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## Stories with a Twist [276]

### Who is This Who is Showing Off Greatness in Our Presence?

(Insights into Babylonian Talmud Bava Kamma 81b)



#### Background of Our Story

##### Joshua



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

Joshua (/ˈdʒɒʃuə/) or Jehoshua (**Hebrew**: יהושע *Yehoshu'a*)<sup>[1]</sup> is the central figure in the **Hebrew Bible's** **Book of Joshua**. According to the books of **Exodus**, **Numbers** and Joshua, he was **Moses'** assistant and became the leader of the **Israelite** tribes after the death of Moses. His name was Hoshea (הושע) the son of **Nun**, of the **tribe of Ephraim**, but Moses called him Joshua (**Numbers 13:16**), the name by which he is commonly known. According to the Bible he was born in **Egypt** prior to **the Exodus**.

According to the Hebrew Bible, Joshua was one of the **twelve spies** of Israel sent by Moses to explore the land of **Canaan**. In **Numbers 13:1-16**, and after the death of Moses, he led the Israelite tribes in the conquest of Canaan, and allocated the land to the tribes. According to **biblical chronology**, Joshua lived sometime in the **Bronze Age**. According to **Joshua 24:29**, Joshua died at the age of 110.

#### Rabbi Hiyya and his family



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Yevamot. Part 1. Koren publishers Jerusalem

Rabbi Hiyya ben Abba, who was from the city of Kafri, Babylonia, was among the last of the tanna'im and was a disciple-colleague of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. Rabbi Hiyya descended from a family of distinguished lineage that traced its ancestry back to King David and produced many Sages. While he was still in Babylonia, Rabbi Hiyya was considered a Torah luminary. When he ascended with his family from Babylonia to Eretz Yisrael, some, engaging in hyperbole, said that the Torah was about to be

forgotten in Eretz Yisrael until he came from Babylonia and reestablished it. When he came to Eretz Yisrael, he became a disciple and a colleague of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, with whom he had a very close relationship. He was especially close with Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's son Shimon, who was also his business partner. All of the students of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi were Rabbi Hiyya's colleagues, and he was close with the tanna Rabbi Shimon ben Halafta. The younger disciples of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, e.g., Rabbi Hanina, Rabbi Oshaya, Rabbi Yannai, and others, studied Torah from Rabbi Hiyya and were, to a certain degree, his disciples as well. His brothers' sons, Rabba bar bar Hana, and above all, the great amora, Rav, were his primary disciples. In addition to his prominence as a Torah scholar, Rabbi Hiyya was outstanding in his piety, as reflected in several anecdotes throughout the Talmud. Rabbi Hiyya also appears as a central figure in the Zohar. He was buried in Tiberias and his two sons were later buried alongside him. Rabbi Hiyya's sons, Yehuda, son-in-law of Rabbi Yannai, and Hizkiyya, were both among the leading Torah scholars in the transitional generation between the tanna'im and the amora'im. They apparently succeeded Rabbi Hiyya at the head of his private yeshiva in the city of his residence, Tiberias. The ge'onim had a tradition, also cited in Tosafot (Bava Batra 149a), that Rabbi Hiyya's daughter Pazi was the mother of a large family that included several important Sages such as Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi and his son, Rabbi Yehuda. Out of respect for Rabbi Hiyya, they were referred to by Pazi's name rather than that of her husband.

