he could also be ordained to rule only for a specified time period.
- There was no limit on how many people could be ordained at one time. In fact, King David ordained 30,000 people at once.
- Originally, whoever was ordained would in turn ordain his students. But during the times of Hillel the Elder (1st century BCE), as a gesture of respect to the remnants of the house of David, the sages instituted that *semicha* could be conveyed only with the express permission of the generation's Jewish leader--the *nasi*.

At the same time, the sages also instituted that the *nasi* should not convey *semicha* unless he was accompanied by the head of the rabbinical court, the *av beit din*, and that the *av beit din* should not convey *semicha* unless accompanied by the *nasi*. The other sages, however, could convey *semicha* by themselves after receiving license from the *nasi*, provided they were accompanied by two others.

The Book of Adam

סֵפֶר אָדָם The Book of Adam. Rashi and most other commentators understand this in the light of the Rabbinic interpretation of the verse (Genesis 5:1): "This is the book of the generations of Adam," according to which God showed Adam the Torah scholars of all the future generations (see *Avodah Zarah* 5a). Accordingly, the "Book of Adam" was a prophetic work which contained cryptic allusions to the leading Torah figures of the future.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Bava Metzia 85b-86a

Shmuel Yarhina'ah was Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's doctor.

Once, when Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi had contracted an eye disease, Shmuel offered him a cure, saying: "Let me place a drug in your eyes." But Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi refused the treatment, saying: "I cannot bear the pain." Shmuel then suggested: "Let me spread an ointment on your eyes." But He [Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi] said: "I could not bear that treatment either." So Shmuel placed a vial of medicine under his patient's pillow and he was cured.

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was anxious to ordain him, but the matter was never accomplished. Every time he tried to arrange for Shmuel's ordination, something occurred to interfere with his plans.


[Shmuel] said to him: "Do not be distressed, sir, for I myself have seen the Book of Adam, in which is inscribed: 'Shmuel Yarhina'ah shall be called "scholar," but he shall not be called "Rabbi," and he will be responsible for Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's recovery.'"



Explaining the Story

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


Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Bonus  "So [Shmuel] placed a vial of medicine under his pillow and he was cured." How was Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's cured?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____


Answer 3 _____

 Why was Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi anxious to confer the title of "Rabbi" upon Shmuel Yarhina'ah?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

 Why couldn't Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi confer the title of "Rabbi" upon Shmuel Yarhina'ah?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? How do we know that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was distressed over the fact that he couldn't confer the title of "Rabbi" to Shmuel Yarhina'ah?

? Why was Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi distressed?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Extra Bonus ? *"Do not be distressed, sir, for I myself have seen the Book of Adam, in which is inscribed: 'Shmuel Yarhina'ah shall be called "scholar," but he shall not be called "Rabbi," and he will be responsible for Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's recovery."* What is the purpose of these words?

Extra Bonus ? Why was Shmuel Yarhina'ah fine with the fact that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi couldn't confer the title of "Rabbi" upon him?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

Answer 5 _____

Extra Bonus ? Why doesn't Shmuel Yarhina'ah tell Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi about "the Book of Adam" as soon as the latter wants to confer upon him the title of "Rabbi"?

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

! Some things are meant to be and others are not. You don't have to be happy about it but you should be able to move on!

EPILOGUE

Shmuel Yarhina'ah understands that some things are meant to be and others are not. Not only does Shmuel Yarhina'ah embody this important lesson but he also tries to convey it to his distressed teacher. Some things are "written in the book" and some are not. You don't have to like it, but as long as you can find some good things "written in your book," you are expected to move on in life.