

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

## **Stories with a Twist** **[289]**

### **Why Is It That You Do Not Know How to Appease Like ben Idi Our Colleague?**

(Insights into Jerusalem Talmud Chapter 2, Halacha 5 (7a & b))



#### **Background to Our Story**

##### **Maimonides: Laws of Talmud Torah. Chapter 5, Halacha 1**

Just as a person is commanded to honor his father and hold him in awe, so, too, is he obligated to honor his teacher and hold him in awe.

[Indeed, the measure of honor and awe] due one's teacher exceeds that due one's father. His father brings him into the life of this world, while his teacher, who teaches him wisdom, brings him into the life of the world to come.

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There is no greater honor than that due a teacher, and no greater awe than that due a teacher. Our Sages declared: "Your fear of your teacher should be equivalent to your fear of Heaven."

Therefore, they said: Whoever disputes the authority of his teacher is considered as if he revolts against the Divine Presence, as implied [by Numbers 26:9]: "...who led a revolt against God."

Whoever engages in controversy with his teacher is considered as if he engaged in controversy with the Divine Presence, as implied [by Numbers 20:13]: "...where the Jews contested with God and where He was sanctified."

Whoever complains against his teacher is considered as if he complains against the Divine Presence, as implied [by Exodus 16:8]: "Your complaints are not against us, but against God."

Whoever thinks disparagingly of his teacher is considered as if he thought disparagingly of the Divine Presence, as implied [by Numbers 21:5]: "And the people spoke out against God and Moses."

## Rabbi Yoĥanan



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This is Rabbi Yoĥanan bar Nappaĥa, one of the greatest *amora'im*, whose teachings are fundamental components of both the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. He resided in Tiberias and lived to an advanced age.

Rabbi Yoĥanan was orphaned at a young age, and although his family apparently owned considerable property, he spent virtually all of his resources in his devotion to the study of Torah, and he eventually became impoverished. In his youth, he had the privilege of studying under Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, the redactor of the Mishna, but most of his Torah study was accomplished under Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's students: Ĥizkiya ben Ĥiyya, Rabbi Oshaya, Rabbi Ĥanina, and Rabbi Yannai, who lavished praise upon him. In time, he became the head of the yeshiva in Tiberias, at which point his fame and influence increased greatly. For a long time Rabbi Yoĥanan was the leading rabbinic scholar in the entire Jewish world, not only in Eretz Yisrael but in Babylonia as well, where he was respected by the Babylonian Sages. Many of them immigrated to Eretz Yisrael to become his students.

A master of both *halakha* and *aggada*, Rabbi Yoĥanan's teachings in both disciplines are found throughout both the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. As a testament to his intellectual and spiritual stature, the *halakha* is in accordance with his opinion in almost every case, even when Rav or Shmuel, the preeminent *amora'im* of Babylonia, whom he treated deferentially, disagree with him. Only in disputes with his teachers in Eretz Yisrael, such as Rabbi Yannai and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, is the *halakha* not in accordance with his opinion.

Rabbi Yoĥanan was renowned for being handsome, and much was said in praise of his good looks. We know that his life was full of suffering. Ten of his sons died in his lifetime. There is a geonic tradition that one of his sons was the Babylonian *amora* Rabbi Mattana, who did not predecease him. The death of Rabbi Yoĥanan's disciple-colleague and brother-in-law, Reish Lakish, for which he considered himself responsible, hastened his own death.

Rabbi Yoĥanan had many students. In fact, all the *amora'im* of Eretz Yisrael in succeeding generations were his students and benefited from his teachings, to the extent that he is considered the author of the Jerusalem Talmud. His greatest students were his brother-in-law Reish Lakish, Rabbi Elazar, Rabbi Ĥiyya bar Abba, Rabbi Abbahu, Rabbi Yosei bar Ĥanina, Rabbi Ami, and Rabbi Asi.

## Rabbi Elazar



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In the Gemara, citations of Rabbi Elazar with no patronymic refer to Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat, a second-generation *amora* in Eretz Yisrael. In many cases his name is referred to as Rabbi Eliezer as in the Gemara here, but this is probably a textual corruption. He was born in Babylonia, where he was a student of both Rav and Shmuel. In his youth he immigrated to

Eretz Yisrael, where he married. In Eretz Yisrael, he became one of Rabbi Yoĥanan's most important students.

The connection between them was so close that at times the Gemara raises a contradiction between the statement of one and the statement of the other, under the assumption that it was unlikely that they would hold different opinions in matters of *halakha*.

**?** What is the relationship between Rabbi Yoĥanan and Rabbi Elazar?

### **Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi**



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Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi was an *amora* of Eretz Yisrael and one of the most prominent disciples of Rabbi Yoĥanan. It seems that Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi managed to learn Torah from the most important *amora'im*

in the first generation of *amora'im* from Eretz Yisrael, such as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi and others. When he became Rabbi Yoĥanan's close disciple he was already a distinguished Torah scholar. Some say that he was even a disciple-colleague of Rabbi Yoĥanan's.

Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi was a colleague of the other disciples of Rabbi Yoĥanan, but after the latter's death he settled in the city of Tyre and was considered one of the great men of his generation. The Sages of the following generation, both in Eretz Yisrael and Babylonia and in particular Rabbi Ze'eira, asked many questions of him. In sources from Eretz Yisrael two sons of his are mentioned, Rabbi Abba and Rabbi Yosei, who were Sages of the next generation.

### **Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma**



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Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma was a fifth-generation *tanna*, of the same generation as Rabbi Akiva's disciples. It appears that Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma lived in Tiberias, where he taught Torah to his disciples. It is known that he had a son named Rabbi Yoĥanan. There are no records of many of his halakhic teachings, but there are a number of aggadic sayings cited in his name in the Talmud and other sources. From here and from other places it is evident that he was considered a holy man who could foretell what would happen in the future, and it is recounted that Rabbi Ĥanina ben Teradyon consulted with him (see *Avoda Zara* 18a). From what he said to Rabbi Ĥanina ben Teradyon, as well as from the fact that the prominent people of Rome took part in his funeral (*Avoda Zara* 18a), it is apparent that he was on good terms with the Roman government.

This chapter deals primarily with the different uses of the shekels collected yearly and stored in the Temple treasury. In the triannual ceremony of the collection of the chamber, some of the shekels were placed in three baskets. The shekels that were not placed in the baskets were known as the remains of the chamber.

They were used to fund various important projects not necessarily directly connected with the sacrificial service, including the maintenance of the Temple and public works in the holy city of Jerusalem.

The Gemara elaborates on which expenses were borne by each fund, following the fundamental distinction that the collection of the chamber was mostly allocated to the purchase of offerings, while the remains of the chamber were largely dedicated to infrastructure. One topic that receives extensive attention is the payment to all the artisans and workmen who performed their tasks for the Temple. As the money in the treasury was consecrated, there were difficulties that had to be overcome for these payments to be made.

Another issue that is clarified is the correct protocol for surpluses that remained at the end of the year. If more money was set aside in the collection of the chamber than was actually used, there would be leftover money, the use of which needed to be determined. Likewise, if enough shekels had been contributed, it was likely that there would be a surplus of the remains of the chamber. The Gemara addresses what should be done with these surpluses.

Besides the surplus shekels, the chapter also focuses on what should be done with additional monies the Temple received from various donations and investments.

### **The Text: Jerusalem Talmud Chapter 2, Halacha 5 (7a & b)**

רבי יוחנן הוה מסמיך ואזל עאל רבי חייא בר אבא, והיה רבי אליעזר חמי ליה ומטמר ליה מקמיה. ואמר: הלין תרתי מלייהו הדין בבלאה עביד ביה: חדא – דלא שאיל בשלומיה, וחדא – מיטמר. אמר ליה רבי יעקב בר אידי: כף נהיגין גבהון, דזעירא לא שאיל בשלומיה דרבה. דאינון נהגון ומקיימין "ראוני נערים ונחבאו וישישים קמו עמדו".

אמר ליה: מהו למיעבר קמי דאדורא צלמי? אמר ליה: מה את פליג ליה יקר? עבור קמוהי וסמי עינוי. אמר ליה: יאות רבי אליעזר עביד דלא עבר קמך.

ועוד עביד הא בבלאה דלא אמר שמעתא משמיה. נכנסו לפניו רבי אמי ורבי אסי. אמרו לו: רבי, כף הנה מעשה בבית הכנסת של טרסיים בנגר שיש בראשו גלוסטרא, שנחלקו.

רבי אליעזר ורבי יוסי עד שקרעו ספר תורה בחמתו. קרעו סלקא דעתך?! אלא שנקרע ספר תורה. והיה שם זקן אחד, ורבי יוסי בן קסמא שמו, אמר: תמיהני אם לא הוה בית הכנסת זה עבודה זרה.

ותור ואמר: הכדין מתבריה!

נכנס לפניו רבי יעקב בר אידי, אמר ליה: כתיב "כאשר צוה ה' את משה עבדו כן צוה משה את יהושע" וגו' וכי כל דיבור ודיבור שהיה יהושע יושב ודורש היה אומר: כף אמר משה? אלא, יהושע יושב ודורש, ויודעין הכל שהתורה של משה היא. אף אתה, אליעזר יושב ודורש והכל יודעין שהתורה שלך היא. אמר להן: מפני מה אין אתן יודעין לרצות כבן אידי חבירנו.

Rabbi Yoĥanan was walking while leaning on the shoulder of Rabbi Ĥiyya bar Abba, and Rabbi Eliezer was watching him and hiding from him. Rabbi Yoĥanan said: This Babylonian has done two improper things to me. One, he didn't inquire after my welfare; and another, he is hiding from me, as though he doesn't want to speak with me.

Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi said to him: This is the custom among them, i.e., among Babylonians. The small, less prominent people do not inquire after the welfare of great, prominent people; they only respond to them. That is the reason he did not inquire after your welfare. Their custom is to fulfill that which is written in the verse: "The young men saw me and hid themselves, and the aged rose up and stood" (Job 29:8).

