

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [263]

Part Your Waters for That Person Too (Insights into Babylonian Talmud, Hullin 7a)

With Appreciation to Rabbi Uri Romano, who brought this story to my attention



Background to Our Story

Rabbi Pinehas ben Ya'ir



[Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Hullin Part 1. Koren publishers Jerusalem Page 35](#)

Rabbi Pinehas ben Ya'ir – רַבִּי פִּנְחָס בֶּן יֵאִיר : Rabbi Pinehas ben Ya'ir was a contemporary of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai. Based on that which is related in tractate *Shabbat* (33b) he was the son-in-law of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai; based on what is written in the *Zohar* he was his father-in-law. Rabbi Pinehas ben Ya'ir is considered exceptional among the *tanna'im* and was renowned for his piety and his capacity for performing miracles. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi treated him with the utmost respect and admiration. Few of his Torah statements are known; prominent among them is his statement describing the path a person must take to ultimately achieve divine inspiration and merit witnessing the revival of the dead.

Rabbi Pinehas ben Ya'ir would say: Torah study leads to care in the performance of mitzvot. Care in the performance of mitzvot leads to diligence in their observance. Diligence leads to cleanliness of the soul. Cleanliness of the soul leads to abstention from all evil. Abstention from evil leads to purity and the elimination of all base desires. Purity leads to piety. Piety leads to humility. Humility leads to fear of sin.

Fear of sin leads to holiness. Holiness leads to the Divine Spirit. The Divine Spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead. And piety is greater than all of them, as it is stated: "Then You did speak in a vision to Your pious ones" (Psalms 89:20). (Avoda Zara 20b)

Redemption of captives



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Redemption of captives – פְּדוּיֹת שְׁבוּיִין : The positive mitzva to redeem Jewish captives, which includes even Canaanite slaves, is a significant mitzva that takes precedence over all other mitzvot involving charity. The redemption of female captives takes priority over the redemption of men, and in fact, one clause in a marriage contract stipulates that a husband assumes responsibility to redeem his wife from captivity. The Sages ruled that one must not redeem prisoners for more than their value so as not to encourage the taking of Jewish prisoners for ransom.

Ginai River



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Ginai River – גִּינַי נְקָרָא : Some suggest that this river is related to the village Ginai, mentioned in the writings of Josephus Flavius, which was located where the city of Jenin is located today, on the border of the Jezreel Valley and Samaria. In fact, the central course of the Kishon River flows past this point. Since this river bisects the central path between the Galilee and Judea via Samaria, it is feasible that Rabbi Pineñas ben Ya'ir took this path on his way to redeem captives. This is supported as well by the fact that the Kishon River expands, and its water level rises, when there is substantial rainfall, and as is evident from the Gemara, this incident took place just before Passover, which marks the conclusion of the rainy season. In the Jerusalem Talmud, it is related that he was on his way to the Sanhedrin, which was then located in the Galilee.

Maaser: The First Tithe



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

Maaser: The first tithe ([Hebrew](#) *ma'aser rishon*) is a positive [commandment](#) in the [Torah](#) requiring the giving of one tenth of agricultural produce, after the giving of the standard [terumah](#), to the [Kohen](#) (Jewish priest) (or [Levite](#)). This giving is required to be free of both monetary and servicial compensation. Historically, during the [First Temple](#) period, the first tithe was given to the [Levite](#). Approximately at the beginning of the [Second Temple](#) construction, [Ezra](#) and his [Beth din](#) implemented its giving to the kohanim.

The tithe gift is discussed in the [Hebrew Bible](#) ([Numbers](#) 18:21-26) according to which a tenth of the produce was to be presented to a Levite who then gave a tenth of the first tithe to a kohen ([Numbers](#) 18:26). Tithing was seen as performing a [Mitzvah](#) done in joyful obedience to God. Giving tithe would open oneself up to receipt of divine blessing: The Torah instructs that the tithe should be of the "five grains", [wine](#), [olive oil](#), [fruit](#), and [cattle](#) ([Leviticus](#) 27:30-33). The time for taking such tithes was at the finished stage of processing the produce ([Numbers](#) 18:30). Unlike [Terumah](#) given to the Kohen, the Maaser Rishon was not regarded as sacred, and as a result did not have to be [ritually pure](#), neither was it required to be eaten in any particular state (such as the Temple in Jerusalem). Once received by the Levite, it was regarded simply as ordinary property, and they could pass it on to non-Levites, or sell it, as they wished.

Demai



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demai>

Demai (**Mishnaic Hebrew**: דמאי) is a **Halakhic** term meaning "dubious," referring to agricultural produce, the owner of which was not trusted with regard to the correct separation of the tithes assigned to the Levites, although the *terumah* (the part designated unto priests) was believed to have been separated from such fruits. In such "dubious" cases, all that was necessary was to separate the **one-tenth portion** due to the priests from the **First Tithe** given to the Levites, being the 1/100th part of the whole. The **Second Tithe** is also removed (redeemed) from the fruit in such cases of doubt.

