

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [230]



He Said to Him: On what do you Normally Dine?

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.

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).

Rabbi Nechemia



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbi_Nehemiah and Frieman, Shulamis: Who's Who in the Talmud. Jason Aronson Inc. 1995.

Rabbi Nehemiah was an Israelite mathematician, circa 150 CE (during the Tannaim era, Fourth Generation).

According to one opinion, Rabbi Nechemiah was one of the five scholars who were ordained by Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava at the cost of Rabbi Yehudah's life. He was one of the seven scholars of Rabbi Akiva who "saved the Torah from destruction" after the destruction of Bettar.

After the Bar Kochba rebellion and the Hadrianic persecution, Rabbi Nechemiah participated in the gathering of the sages in Usha. He was also found with the gathering of the sages in Yavneh, and he was active at Beit Rimmon when the sages made the renewed calendar arrangements.

He was very poor. He taught: "Beloved is suffering, for just as sacrifices bring atonement, so does suffering bring atonement," and "a single individual is equivalent to the whole of creation."

He is attributed as the author of the [Mishnat ha-Middot](#) (ca. AD 150), making it the earliest known [Hebrew](#) text on [geometry](#), although some historians assign the text to a later period by an unknown author.

The *Mishnat ha-Middot* argues against the common belief that the Bible defines the [geometric](#) ratio π (pi) as being exactly equal to 3, based on the description in [1 Kings](#) 7:23 (and [2 Chronicles](#) 4:2) of the [great bowl](#) situated outside the [Temple of Jerusalem](#) as having a diameter of 10 [cubits](#) and a circumference of 30 cubits. He maintained that the [diameter](#) of the bowl was measured from the *outside* brim, while the [circumference](#) was measured along the *inner* brim, which with a brim that is one [handbreadth](#) wide (as described in the subsequent verses [1 Kings](#) 7:24 and [2 Chronicles](#) 4:3) yields a ratio from the circular rim closer to the actual value of π .

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 67b

A certain person came before Rabbi Nehemya to request charity. He [Rabbi Nehemya] said to him: On what do you normally dine? He [the pauper] said to him: on fatty meat and aged wine.

Rabbi Nehemya asked him: Is it your wish to belittle yourself and partake together with me in a meal of lentils, which is my regular food?

He [the pauper] partook with him a meal of lentils, and he died.

Rabbi Nehemya said: Woe to this one who was killed by Nehemya.

The Gemara wonders: On the contrary, Rabbi Nehemya should have said: Woe to Nehemya who killed this one.

The Gemara responds: Rather, Rabbi Nehemya meant that it was he, the pauper, who should not have pampered himself so much.



Explaining the Story

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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why did Rabbi Nehemya ask the pauper: "On what do you normally dine?"

? Why did Rabbi Nehemya offer the pauper to join him for a meal of lentils?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why did the the pauper aquiesce to Rabbi Nehemya’s request?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? What would have Rabbi Nehemya’s done had the pauper not aquiesced to his invitation?

Bonus Question ? Why did the the pauper die?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

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

- ! Live well, enjoy life, but keep your survival skills at hand.

EPILOGUE

When parents force their “picky eating” children to eat everything on their plate, they are not only caring for their nutrition or teaching them the value of food, but they are teaching them survival skills, as well.

Adaptability and flexibility are probably two of the most important skills a person can learn, and it is your responsibility to acquire these skills if you didn’t learn them from home. Studies on Holocaust survivors show that adaptable and flexible persons had a higher chance of survival.

While our story focuses on “fussy eaters,” the same is true about people who are “picky” about their social settings. While not everybody needs to be your friend, your capacity to share time and space with people of different backgrounds and personalities, could open new doors to you, or at least not close the ones already open.