### **Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (also known as "Rabbi")**



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

Rabbi closed the tannaitic period with his arrangement of the Mishna. The son of Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel II, and a seventh-generation descendant of Hillel the Elder, Rabbi Yehuda lived in 135–220 CE during the fifth, and last, generation of tanna'im. According to tradition, Rabbi Yehuda was born on the day of Rabbi Akiva's death, leading people to later proclaim: "the sun sets, and the sun rises" (Ecclesiastes 1:5). Indeed, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was a successor to Rabbi Akiva, who had begun to assemble the statements of the Oral Law into a format that later became the Mishna. During his youth, Rabbi Yehuda studied under the five great students of Rabbi Akiva: Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda bar Elai, Rabbi Yosei, Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Elazar. In addition, he learned Torah from his father Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel. In an effort to collect all the statements of the previous generations, Rabbi Yehuda moved from yeshiva to yeshiva, obtaining most of his knowledge from Rabbi Ya'akov bar Krashai. The wide breadth of his learning and his position as Nasi, to which he was appointed at age thirty upon his father's death, gave him the standing to undertake the greatest Torah enterprise of the era, the compilation of the Mishna. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi surrounded himself with the most prominent Sages of his time, who assisted him in establishing the accuracy of the corpus he wanted to produce. Fortunately for him, the relative political calm of the time, and his favorable relationship with the Roman government, permitted the development of such an ambitious project. Due to his position as head of the community, the Mishna of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was universally accepted, and earlier and other collections of halakha were set aside. This phenomenon unified the nation, as all of the Jewish people began to study the identical corpus of Oral Law. Due to poor health in his later years, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi moved to Tzipori. His students were the Sages of the first generation of amora'im, including Rabbi Yo'hanan, Rabbi Hiyya, bar Kappara and Rav. The Gemara reports (Gittin 59a) that Rabbi Yehuda

HaNasi was the first individual since Moses to have such a broad mastery of Torah, and his great scholarship led him to be referred to in the Talmud as simply: Rabbi, or: Our holy Rabbi.

## Rabbi Yehuda ben Kanosa



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Bava Kamma. Part 2. Koren publishers Jerusalem

Also known as Rabbi Yehuda ben Nakosa, Rabbi Yehuda ben Kanosa was a *tanna* from the last generation of *tanna'im*. He was apparently a younger contemporary of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, from whom he studied Torah, like many others of that period. He also received and transmitted statements of other Sages from the preceding generation. Rabbi Yehuda ben Nakosa is cited in several places in both the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. It is related that he successfully engaged in debates with heretics.

### The Text: Babylonian Talmud Bava Kamma 81b

תנו רבנן, עשרה תנאין התנה הושע: שיהו מרעין בחורשין, ומלקטין עצים בשדותיהם, ומלקטים עשבים בכל מקום חוץ מתלתן, וקוטמים נטיעות בכל מקום חוץ מגרופיות של זית, ומעין היוצא בתחילה בני העיר מסתפקין ממנו, ומחכין בנימה של טבריא ובלבד שלא יפרוס קלע וינעמיד את הספינה, ונפנין לאחורי הגדר ואפילו בשדה מליאה כרפום, ומהלכים בשבילי הרשות עד שתד רביעה שניה, ומסתלקין לצידי הדרכים מפני יתידות הדרכים, והתועה בין הכרמים מפסיג ועולה מפסיג ויורד, ומת מצוה קונה מקומו.

...

"ומסתלקין לצידי הדרכים מפני יתידות הדרכים".

...

רבי ורבי חייא הוּו שְקֵלִי וְאֲזֵלִי בְּאֶרְחָא, אֶסְתַּלְקוּ לְצִדֵי הַדְּרָכִים; הָהּ קָא מְפָסִיעַ וְאֲזִיל רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בֶּן קִנּוּסָא קִמְיָהוּ, אָמַר לִיה רַבִּי לְרַבִּי חֵיָא: מִי הוּא זֶה שְׁמַרְאָה גְדוּלָה בְּפָנֵינוּ? אָמַר לִיה רַבִּי חֵיָא: שְׁמָא רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בֶּן קִנּוּסָא תִלְמִידֵי הוּא, וְכָל מַעֲשָׂיו לְשֵׁם שְׁמַיִם. כִּי מָטוּ לְגַבְיָהּ, חֲזִייה, אָמַר לִיה: אִי לָאוּ יְהוּדָה בֶּן קִנּוּסָא אַתָּה, גְּזַרְתִּינָהּ לְשַׁקֵּד בְּגִיתָרָא דְּפְרוּזָא.

Joshua stipulated ten conditions when he apportioned Eretz Yisrael among the tribes:

The conditions are <sup>1</sup> that people shall have the right to graze their animals in forests, even on private property; <sup>2</sup> and that they shall have the right to gather wood from each other's fields, to be used as animal fodder; <sup>3</sup> and that they shall have the right to gather wild vegetation for animal fodder in any place except for a field of fenugreek; <sup>4</sup> and that they shall have the right to pluck off a shoot anywhere for propagation and planting, except for olive shoots; and that <sup>5</sup> the people of the city shall have the right to take supplies of water from a spring on private property, even from a spring that emerges for the first time; and that <sup>6</sup> they shall have the right to fish in the Sea of Tiberias, i.e., the Sea of Galilee, provided that the fisherman does not build an underwater fence to catch fish, thereby causing an impediment to boats.