The **tribe of Levi**, having been excluded from participating in the division of the land, obtained as compensation a share in its produce (**Numbers** 18:24). As the tribe included two elements, **priests** and Levites, the compensation was given in two forms: "*terumah*" (heave-offering) and "*ma'aser*" (tithes) for the Levites; and the latter gave the tenth part of the tithe to the priests as "*terumat ma'aser*" (heave-offering of the tithe: Numbers 18:26). In addition, a second tithe had to be separated from the produce in the first, second, fourth, and fifth years of the year-week. This tithe had to be taken to **Jerusalem** and consumed there, in accordance with certain regulations; while in the third and sixth years it was given to the poor. In the former case it was called "*ma'aser sheni*" (second tithe); in the latter "*ma'asar 'ani*" (the tithe for the poor). The produce of the seventh year was free from all these dues.

Grain or produce purchased for purposes other than human consumption



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Grain or produce purchased for purposes other than human consumption are not included in the decree requiring the tithing of *demai*. This includes animal feed, grain purchased for sowing, flour purchased for use in processing animal hides or for medicinal purposes, oil purchased for kindling or to smear on vessels, and wine purchased as an eye balm. In all of those instances, if the *am ha'aretz* tells the buyer that he tithed the produce, the buyer need not tithe it

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Hullin 7a

אמר רבי פנחס בן יאיר הוה קאזיל לפדיון שבויין, פגע ביה בגינאי נהרא, אמר ליה: גינאי, חלוק לי מימך ואעבור בך! אמר ליה: אתה חולף לעשות רצון קונך ואני חולף לעשות רצון קוני, אתה – ספק עושה ספק אי אתה עושה, אני – ודאי עושה. אמר ליה: אם אי אתה חולק, גוזרני עליך שלא יעברו בך מים לעולם! חלק ליה.

הוה ההוא גברא דהוה דארי חיטי לפיסתא, אמר ליה: חלוק ליה נמי להאי, דבמצוה עסיק! חלק ליה. הוה ההוא טייעא דלווה בהדיהו, אמר ליה: חלוק ליה נמי להאי, דלא לימא: כף עושים לבני לוי? חלק ליה.

אמר רב יוסף: כמה נפיש גברא ממשא ושתין רבוון, דאילו התם חד זימנא, וקא תלתא זימנין. ודלמא הכא נמי חדא זימנא! אלא כמשא ושתין רבוון

אֶקְלַע לְהֵיוּא אוֹשְׁפִיזָא, רְמוּ לִיה שְׁעָרֵי לְחַמְרִיה, לֹא אֶכַּל, תְּבַטִּינְהוּ – לֹא אֶכַּל, נִקְרִינְהוּ – לֹא אֶכַּל, אָמַר לְהוּ: דְּלָמָא לֹא מַעֲשָׂרָן? עֲשָׂרִינְהוּ וְאֶכַּל. אָמַר: עֲנִינְיָה זֹה הוֹלֶכֶת לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹן קוֹנְיָה, וְאַתֶּם מֵאֶכִילִין אוֹתָהּ טְבָלִים?

Rabbi Pineñas ben Ya'ir was going to engage in the redemption of captives, and he encountered the Ginai River. He said to the river: Ginai, part your water for me and I will pass through you.

The river said to him: You are going to perform the will of your Maker and I am going to perform the will of my Maker, to flow in my path. With regard to you, it is uncertain whether you will perform His will successfully, and it is uncertain whether you will not perform His will successfully. I will certainly perform His will successfully.

Rabbi Pineñas ben Ya'ir said to the river: If you do not part, I will decree upon you that water will never flow through you. The river parted for him.

There was a certain man who was carrying wheat for the preparation of *matza* for Passover. Rabbi Pineñas ben Ya'ir said to the river: Part your waters for that person too, as he is engaged in the performance of a mitzva. The river parted for him.

There was a certain Arab who was accompanying them. Rabbi Pineñas ben Ya'ir said to the river: Part your waters for that person too, so that he will not say: Is that what one does to a person who accompanies him? The river parted for him.

Rav Yosef said: How great is this man, Rabbi Pineñas ben Ya'ir, greater than Moses and the six hundred thousand who left Egypt, as there, at the Red Sea, the waters parted one time, and here the waters parted three times. The Gemara asks: And perhaps here too, the waters parted one time, and the river began to flow again only after all three of them passed. Rather, this man was as great as Moses and the six hundred thousand children of Israel.

After crossing the river, Rabbi Pineñas ben Ya'ir happened to come to a certain inn [*ushpiza*]. His hosts cast barley before his donkey for him to eat. The donkey did not eat it.

The hosts sifted the barley with a utensil, but the donkey did not eat it. They separated the chaff from the barley by hand, but the donkey did not eat it. They wondered why the donkey would not eat the barley. Rabbi Pineñas ben Ya'ir said to his hosts: Perhaps the barley is not tithed. They tithed it and the donkey ate it. Rabbi Pineñas ben Ya'ir said: This poor animal is going to perform the will of its Maker, and you are feeding it untithed produce?



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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why did the River Ginai part for Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why did the River Ginai part for a certain man who was carrying wheat for Passover?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why did the River Ginai part for the Arab who was accompanying Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair and the man who was carrying wheat for Passover?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? What is our story's purpose of comparing Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair to Moses?

? Why didn't Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair's donkey eat the barley they put in front of him, despite that the halakha is that Grain or produce purchased for purposes other than human consumption are not included in the decree requiring the tithing of *demai*?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Bonus ? How was Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair's donkey special?

Bonus ? Why was Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair's donkey special?

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

! Special people have the potential to affect and influence their entire environment in concentric circles, like ripples created when a pebble is tossed into a pond.



epilogue