He [Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi] said to him [to Rabbi Yoĥanan]: What is the *halakha* with regard to passing in front of the Adura statue? Does that fall into the category of giving honor to idolatry? Rabbi Yoĥanan said to him: What honor are you giving it by merely passing in front of it? You could pass in front of it and blind its eyes, meaning that you could pass in front of it and insult it.

Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi said to him: If so, Rabbi Eliezer was right not to pass in front of you, since if he had passed in front of you but maintained the custom of Babylonians not to inquire after your welfare, it would have been a slight to your honor.

That Babylonian did something else wrong, in that he did not say a *halakha* in my name, as he repeated without attribution something I taught him.

Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi entered. In order to appease Rabbi Yoĥanan they said to him: Rabbi, there was an incident that occurred in the synagogue of the weavers [*tarsiyyim*], where they were discussing the halakhic status of a door bolt, a vertical bar that is affixed to the door in order to push into the ground, which has a knob [*gelustera*] protruding at its top.

Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yosei disagreed about this issue until it reached a point that they tore up a Torah scroll in their anger. Before the Gemara resumes the story, it asks: Could it enter your mind that these Sages tore up a Torah scroll? Rather, it means that as each of them pulled it in his own direction, a Torah scroll was torn. The Gemara returns to the story told by Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi: There was a certain old man, one of the Sages, named Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma, and he said: I will be

surprised if this synagogue does not become a house of idolatry, since the Sages say that whoever is angry should be in your eyes like an idol worshipper.

Rabbi Yoĥanan responded and said: This is an incident between colleagues. How can you compare that to my situation, as Rabbi Eliezer is my disciple?

Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi entered before Rabbi Yoĥanan and said to him that it is written: "As God commanded Moses His servant, so did Moses command Joshua and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone from all that God had commanded Moses" (Joshua 11:15). From here it is evident that Joshua taught the Jewish people all of the Torah that he learned from Moses. Is it possible to conceive that with every statement that Joshua made while sitting and expounding to the Jewish people he would diligently say: Thus said Moses?" This does not seem plausible.

Rather, Joshua would sit and expound, and everyone knew that it is the Torah of Moses. Similarly, you, Rabbi Yoĥanan, should know that Eliezer, your disciple, is sitting and expounding before his own disciples, and although he does not say so explicitly, everyone knows that it is your Torah.

Rabbi Yoĥanan said to Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi, who had tried unsuccessfully to appease him: Why is it that you do not know how to appease like ben Idi our colleague?



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

### **Comprehension and Analysis Questions**

**?** Why was Rabbi Yoĥanan walking while leaning on the shoulder of Rabbi Ĥiyya bar Abba?

**Extra Bonus ?** Why did Rabbi Eliezer (Elazar) hide from Rabbi Yoĥanan?

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

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

**?** Why was Rabbi Yoĥanan deeply offended?

**?** Read one more time the short biography of Rabbi Elazar above. What additional information does the biographical sketch of Rabbi Elazar add to help us understand, perhaps, Rabbi Yoĥanan's anger?

**Extra Bonus ?** Why does Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi explain Rabbi Elazar's behavior to Rabbi Yoĥanan?

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

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

**Bonus ?** What is the main point of Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi's explanation of Rabbi Elazar's behavior?

**Bonus ?** Why does Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi's bring the discussion about passing in front of the Adura statue?

**?** Why does Rabbi Yoĥanan keep calling Rabbi Elazar "the Babylonian"?

**?** Why do Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi enter to appease Rabbi Yoĥanan?

**?** Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi share with their teacher an incident that occurred in the synagogue of the weavers [*tarsiyyim*]. What is the main point of their exposition?

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

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

**Bonus ?** What is problematic about Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi's particular attempt to appease Rabbi Yoĥanan?

**?** Why wasn't Rabbi Yoĥanan appeased after listening to the story about Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yosei's strong disagreement?

**?** How does Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi finally appease Rabbi Yoĥanan?

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

**!** The lost (and difficult) art of extinguishing fires.

**!** It takes very little to start a fire. It may take an entire village to put it off.

! There is no greater gift (and expression of love and kindness) than to give a troubled person the gift of peace of mind.



Our story opens with a very angry Rabbi Yoĥanan. The anger of the leading teacher is directed towards his most devoted disciple. Rabbi Yoĥanan doesn't know how to decode Rabbi Elazar's behavior and among all the possibilities to make sense of it, he chooses to believe that Rabbi Elazar is disrespecting him, the most serious possible offense towards a teacher.

Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi has the difficult task to appease his beloved, but angry and irrational teacher, before a rift is created.

Different students might have used this opportunity to add fuel to the fire, to remove Rabbi Elazar from Rabbi Yoĥanan's proximity, and bring themselves closer to their teacher (a *divide and conquer* approach). However, Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi loves his teacher and he is a man of integrity, who knows that there is no greater act of love, kindness, and compassion than to bring peace of mind to a troubled person.