The *baraita* continues the list of Joshua's ten conditions: And people shall have the right to <sup>7</sup> relieve themselves outdoors behind a fence, even in a field that is full of saffron [*karkom*];<sup>8</sup> and they shall have the right to <sup>9</sup> walk in permitted paths, i.e., those paths that cut through a private field, throughout the summer until the second rainfall, when crops begin to sprout; <sup>9</sup> and they shall have the right to veer off to the sides of the roads onto private property because of hard protrusions [*yeteidot*] of the road; <sup>10</sup> and one who becomes lost among the vineyards shall have the right to cut down branches and enter an area of the vineyard, or cut down branches and exit an area of the vineyard, until he finds his way back to the road; <sup>11</sup> and that a corpse with no one to bury it [*met mitzva*] acquires its place and is buried where it was found.

And they shall have the right to veer off to the sides of the roads onto private property because of hard protrusions of the road.

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and Rabbi  $\hat{H}$ iyya were once walking along the road, and they veered off to the sides of the road.

Rabbi Yehuda ben Kanosa was taking broad steps on the road, to avoid the protrusions without going off to the side of the road, while walking in front of them.

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said to Rabbi  $\hat{H}$ iyya: Who is this man who is showing off his supposed greatness in our presence?

Rabbi  $\hat{H}$ iyya said to Rabbi Yehuda: Perhaps it is my student Rabbi Yehuda ben Kanosa. And if so, all of his actions are undertaken for the sake of Heaven; he is not acting out of haughtiness.

When they reached him and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi saw him, he said to him: If you were not Yehuda ben Kanosa I would have cut off your legs with iron shears, i.e., I would have excommunicated you for your impudence.



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

## Comprehension and Analysis Questions

**?** Why did Joshua stipulate these 10 conditions before apportioning the land among the tribes? What do these stipulations have in common? Which one do you find particularly interesting?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**?** Why did Joshua stipulate that all the inhabitants of the Land of Israel shall have the right to veer off to the sides of the roads onto private property because of hard protrusions [*yeteidot*] of the road?

**?** Why did Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and Rabbi *Ħiyya* veer off to the sides of the road when they were walking along the road?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**?** Why was Rabbi Yehuda ben Kanosa taking broad steps on the road?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah. Laws of Torah Study. Chapter 5. Halacha 6

Similarly, he [the Student] should not remove his *tefillin* in the presence of his teacher, nor should he recline in his presence. Rather, he should sit before him as one sits before a king.

A person should not pray either in front of his teacher, behind his teacher, or at his teacher's side. Needless to say, one should not walk by his side. Rather, he should distance himself behind his teacher without standing directly behind him and then pray.

**Bonus ?** According to Jewish law, it is forbidden for a student to walk by the side of his teacher and needless to say, it is forbidden to walk in front of him. Our story tells us (through the testimony of Rabbi *Ħiyya*) that Rabbi Yehuda ben Kanosa was a pious person. If so, why did he walk in front of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and Rabbi *Ħiyya*?

**?** How did Rabbi Yehuda ben Kanosa show off greatness in the presence of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and Rabbi Hiyya?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** If Rabbi Yehuda ben Kanosa's actions are undertaken for the sake of Heaven; why did Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi still admonish him at the end of our story?

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

**!** You are humble; that's good. You are pious; even better! Now let's work on your sensitivity and social skills.



Rabbi Yehuda ben Kanosa is a humble, pious person, who wishes to go beyond the letter of the law and not to avail himself of the leniencies that Joshua stipulated before apportioning the land among the tribes.

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi is teaching Rabbi Yehuda ben Kanosa –and all of us– that while humility and piety are praiseworthy character traits, if displayed in the wrong context, will pass as haughtiness, lack of sensitivity, and lack of consideration.

It is very important to supplement character traits with sensitivity and good social skills, so we learn how to read different situations and how to behave with different people and in different circumstances.