

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [274]

Rav Papa was Offended

(Insights into Babylonian Talmud Taanit 9a)



Background of Our Story

Rava



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rava_\(amora\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rava_(amora))

Abba ben Joseph bar Ḥama (c. 280 – 352 CE), who is exclusively referred to in the Talmud by the name Rava (רבא), was a Babylonian rabbi who belonged to the fourth generation of amoraim. He is known for his debates with Abaye, and is one of the most often-cited rabbis in the Talmud.

He was born about 280 CE in Mahoza (a suburb of Ctesiphon, the capital of Babylonia), where his father was a wealthy and distinguished scholar. In his youth Rava went to Sura, where he attended the lectures of Rav Chisda and associated with Rami bar Hama. About ten years after Rami's death Rava married his widow, the daughter of Rav Chisda. It is said that earlier Rav Chisda's daughter sat in her father's classroom, while his students, Rava and Rami bar Hama, stand before them. When Rav Chisda asked her which of the two she wants to marry, she replied "both of them," and Rava added, "I'll be the last one" (commentators let us know that she indeed married Rami first and Rava second). They had five sons, the eldest of whom, Joseph, died during his parents' lifetime.

Rava studied at the Talmudical Academy at Pumbedita, site of modern-day Falluja, Iraq. Rava's teachers were Rav Yosef, Rabbah, and, chiefly, Rav Nachman (who lived in Mahoza). His chief study-companion was Abaye, who was about the same age, and both of them developed the dialectic method which Rav Judah and their teacher Rabbah had established in their discussions of tradition; their debates became known as the "Havayot de-Abaye ve-Rava".

Rava enjoyed the special protection of the mother of Shapur II, the reigning King of Persia. For this reason, and in consideration of large sums which he secretly contributed to the court, he succeeded in making less severe Shapur's oppressions of the Jews in Babylonia.

When, after the death of Rav Yosef, Abaye was chosen head of the Academy of Pumbedita (Horayot 14a), Rava founded a school of his own in Mahoza. Many pupils, preferring his lectures Abaye's, followed him to there. After Abaye's death Rava was elected head of the school, and the academy was transferred from Pumbedita to Mahoza, which, during the lifetime of Rava, was the only seat of Jewish learning in Babylonia.

When Rabbah bar Nahmani, the head of the yeshiva of Pumbedita, retired, the position went to Abaye. At that point, Rava returned to Mahoza, where he established a yeshiva there. After the death of Abaye, many of his students moved from Pumbedita to Mahoza, to join Rava's Yeshiva, which had become one of the intellectual centers of the Babylonian Jewish Community.

According to Sherira Gaon, Rava died in 352 CE.

Rav Papa



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

Rav Papa (Hebrew: רַב פָּפָא) (c. 300 – died 375) was a Babylonian rabbi, of the fifth generation of amoraim.

He was a student of Rava and Abaye. After the death of his teachers he founded a school at Naresh (or Naresš), a city near Sura, in which he officiated as "resh metivta," his friend and associate, Rav Huna ben Joshua, acting as "resh kallah" (356-375).

Papa's father seems to have been wealthy and to have enabled his son to devote himself to study. Papa inherited some property from his father; and he also amassed great wealth by brewing beer, an occupation in which he was an expert. He likewise engaged in extensive and successful business undertakings, and his teacher Rava once said of him: "Happy is the righteous man who is as prosperous on earth as only the wicked usually are!". However, Rava also accused Papa and his friend Huna of being exploitative in business: "You would take the coats from people's backs". Papa sold his beer at a higher price than ordinary because he gave the buyer credit, although this practice was regarded as a kind of usury. In addition, other scholars were known to criticize him for his reluctance to aid the poor. He was, however, known for his honesty in business: he once returned a field he had purchased upon learning that the seller regretted the sale.

He is known to have married two wives. One was the daughter of a kohen, and he attributed his wealth to this marriage. The second was the daughter of Abba Sura'ah (=of Sura). They do not seem to have lived happily together, for she prided herself on the nobility of her ancestry as contrasted with his own. He therefore said, referring to his own experience: "Be circumspect and not hasty in marrying, and take a wife from a class of society lower than your own". Several of his children married prominent figures in Jewish Babylonian society.

He was obese, and once noted that he could break a bench simply by sitting on it.

"Go in Peace" vs. "Go to Peace" (Babylonian Talmud Berachot 64a)

ואמר רבי אבין הלוי: הנפטר מתברו אל יאמר לו "לך בשלום", אלא "לך לשלום".
שהרי יתרו שאמר לו למשה "לך לשלום" – עלה והצליח. דוד שאמר לו לאבשלום "לך בשלום" – הלך ונתלה.

ואמר רבי אבין הלוי: הנפטר מן המת אל יאמר לו "לך לשלום" אלא "לך בשלום", שנאמר: "ואתה תבוא אל אבותיך בשלום".

