

Stories with a Twist [229]



Even a Horse Upon Which to Ride and a Servant to Run in Front of Him

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 67b

Background to Our Story

Deuteronomy 15:7-8

If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother.

But you shall surely open your hand to him, and shall surely lend him sufficient for his deficiency in that which is deficient for him.

Stories in Context (Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 67a & b)

MISHNA:

*With regard to one who marries off his daughter with the terms of the dowry **unspecified**, he must not give her less than fifty dinars. If the bride's father **pledged to bring her into the marriage bare**, by saying that he refuses to give her anything, **the husband should not say: When I bring her into my house, I will clothe her with my clothing**, but not beforehand. **Rather, he must clothe her while she is yet in her father's house**, and she enters the marriage with the clothing in hand. **And similarly**, with regard to a charity administrator who marries off an orphan girl, he must not give her less than fifty dinars. **If there are sufficient resources in the charity fund**, the charities **provide** even more for her, furnishing a dowry and her other needs **according to her dignity.***

GEMARA:

...

The Sages taught: Concerning **an orphan boy and an orphan girl who have come and appealed to be supported** by the charity fund, the distributors **provide for the orphan girl first and afterward they provide for the orphan boy**. This is **because it is the way of a man to circulate about the entryways** to ask for charity, **and it is not a woman's way to circulate** for charity. Therefore, her need is greater. Concerning **an orphan boy and orphan girl: who have come to appeal to the charity fund to be married off**, the administrators **marry off the orphan girl first and afterward they marry off the orphan boy, because the humiliation of a woman who is not married is greater than that of an unmarried man**.

The Sages taught: Concerning **an orphan boy who has come to marry**, the community tries its utmost to provide for all of his needs. The charities **rent a house for him, arrange for him a bed and all his utensils, and thereafter they marry him a wife, as it is stated:** "But you shall surely open your hand to him, and shall surely lend him **sufficient for his deficiency in that which is deficient for him**" ([Deuteronomy 15:8](#)). With regard to the phrase "**sufficient for his deficiency**," this is referring to the house. "**Which is deficient**"; this is referring to a bed and table. "**For him [lo]**"; this is referring to a wife. **And similarly** the verse states: "**I will make him [lo] a helpmate for him**" ([Genesis 2:18](#)), when God created a wife for Adam.

Hillel the Elder



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillel_the_Elder

Hillel (born Babylon 1st Century BCE – died? Jerusalem, 1st Century CE) 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 "Beit Hillel" ("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: "If I am not for myself, who will be [for me]? And when I am for myself, what am 'I'? And if not now, when?"^[1] and 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."^[2]

Hillel was recognized as the highest authority among the Pharisees (predecessors to Rabbinic Judaism). Hillel lived in Jerusalem during the time of King Herod and the Roman Emperor Augustus. His activity of forty years likely covered the period of 30 BCE to 10 CE.

Footnotes

1. Pirkei Avot 1:14
2. Babylonian Talmud, tractate Shabbat 31a. See also the ethic of reciprocity or "The Golden rule."

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 67b

The Sages taught: "Sufficient for his deficiency"; this teaches that you are commanded with respect to the pauper to support him, but you are not commanded with respect to him to make him wealthy, as the obligation encompasses only that which he lacks, as indicated by the word deficient. However, the verse also states: "Which is deficient for him"; this includes even a horse upon which to ride and a servant to run in front of him for the sake of his stature, if necessary. For someone accustomed to these advantages, their absences constitute a true deficiency, not an extravagant indulgence.

They said about Hillel the Elder that he obtained for a poor person of noble descent a horse upon which to ride and a servant to run in front of him. One time he did not find a servant to run in front of him, and Hillel himself ran in front of him for three *mil* (about 2 miles).



Explaining the Story

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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Extra Bonus **?** What do you think of the law above?

? Why did Hillel the Elder obtain a horse and a servant for a poor person of noble descent?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why did Hillel himself run in front of the poor person of noble descent when he wasn't able to find a servant?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Hillel was the leading Sage of his generation and he could have excused himself arguing that playing the role of a running slave was against the honor due to the Torah, if not to a Torah scholar. What do you think was Hillel's motivation to play

the role of a running slave and not to excuse himself even when he could have done so?

Another Story Before the Twist (also in Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 67b)

The Sages taught: There was an incident involving the people of the Upper Galilee, who bought for a poor person of noble descent from the city of Tzipori a *litra* of meat every day (a small amount of meat, no more than 300 grams).

