

From the Rabbi's Desk
Rabbi Manes Kogan
Hillcrest Jewish Center
183-02 Union Turnpike, Flushing, NY 11366
rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org

Stories with a Twist [264]

Can We, Too, Pass Over?

(Insights into Jerusalem Talmud, Demai 1:3)

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



Background to Our Story

Rabbi Pineñas ben Ya'ir



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Hullin Part 1. Koren publishers Jerusalem
Page 35

Rabbi Pineñas 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 Pineñas 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 Pineñas 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)



Ginai River – גִּינַי נְהָרָא : 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 Pinehas 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.

The Text: Jerusalem Talmud Demai 1:3

רַבִּי פִּנְחָס בֶּן יָאִיר הָיָה אֹחַל לְבֵית וְעָדָר. הָיָה גִּינַי נְהָרָא הָלֵךְ לְבֵית הָעָדָר. הָיָה הָעָדָר עוֹלָה עַל גְּזֵרֵי אֵיל, גִּינַי מָה אַתָּה מִנְעָה לִי מִן בֵּית וְעָדָרָא? אָמַר לוֹ, נָהַר. הַטּוֹנֵעַ אַחַת מִמֶּנּוּ לְלִכְתּוֹ אֶל בֵּית הָעָדָר וּפְלִיג קַמּוּזֵי וְהַנְהַר נִרְעָה לִפְנֵי וְעָבַר. אֵיל תִּלְמִידֵיךָ, וְכֵלְכִין אֲנִי עֹבְרִין? הָאֵם גַּם אֲנִי יוֹכֵלִים לְעָבֵד בְּהַרְזָה הָאֵם הִנֵּה נַעֲשֶׂה גַם לָנָה אָמַר לֵהֶן, מֵאֵן דְּיָדְעָה בְּנַפְשִׁיהָ דְּלֵא אָקִיל לְכַר נִשְׁ מִן יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן לִמּוּזֵי וְעָבַד וְלֵא מִנְפָּה מִי שִׁדְדָה בּוֹפְשָׁה שְׁלֵא מִדָּה בֶּן יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיִּמְיָה יַעֲבֹד וְלֵא יִטָּק.

Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair was on his way to the house of study, when the [River] Ginai rose up. He [Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair] said: Ginai, why are you keeping me from the house of study? So it parted for him, and he crossed over.

His students asked him [Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair]: Can we, too, pass over? He [Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair] told them: Someone who knows that he never in his life mistreated a fellow Jew, can pass over and no harm will come to him.



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 _____

Extra Bonus ? "*Can we, too, pass over?*" What are the students actually asking Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair?

Bonus ? Why do you think Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair say that the criteria to cross is "Someone who knows that he never in his life mistreated a fellow Jew"? Why only a Jew?

Bonus ? What is the lesson Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair wishes to teach his students?

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

! Want to get to the other side? You better be ready!

epilogue