And Rabbi Avin HaLevi said: One who takes leave from another should not say to him: Go in peace, but rather, he should say: Go to peace. As we see that, on the one hand, Jethro said to Moses: "Go to peace" (Exodus 4:18), and Moses ascended and was successful.

On the other hand, David said to his son, Absalom: "Go in peace" (II Samuel 15:9), and Absalom went and was ultimately hanged.

Rabbi Avin HaLevi also said: One who takes leave from a dead person should not say to him: Go to peace, but rather, one should say: Go in peace, as it is stated: "But you shall go to your fathers in peace" (Genesis 15:15).

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Taanit 9a

רב הונא בר מנחם ורב שמואל בר אידי ורב תינא מווסתנא הוו שכיתי קמיה דרבא. פי נח
נפשיה דרבא אתו לקמיה דרב פפא. כל אימת דהוה אמר להו שמעתא ולא הוה מסתברא
להו, הוו מרמיזי אהדדי.
חלש דעתיה.
קרויה בקלמיה: "ואכחד את שלשת הרעים". למחר, פי הוו מיפטריו מיניה, אמר להו:
ליזלו רבנן בשלמא.

Rav Huna bar Manoaḥ, Rav Shmuel bar Idi, and Rav Ḥiyya from Vastanya were often found before Rava, as they were among his most distinguished students.

When Rava died, they came before Rav Papa to learn from him.

Whenever Rav Papa would say a *halakha* that did not sound reasonable to them, they would gesture to each other.

Rav Papa was offended by their behavior.

A verse was read to Rav Papa in a dream: "*And I cut off the three shepherds in one month*" (Zechariah 11:8). The next day, when they took their leave from him, Rav Papa said to them: May the Rabbis go in peace, a hint that this would be their final parting. Rav Papa thought (Perhaps wished) that the three Sages would die as punishment for their behavior and he would never see them again.



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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why did Rav Huna bar Manoaḥ, Rav Shmuel bar Idi, and Rav Ḥiyya from Vastanya go to learn with Rav Papa?

? What did Rav Huna bar Manoaḥ, Rav Shmuel bar Idi, and Rav Ḥiyya from Vastanya gesture to each other?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? What didn't Rav Huna bar Manoaḥ, Rav Shmuel bar Idi, and Rav Ḥiyya from Vastanya voice their opinion?

? How do we know the students' behavior happened more than once?

Extra Bonus ? Why didn't Rav Papa confront the students about their behavior?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why was Rava offended?

Bonus ? Why did Rav Papa dream about the verse with the three shepherds?

Bonus ? Why did Rav Papa tell Rav Huna bar Manoaḥ, Rav Shmuel bar Idi, and Rav Ḥiyya from Vastanya "go in peace"?

Appendix

May the Rabbis go in peace

לִיזְלוּ רַבָּנַן בְּשָׁלְמָא



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Ta'anit. Koren publishers Jerusalem
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According to a variant reading, found in some texts of the Talmud and in other sources, Rav Papa actually said: May the Rabbis go to peace, the correct formula used for the living. If so, Rav Papa understood the quote from the verse in Zechariah as a question: Am I to cut off the three shepherds?

Consequently, Rav Papa told his younger colleagues to go to peace, as he did not want them to be punished on his account (*Shita Mekubbetzet*), or he was

hinting to them that it would be safer for them to go and study somewhere else (*Sefat Emet*).

Bonus ? Which version of our story makes the most sense to you; the one in which Rav Papa tells his students “go in peace” or the one in which he tells them “go to peace”? Why?

Bonus ? In the above appendix (the alternative version of our story), the Shita Mekubetzet suggests that Rav Papa did not want the three disrespectful students to be punished on his account and hence he told them “go to peace.” The Sefat Emet suggests the he hinted to them that it would be safer (or better) for the students (and for him) if they go and study somewhere else. Which of these two explanations of the alternative version (the version where Rav says, “go to peace”) do you think is a better one? Why?

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

! • Brewing resentment is very bad, and could even be dangerous; for everybody!



Our Talmudic story could be seen as one about bullying and shaming. Rav Papa finds himself with three students, who don't appreciate the level of his knowledge, his teaching style, or maybe his personality. Perhaps they miss their former teacher, Rava, who was also a teacher of Rav Papa. Regardless of the motivation of Rav Huna bar Manoah, Rav Shmuel bar Idi, and Rav Hiyya from Vastanya, we learn that their constant behavior deeply offended Rav Papa, who even dreams about the three rabbi's demise, a demise which will put an end to his agony.

The alternative version of our story - the one brought in the appendix- points to the fact that there is more than one way to deal with the problem of shaming and bullying, besides fantasies of death and obliteration of the accoster.