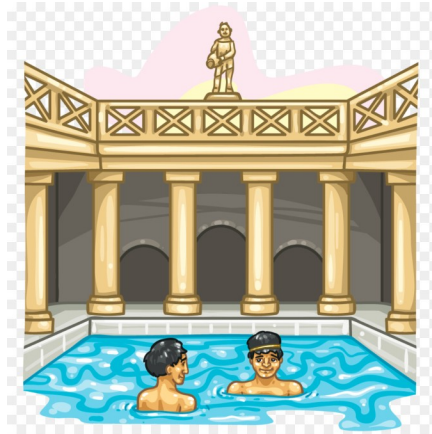


From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [261]

For What Reason Do You Bathe in the Bathhouse of Aphrodite? (Insights into Babylonian Talmud, Avoda Zara 44b)



Background to Our Story

Proclus and Plopsus



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Avoda Zara- Horayot. Koren publishers
Jerusalem Page 242

Proclus – פְּרוֹקְלוֹס: This seems to be the Greek name Πρόκλος, Proclus, which means one who raises objections. It is not known exactly who this man was, but judging by the context is seems that he was an important officer in the Roman government. This is supported by the fact that Rabban Gamliel took the time and trouble to explain his actions to him.

Plospus – פְּלוֹסְפּוֹס: Many prefer the variant, Ploplus, which is close to the Greek name Φιλόλαος, Philolaos, meaning one who loves the people.

Akko



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Akko – אַכּוֹ: Although this ancient and significant port city is included in the boundaries of Eretz Yisrael as described in the Torah, it was never actually conquered by the Israelites during the First Temple period and remained under the jurisdiction of the rulers of Sidon. Even during the Second Temple period, when the Hasmonean dynasty was at its zenith, Akko remained under foreign control. Since it was not under Jewish control, Akko was not consecrated as part of Eretz Yisrael for the purposes of the mitzvot that are dependent on Eretz Yisrael. The

outskirts of the city were under Jewish control and therefore were considered to have been consecrated by the Jews returning from the Babylonian exile. The Jerusalem Talmud provides highly specific demarcations of which areas form part of Eretz Yisrael. Despite its unconsecrated status, there were periods in which Akko contained a significant Jewish community that produced many illustrious Sages. The mother of the well-known Rabbi Kogan from Fresh Meadows lives there

Aphrodite



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Aphrodite – אַפְרוֹדִיטָי : This is Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and procreation. Its image was fashioned as a young, attractive woman. Therefore, its image was also commonly used for ornamental purposes not connected to actual worship.



Rabban Gamliel II



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

Rabban Gamaliel II (also spelled Gamliel) was the first person to lead the sanhedrin as nasi. After the fall of the second temple, which occurred in 70 CE, Gamliel was appointed nasi approximately 10 years later. Gamaliel II was the son of Shimon ben Gamaliel, one of Jerusalem's foremost men in the war against the Romans (vide Josephus, Bellum Judaicum iv. 3, 9, Vita 38), and grandson of Gamaliel I. To distinguish him from the latter he is also called Gamliel of Yavne (or Gamaliel of Jabneh).

In Yavne, during the siege of Jerusalem, the scribes of the school of Hillel had taken refuge by permission of Vespasian, a new centre of Judaism arose under the leadership of the aged Johanan ben Zakkai, a school whose members inherited the authority of the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem. Gamaliel II became Johanan ben Zakkai's successor, and rendered immense service in the strengthening and reintegration of Judaism, which had been deprived of its former basis by the destruction of the Temple and by the entire loss of its political autonomy. He put an end to the division which had arisen between the spiritual leaders of Palestinian Judaism by the separation of the scribes into the two schools called respectively after Hillel and Shammai, and took care to enforce his own authority as the president of the chief legal assembly of Judaism with energy and often with severity. He did this, as he himself said, not for his own honor nor for that of his family, but in order that disunion should not prevail in Israel.

Deuteronomy 12:2-3

² You must destroy all the sites at which the nations you are to dispossess worshiped their gods, whether on lofty mountains and on hills or under any luxuriant tree. ³ Tear down their altars,

smash their pillars, put their sacred posts to the fire, and cut down the images of their gods, obliterating their name from that site.

