

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [240]

Yehudah of Hutza Went and Hid in a Cave for Three Days

Insights into Jerusalem Talmud Nedarim 11:1



Background to Our Story

Yehudah of Hutza



Jose ben Halafta



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

Jose ben Halafta - Yose ben Halafta (Hebrew: רבי יוסי בן חלפתא) was a Tanna of the fourth generation (2nd century CE). Jose was a student of Rabbi Akiva and was regarded as one of the foremost scholars of halakha and aggadah of his day. He was a teacher and mentor to, among other notables, Judah ha-Nasi and thus is prominently mentioned in the Mishnah, being the fifth most frequently mentioned sage in the Mishnah. Of the many Rabbi Yose's in the Talmud, Yose Ben Halafta is the one who is simply referred to as Rabbi Yose.

Prioritizing Our Giving

תלמוד בבלי, בבא מציעא עא
דתני רב יוסף (שמות כ"ב) אם כסף תלוה את עמי את העני עמך, עמי ונכרי - עמי קודם, עני ועשיר - עני קודם,
ענייך ועניי עירך - ענייך קודמין, עניי עירך ועניי עיר אחרת - עניי עירך קודמין

Rabbi Joseph learned: "If you lend money to any of my people that are poor with you" [this teaches, if the choice lies between] a Jew and a non-Jew, a Jew has preference; the poor or the rich the poor takes precedence; your poor [i.e. your relatives] and the [general] poor of your town, your poor come first; the poor of your city and the poor of another town the poor of your own town have prior rights.

Monasticism

www.christianitytoday.com

Monasticism was "in the air" in the fourth and fifth centuries. Palestine played an important role in this monastic explosion. Biblical precedents and personalities—Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, and Jesus himself— attracted faithful visitors and aspiring monastics. The austere cliffs and caves of the Judean desert stretching east of Jerusalem to the Dead Sea presented a double advantage: remoteness and accessibility. You could walk just an hour from the Holy City and find yourself in the wilderness.

No one is sure who first sought out this spiritual refuge. The historian Eusebius records that, toward the middle of the third century, a bishop of Jerusalem named Narcissus fled to the desert in order to avoid scandalous rumors. Others sought to escape persecution or barbarian invasions. Chariton is often considered the pioneer of monasticism in the wilderness immediately outside Jerusalem. Others chose to remain in or near the holy sites themselves: the renowned Roman matron Melania the Elder and her companion Rufinus founded monastic communities on the Mount of Olives, while the scholar Jerome and his aristocratic friend Paula did the same near the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. These were frequented by intellectuals such as Evagrius and Cassian.

Monks flocked to Palestine from nearby Egypt and Syria and also from far-away Rome and Gaul. By the early fourth century, the diversity of pious pilgrims and monastic luminaries gave Palestinian monasticism its own unique aristocratic, international, and ecumenical character.

Joshua 21:40

"Thus these cities were assigned, every city with its surrounding pastures, and so it was with all these cities."

The Text: Jerusalem Talmud Nedarim 11:1

יהודה איש הוצא עבד טמיר במערתא
תלתא יומין מיקו' על הדין טעמא מניין שחיי העיר
הזאת קודמין לחיי עיר אחרת. אתא לגבי רבי יוסי
בן חלפתא אמר ליה אית לי טמיר במערתא תלתא
יומין מיקום על הדין טעמא מניין שחיי העיר הזאת
קודמין לחיי עיר אחרת. קרא לרבי אבא בריה אמר
ליה הדין טעמא מניין שחיי העיר הזאת קודמין
לחיי עיר אחרת. א"ל "תהיינה הערים האלה.
תהיינה עיר ואחר כך מגרשיה סביבותיה. אמר ליה
מי גרם לך דלא ילפתה עם חבירך.

Yehudah of Hutza went and hid in a cave for three days, considering this matter: from where do we learn that when it comes to charity, for example, the life

of this city (of one's own city) takes precedence over the life of a city elsewhere?

He came to Rabbi Yose ben Halafta and said to him: I went and hid in a cave three days, considering this matter: from where do we learn that when it comes to charity, for example, the life of this city (of one's own city) takes precedence over the life of a city elsewhere.

He [Rabbi Yose] called to his son, Rabbi Abba, and said to him: this matter, from where do we learn that when it comes to charity, for example, the life of this city (of one's own city) takes precedence over the life of a city elsewhere?

He [Rabbi Abba] said, "*Thus these cities were assigned, every city with its surrounding pastures*" (Joshua 21:40). "These cities were assigned;" Cities were assigned and only afterward, "its surrounding pastures."

He [Rabbi Yose] said then to him [to Yehudah of Hutza]: what was the cause that you couldn't find a solution? That you did not study with your colleagues.



Explaining the Story (What is the sequence of events that take place in the story?)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why did Yehudah of Hutza hide in a cave for three days?

Bonus ? Why did Yehudah of Hutza go to Rabbi Yose ben Halafta?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Bonus ? Why does Rabbi Yose ben Halafta call his son to answer Yehudah of Hutza's question?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus ? How does Rabbi Yose ben Halafta's son know the answer to Yehudah of Hutza's question?

Extra Bonus ? Why do you think Yehudah of Hutza did not study with his colleagues?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

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

! Teamwork is not only good for the collective. It is good also for the individual!



EPILOGUE

From where do we learn that the life of this city takes precedence over the life of a city elsewhere? Yehudah of Hutza wishes to find the answer to this question and secludes himself for three days in a cave to find the answer. We are not sure what prompted Yehudah of Hutza to seclude himself in a cave. Was he bothered by the noise of the House of Study? Was he looking for mystical inspiration? Was he embarrassed to ask his colleagues and to show that he didn't have all the answers? Did he think that nobody else knew the answer either and wanted to make a triumphal entrance to the House of Study after having found the answer in solitude? Yehudah of Hutza finds, at the end of the story, the answer to his original question, but he learns an even more important lesson: when the individual separates himself from the community, both the individual and community lose.