

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [268]

What is the Reason for all this Fuss?

(Insights into Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 30a)

With appreciation to Tina Schnall who brought this story to my attention



Background of Our Story

Deuteronomy 4:9-10

⁹But take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously, so that you do not forget the things that you saw with your own eyes and so that they do not fade from your mind as long as you live. And make them known to your children and to your children's children:¹⁰The day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to Me, "Gather the people to Me that I may let them hear My words, in order that they may learn to revere Me as long as they live on earth, and may so teach their children."

Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Kiddushin. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 157

Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba was an *amora* of the third generation. Born in Babylonia, Rabbi Ḥiyya immigrated to Eretz Yisrael in his youth, where he was fortunate to learn with scholars of the first generation of *amora'im* such as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. His primary teacher in Eretz Yisrael was Rabbi Yoḥanan, whom he quotes hundreds of times in the Talmud. Rabbi Zeira reports that Rabbi Ḥiyya was so obsessed with remembering his master's Torah that every thirty days he would review before him all that he had been taught (*Berakhot* 38b). Upon Rabbi Yoḥanan's death, Rabbi Ḥiyya became a student of Rabbi Elazar. Rabbi Ḥiyya was desperately poor and the Gemara reports that he wore patched shoes. He traveled to various Jewish communities in Syria where he investigated the religious standards of the people and attempted to guide their behavior. Rabbi Ḥiyya specialized in *halakha*. When asked a question concerning *aggada*, he would defer to Rabbi Tanḥum bar Ḥanilai, another student of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, who was an expert in *aggada*.

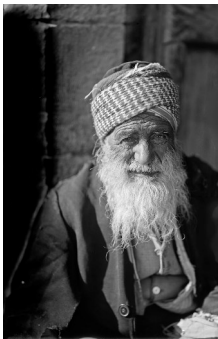
Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi was one of the greatest Torah scholars of the first generation of *amora'im* in Eretz Yisrael. According to some opinions, he was the son of Levi ben Sisi, one of the outstanding students of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. Apparently, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi himself was one of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's younger students. Many halakhic disputes are recorded between him and Rabbi Yoĥanan, who was probably his younger disciple-colleague. In general, the *halakha* is ruled in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, even against that of Rabbi Yoĥanan, who was the leading authority at that time. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi was also a renowned teacher of *aggada*. Because of the great esteem in which he was held, aggadic statements in his name are cited at the end of the six orders of the Mishna. Many stories are told of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's piety and sanctity. He is regarded as one of the most righteous men who ever lived. He was famous for precipitating miracles, and it is related that he would sit with the most dangerously infected lepers and study Torah. In addition, it is said that Elijah the prophet appeared to him, and that his prayers were always answered. According to tradition, the Angel of Death had no dominion over Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, and he entered the Garden of Eden alive. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi had many students. All the Sages of the succeeding generation were his students, to some degree, and they regularly quoted Torah pronouncements in his name. His son Rabbi Yosef, who was also a Torah scholar, married into the family of the *Nasi*.

Sudra (headdress)



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudra_\(headdress\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudra_(headdress))



The sudra is believed to be thousands of years old and referenced to in the Bible. Ancient Hebrews used to wear a headgear that was similar to either a keffiyeh, turban or a stocking cap. As such, there are many ways of tying the fabric to make these different designs. The Sudra has been mentioned directly and indirectly in many of the ancient religious texts of Judaism including the Babylonian Talmud.

Bonus ? How is the sudra similar to the yarmulke/ Kippah? How is it different?

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 30a

רבי תניא בר אבא אשפחיה לרבי יהושע בן לוי דשדי דיסנא ארישיה, וקא ממטי ליה
לינוקא לבי כנישתא.

אמר ליה: מאי פולי האי? אמר ליה: מי זוטא מאי דכתיב: "והודעתם לבניך" וסמיך
ליה: "יום אשר עמדת לפני ה' אלקיך בחרב!"

מִכַּאֲן וְאִילָדֵי רַבִּי חִיָּיא בַר אַבְבָּא לֹא טָעִים אֲמַצָּא עַד דְּמַקְרִי לְיִנּוּקָא וּמוֹסְפִיָּה. רַבָּה בַר רַב הוֹנָא לֹא טָעִים אֲמַצָּא עַד דְּמִיִּיתִי לְיִנּוּקָא לְבֵית מִדְרָשָׁא

Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba encountered Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, and saw that he had thrown a sheet on his head and brought his child to the synagogue to study.

Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba said to him: What is the reason for all this fuss, as you are in such a hurry that you do not have time to dress yourself properly?

[Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi] said to him: Is it insignificant, that which is written: "*But make them known to your sons,*" and juxtaposed to it is the phrase in the verse that states: "*The day when you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb*"?

From this moment onward, Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba would not taste *umtza* - he would not eat breakfast, before he had read to his child and added to the child's studies from the day before.



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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Bonus **?** What do we learn from the fact that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi had thrown a sheet on his head to bring his child to the synagogue to study?

? Why didn't Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi cover his head with a proper headgear to bring his child to the synagogue to study?

? Why was Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi in a hurry?

Bonus **?** What does Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi learn from the juxtaposition of the two verses in Deuteronomy?

? How did Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba decide to show how important his child's education was?

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

! Live your values and your priorities! Or “Put your money -and your time, and your efforts - where your mouth is!”

epilogue

This story is reminding us that the only way to show what our values are is to “live them.” In other words, our values are not expressed by our words, but by our daily actions. In a world where time and financial resources are limited, what we value the most is where we allocate these two limited resources.