

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [271]

She Would Have Been Repulsive to Him (Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 39a)



"The Creation of Eve" by Bartolo di Fredi (c. 1330 – 1410)

Background of Our Story

Genesis 2:20-24

²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found.²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs (or side) and then closed up the place with flesh.²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib (or side) he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

The Emperor and Rabban Gamliel



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Sanhedrin Part 1. Koren publishers Jerusalem
Page 249

The Rabban Gamliel mentioned here (in our story) is Rabban Gamliel of Yavne, the *Nasi* of the Jewish people after the destruction of the Second Temple. Chronologically, this emperor

would be one of the Roman emperors who rose to power after the end of Vespasian's dynasty, perhaps Trajan, who also took an interest in various fields of science and literature, as well as the beliefs of different peoples.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 39a

אמר ליה קיסר לרבן גמליאל: "אלהיכם גנב הוא, דכתיב ויפל ה' אלהים תרדמה על האדם וישן". אמרה ליה ברתייה: "שבקיה, דאנא מהדרנא ליה". אמרה ליה: "תנו לי דוכוס אחד". אמר לה: "למה ליה?" "ליסטין באו עלינו הלילה, ונטלו ממנו קיתון של כסף והניחו לנו קיתון של זהב". אמר לה: "ולואי שניבא עלינו בכל יום". "ולא יפה היה לו לאדם הראשון שנטלו ממנו צלע אחת ונתנו לו שפחה ל שם שו"?

אמר לה: "הכי קאמינא: אלא לשקליה בהדיא!" אמרה ליה: "איתו לי אומצא דבישרא". איתו לה. אותבה תותי בחשא, אפיקתה, אמרה ליה: "אכול מהאי!" אמר לה: "מאיסא לי". אמרה ליה: "ואדם הראשון נמי, אי הות שקילה בהדיא – הוה מאיסא ליה".

The Roman emperor said to Rabban Gamliel: Your God is a thief, as it is written: *"And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and he slept; and He took one of his sides, and closed up the place with flesh instead"* (Genesis 2:21).

The daughter of the emperor said to Rabban Gamliel: Leave him, as I will respond to him.

She said to her father: Provide one commander [dukhus] for me to avenge someone's wrongdoing. The emperor said to her: Why do you need him? She said to him: Armed bandits came to us this past night, and took a silver jug from us, and left a golden jug for us. The emperor said to her: If so, would it be that armed bandits such as these would come to us every day! She [the emperor's daughter] said to him [to her father]: And was it not similarly good for Adam the first man that God took a side from him and gave him a maidservant to serve him?

The emperor said to her [to her daughter]: This is what I was saying: But if it is good for Adam, let God take his side from him in the open, not during the time of his deep sleep, like a thief.

She said to him: Bring me a slice of raw meat. They brought it to her. She placed it under the embers, and removed it after it was roasted. She said to him: Eat from this meat. The emperor said to her: It is repulsive to me. Although he knew that this is how meat is prepared, seeing the raw meat made it repulsive to him.

She said to him: With regard to Adam the first man as well, had God taken her from him in the open, she would have been repulsive to him.



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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Extra Bonus ? Why did the emperor say to Rabban Gamliel: "Your God is a thief!"?

"First Association" Answer _____

"Look Deeper" Answer _____

Bonus ? Why did the emperor's daughter pick the fight on behalf of Rabban Gamliel?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

? How does the story about the armed bandits who exchanged the jugs address the emperor's challenge?

Bonus ? Why does the emperor's daughter resort to the story of the exchanged jugs to make her point instead of being straightforward and telling her father what she thinks?

Bonus ? In the words of the emperor's daughter, our story calls Eve "a maidservant." Why do you think the story chose this expression which most modern readers will find to be politically incorrect and even offensive?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why does the emperor still maintain the belief “your God is a thief!,” after his daughter showed him the kindness of God.

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Bonus ? Why does the emperor’s daughter resort to the raw meat example to make her point? Why does she go through the trouble of cooking the meat in front of her father instead of asking him to “imagine if I take a piece of raw meat....”?

? Look at the painting “the Creation of Eve” by Bartolo di Fredi (c. 1330 – 1410) that illustrates our story. What do you think about the way it depicts Eve’s creation? What is your first association when you see the painting?

? Ignorance, or a lack of knowledge, isn't usually viewed as a good thing. However, there might be situations when it is better for us not to know all the facts. A common expression used to describe these situations is “*ignorance is bliss.*” Can you think of some situations when you would rather not know all the facts?

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

! You’d rather not know... or when “*ignorance is really bliss*”



While our story is about one emperor, his daughter, and a famous rabbi, it is also about all of us. The “right to know” is considered almost a sacred one in our society. We demand from our government, from our institutions, and even from our own families, total transparency. The truth, however, is that some things are better left unknown or unrevealed. Knowledge is very important but sometimes, too much knowledge could be detrimental to relationships, to community building, and to the self-esteem of loved ones.

Appendix: What Would You Rather Not Know?

- When was the last time my parents had sex?
- When will I die?
- What are the actual circumstances of my conception?
- What will my surprise birthday party look like?
- How did they kill the cow from which the juicy steak I am eating came from?
- Who dies at the end of the movie I am about to watch?
- Has my spouse ever had an affair?
- Who didn't vote to renew my contract?
- Does my spouse really love me?
- Do my friends really care about me?