

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

Stories with a Twist [305]

Since We Did Not Merit to Be Faithful Custodians, Let the Keys Be Handed to You.

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 29a



Background to Our Story

Mishna Ta'anit Chapter 4:6

בַּתְּשַׁעָה בְּאָב נִגְזַר עַל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁלֹּא יִכְנסוּ לְאֶרֶץ, וְחָרַב הַבַּיִת בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה וּבַשֵּׁנִיָּה, וְנִלְכְּדָה בֵּיתָר, וְנִחְרְשָׁה הָעִיר

On the Ninth of Av it was decreed upon our ancestors that they would all die in the wilderness and **not enter Eretz** Yisrael; **and the Temple was destroyed the first time**, in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, **and the second time**, by the Romans; **and Beitar was captured; and the city** of Jerusalem **was plowed**, as a sign that it would never be rebuilt.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 29a

תָּנוּ רַבֵּנָן: מִשְׁחָרַב הַבַּיִת בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה, נִתְקַבְּצוּ כִּיתוֹת כִּיתוֹת שֶׁל פְּרָחֵי כְהוּנָה וּמִפְתָּחוֹת הַהֵיכָל בְּיָדָן. וְעָלוּ לְגַג הַהֵיכָל וְאָמְרוּ לְפָנָיו: רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם! הוֹאִיל וְלֹא זָכִינוּ לְהִיּוֹת גִּזְבָּרִין נְאֻמָּנִים, יִהְיוּ מִפְתָּחוֹת מְסוּרוֹת לָךְ. וְיִרְקוּם כְּלָפֵי מַעְלָה, וְיִצְתָה כַּעֲזֵן פִּיסַת יָד וְקִיבְלָתָן מֵהֶם. וְהֵם קָפְצוּ וְנִפְלוּ לְתוֹךְ הָאֵוֶר.

The Sages taught: When the Temple was destroyed for the first time, many groups of young priests gathered together with the Temple keys in their hands. And they ascended to the roof of the Sanctuary and said before God: Master of the Universe, since we did not merit to be faithful treasurers (custodians), and the Temple is being destroyed, let the Temple keys be handed to You. And they threw them upward, and a kind of palm of a hand emerged and received the keys from them. And the young priests jumped from the roof and fell into the fire of the burning Temple.



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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Bonus ? Why did many groups of young priests ascend to the roof of the sanctuary?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus ? Why did the young priests gather together as opposed to the more established priests?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

Extra Bonus ? Who wasn't a faithful custodian of the Temple?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Extra Bonus ? Why did "the hand" receive the keys?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Extra Bonus ? Why did the young priests jump from the roof and fall into the fire?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

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

! If you cannot take care of the house, it is time to hand over the keys.



Our short and tragic story takes place on the day the Temple of Jerusalem is being destroyed. The young priests, untainted by the mistakes of their elders, recognized the collective failure of the priestly cast (and the Jewish people) in protecting God's holy Temple and Israel's sovereignty.

Acknowledging that they didn't merit to be good custodians, they handed over the keys to the "original owner," hoping that in the future, someone would be able to do a better job.

The "hand" of God accepts the keys (and the young priests' remorse and confession) and reminds all of us, that when we are not able to get the job done, we must hand the baton over to someone who can.