Deuteronomy 13:13-19

¹³ If you hear it said, of one of the towns that the Lord your God is giving you to dwell in, ¹⁴ that some scoundrels from among you have gone and subverted the inhabitants of their town, saying, "Come let us worship other gods" — whom you have not experienced — ¹⁵ you shall investigate and inquire and interrogate thoroughly. If it is true, the fact is established — that abhorrent thing was perpetrated in your midst — ¹⁶ put the inhabitants of that town to the sword and put its cattle to the sword. Doom it and all that is in it to destruction: ¹⁷ gather all its spoil into the open square, and burn the town and all its spoil as a holocaust to the Lord your God. And it shall remain an everlasting ruin, never to be rebuilt. ¹⁸ Let nothing that has been doomed stick to your hand, in order that the Lord may turn from His blazing anger and show you compassion, and in His compassion increase you as He promised your fathers on oath — ¹⁹ for you will be heeding the Lord your God, obeying all His commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, doing what is right in the sight of the Lord your God.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Avoda Zara 44b

שאל פרוקלוס בן פלוספוס את רבן גמליאל בעכו, שהיה רוחץ במרחץ של אפרודיטי, אמר ליה, כתוב בתורתכם: "לא ידבק בידך מאומה מן החרם", מפני מה אתה רוחץ במרחץ של אפרודיטי? אמר לו: אין משיבין במרחץ. ו

כשניצא, אמר לו: אני לא באתי בגבולה, היא באה בגבולי; אין אומרים: "נעשה מרחץ נוי לאפרודיטי", אלא אומר: "נעשה אפרודיטי נוי למרחץ".

דבר אחר: אם נותנים לה ממון הרבה, אי אתה נכנס לעבודה זרה ששלה ערום ובעל קרי ומשתין בפניה; זו עומדת על פי הדיב וכל העם משתינין לפניה, לא נאמר אלא "אלהיהם", את שנוהג בו משום אלוה — אסור, את שאינו נוהג בו משום אלוה — מותר.

Proclus ben (the son of) Plospus, once asked a question of Rabban Gamliel in the city of Akko when he was bathing in the bathhouse of the Greek god Aphrodite.

Proclus said to him: It is written in your Torah: "And nothing of the proscribed items shall cleave to your hand" (Deuteronomy 13:18). For what reason do you bathe before an idol in the bathhouse of Aphrodite?

Rabban Gamliel said to him: One may not answer questions related to Torah in the bathhouse. And when he left the bathhouse, Rabban Gamliel gave him several answers.

He [Rabban Gamliel] said to him: I did not come into its domain; it came into my domain. The bathhouse existed before the statue dedicated to Aphrodite was erected.

Furthermore, people do not say: Let us make a bathhouse as an adornment for Aphrodite; rather, they say: Let us make a statue of Aphrodite as an adornment for the bathhouse. Therefore, the main structure is not the Aphrodite statue, but the bathhouse.

Rabban Gamliel continued: Alternatively, there is another answer: Even if people would give you a lot of money, you would not enter before your object of idol worship naked, or as one who experienced a seminal emission who comes to the bathhouse to purify himself, nor would you urinate before it. This statue stands upon the sewage pipe and all the people urinate before it. There is no prohibition in this case, as it is stated in the verse only: "Their gods" (see Deuteronomy 12:2), which indicates that a statue that people treat as a deity is forbidden, but one that people do not treat with the respect that is due to a deity is permitted.



Explaining the Story - What's going on in our story? (The sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

- ?** Why was Rabban Gamliel bathing in the bathhouse of Aphrodite in Akko?
- ?** How do we know that Proclus the son of Plospus wasn't Jewish?
- ?** Why did Proclus the son of Plospus ask Rabban Gamliel what was he doing in the bathhouse of Aphrodite?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

- ?** Why didn't Rabban Gamliel reply to Proclus the son of Plospus inside the bathhouse of Aphrodite?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 (**Extra Bonus**) _____

Super Extra Bonus ? Rabban Gamliel replied to Proclus the son of Plospus: "One may not answer questions related to Torah in the bathhouse." What is problematic with the answer of Rabban Gamliel?

? Which three answers Rabban Gamliel gave Proclus the son of Plospus? Which answer do you find more convincing? Why?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Which three answers Rabban Gamliel gave Proclus the son of Plospus? Which answer do you find more convincing? Why?

? When analyzing our story, Rav Hama bar Yosef the Distinguished, in the name of Rabbo Oshaya, suggests that the answers Rabban Gamliel gave to Proclus the son of Plospus were flawed ones. What are the possible flaws in Rabban Gamliel's answers?

Extra Bonus ? What was the real answer Rabban Gamliel didn't give Proclus the son of Plospus when he inquired for what reason was he bathing before an idol in the bathhouse of Aphrodite?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from These Texts

! Doing what you believe is the right thing to do and explaining it to others are two distinctive tasks, always being the first one the most important.



Sometimes we may be questioned or challenged by people who really are not interested in our wellbeing. All they wish to do is to "pock" us, to embarrass us,

the put us down. Sometimes, due to the particular circumstances of the exchange, or due to a position of leadership we are might be occupying at a particular time, we may be “forced” to give those people a particular answer, or to justify ourselves with particular words. We should always remember that when you know in your guts that your actions are the right ones, the way you justify your actions in front of others is merely cosmetic. When you know that your behavior is the one necessary in particular circumstances, your actions are your answers. Conversely, we should never let a lack of a convincing justification to prevent us from doing the right thing.