The Gemara asks: If they provided him with the reasonable ration of a *litra* of meat, what is the novelty in this incident?

Rav Huna said: It was a *litra* of meat of poultry, which is very expensive. And if you wish, say instead that for the weight of a *litra* of coins, they bought him actual red meat. The price of ordinary meat was so expensive that they had to pay the exorbitant price of a *litra* of coins.

Rav Ashi said they did not spend a *litra* of coins for him. Rather, there, in the Galilee, it was a small village, and every day they would lose an entire animal just for him. They would slaughter an animal daily, simply to provide him with fresh meat, although there was otherwise no market for such a plentiful supply of meat in the village.

? Why did the people of the Upper Galilee provide a poor person of noble descent from the city of Tzipori with an extravagant amount of meat?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Extra Bonus **?** What do you think of the story above?

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

! On the importance of overcoming envy: the lesson Hillel the Elder and the people of the Upper Galilee taught themselves and all of us!

EPILOGUE

A Helpful Guide to Overcoming Envy

About Joshua Becker

"*Envy is ignorance.*" –Ralph Waldo Emerson

Very few people would argue for the positive influence of envy in our lives. In fact, most of us can quickly recognize its harmful effects:

- It fosters discontent and distress.
- It binds our freedom.
- It leads to resentment and bitterness.
- It causes us to do things we wouldn't normally do.
- It can spiral into depression.

And yet, [the wasted emotions](#) of envy and jealousy continue to be present in our lives. It is a constant battle that wars against our heart and soul. We experience envy over other peoples' appearance, talents, relationships, and bank accounts. It offers no positive contribution to our lives. Yet, it remains. It is time to break free. Certainly, each of us desire to live in freedom from jealousy and envy. How then, can we overcome it?

Consider these helpful, life-changing steps to overcoming envy:

1. Shift your focus to the goodness in your life.

One of the biggest reasons we envy the life of another is because we have begun to take our blessings for granted. Count them again. You are talented. You are gifted. You are cared for. You are unique. [Your life is too valuable to be lived like everyone else](#). You have countless reasons to be grateful for the life you have been given. Remind yourself again.

2. Remind yourself that nobody has it all.

[Comparing your life](#) with others is always a losing proposition. There will always appear to be people who have it better than you. But remember, we always compare the worst of what we know about ourselves to the best assumptions we make about others. Be reminded, nobody has it all. Each person you meet experiences problems, trials, and weaknesses—just like you. This is what makes us human. Nobody is exempt. Nobody has it all. Nobody.

3. Avoid people who habitually value the wrong things.

If you spend all your time with people who compare the latest fashions, you are going to start desiring the latest fashions. If you spend all your time with people who talk about their salaries, their new cars, or their extravagant vacations, you are going to naturally fall into the inevitable trap of comparing your possessions to theirs. But there are [far more important](#)

[things](#) to pursue. Remove yourself from the conversation (and the relationship if necessary).

4. Spend time with grateful people.

Gratitude is highly contagious—that is why I spend time reading [Tammy Strobel](#). You can read gratitude in almost every word she writes. Find grateful people who experience contentment in their lives and spend quality time with them. You can find them online or you can find them in person. But the more you invest your time with them, the more their spirit will become yours... and soon, others will desire what you have.

5. Understand that marketers routinely fan the flame.

One of the most effective tools for advertisers in our culture is to foster jealousy and envy among us. After all, if they can cause us to recklessly desire the possessions of another, they can drive us to great lengths to acquire it for ourselves. Be on guard against their tactics. Recognize them. Avoid them. And refuse to succumb to their deception.

6. Celebrate the success of others.

Genuinely and practically, rejoice in the fortune of others. When somebody receives something that you desire, be happy for them. If you wanted it, they probably did too. [Stop viewing life as a competition](#). Joy is not a finite resource. And the moment you learn to experience happiness in others' joy is the day you take a huge step to overcoming envy once and for all.

7. Be generous.

Even if you have to force yourself into it at first, make generosity an essential habit in your life. Give your time. Give your finances. Give your abilities, talents, and skills. Volunteer in your community. Support a cause that promotes social justice. And get your hands dirty. As you begin to spend more time and more energy with those who have less than you, the more you will find fulfillment and meaning. And when you do, the allure of another's person life will quickly fade away.

Envy has held us hostage for far too long. It is time, once and for all, to break free from envy and experience a more fulfilled life because of it.