

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [307]

I Humble Myself Before You, Bones of Beit Shammai Insights into Babylonian Talmud Chagigah 22a



Background to Our Story

Hillel and Shammai



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Beitza – Rosh Hashanah. Koren publishers
Jerusalem Page 109

Hillel the Elder and Shammai were the last of the pairs of Sages who transmitted the Oral Torah to successive generations over a period of about two centuries; Hillel served as *Nasi* of the Sanhedrin while Shammai was the president of the court. Hillel and Shammai lived about one hundred years prior to the destruction of the Temple, at the beginning of Herod's reign. Hillel and Shammai founded two schools, Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, which flourished for many years after their passing, but they themselves disagreed about only three or four issues. The main difference between Hillel and Shammai was one of personality. Hillel treated himself and others in an easygoing manner, avoiding conflict whenever possible. Shammai, by contrast, took a more severe approach, attempting to scrutinize people's motivations and habits.

Tradition has it that Hillel began as an impoverished student who took on menial labor in order to pay to attend the lectures of Shemaya and Avtalyon. The Gemara compares Hillel to Ezra the Scribe, crediting him with reestablishing Torah study at a period in history when it was utterly neglected (*Sukka* 20a). His disciples were praised as well. According to the Gemara, Hillel the Elder had eighty students: Thirty of them were worthy that the Divine Presence should rest upon them as it rested upon Moses; thirty were worthy that the sun should stand still for them, as it did for Joshua bin Nun; and twenty were average. The greatest among Hillel's students was Yonatan ben Uzziel and the least among them was Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai (*Sukka* 28a).

Houses of Hillel and Shammai



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

The House of Hillel (Beit Hillel) and House of Shammai (Beit Shammai) were, among Jewish scholars, two [schools of thought](#) during the period of [tannaim](#), named after the sages [Hillel](#) and [Shammai](#) (of the last century BCE and the early 1st century CE) who founded them. These two schools had vigorous debates on matters of ritual practice, ethics, and theology which were critical for the shaping of the [Oral Law](#) and Judaism as it is today.

In general, Beit Shammai's positions were stricter than those of Beit Hillel. On the few occasions when the opposite was true, Beit Hillel would sometimes later recant their position. Similarly, though there are no records of Beit Shammai as a whole changing its stance, a few individuals from Beit Shammai are recorded as deserting a particular stringent opinion of their school, in favor of Beit Hillel's opinion.

The final law almost always coincides with Beit Hillel, not because they constituted the majority, but because Beit Hillel studied the view of their opponents, and because a Divine voice (bat-kol) was heard in [Yavne](#) declaring a general rule of practice: "Both schools espouse to the words of the living God, but the Halakhah follows the School of Hillel." Accordingly, halachic-practice was decided in favor of Beit Hillel since they were agreeable and forbearing (or more literally, piteous). Not only did they teach Beit Shammai's teachings, but they said them first before their own. The ruling in accordance with the teachings of the School of Hillel was also intended to bring conformity to Jewish practices.

Rabbi Yehoshua



[Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Berakhot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 182](#)

This is Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya the Levite, one of the leading Sages in the generation following the destruction of the Second Temple. He had served as one of the Levite singers in the Temple. After its destruction, he was among the students who went with their primary teacher, Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai, to Yavne.

[Unlike his colleague Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua completely adhered to the approach of his teacher and of Beit Hillel.](#)

Chaver & Am-ha'aretz

In: [Reference Guide to the Talmud](#), by **Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. Koren. 2014.**

Page 438.

Member of a group dedicated to the precise observance of mitzvot (Chaver).

In the talmudic period, this referred to a person who was a member of a group dedicated to the precise observance of mitzvot. One who sought to enter that society had to formally accept its practices in the presence of three other members. The main emphasis of these groups was the strict observance of the laws of teruma and tithes and careful adherence to the laws of ritual purity, to the extent that they would eat even non-sacred food in a state of ritual purity. In practice, all Torah scholars were members of this group. However, many common, uneducated people and even some Samaritans entered into this category. Acceptance as a member of this group removed an individual from the category of a common, uneducated person, and his statements with regard to tithes and ritual purity were deemed reliable. In later generations, the term took on a more restricted meaning and was used to refer only to significant Torah scholars.

Common, uneducated person (Am-ha'aretz)

A term specifically used in the mishnaic period to refer to an ignorant person who is not meticulous in his observance of mitzvot. At times the term was used to refer only to those far removed from Torah practice, but it also referred, on occasion, to those who maintained a certain level of religious observance.

The opposite of this common, uneducated person is a member of a group dedicated to the precise observance of mitzvot. There were many restrictions governing relations between a chaver and an am-ha'aretz, particularly in the areas of ritual purity and tithes. For example, a common person and his clothes were considered ritually impure, and contact with him imparted ritual impurity. Similarly, with regard to tithes and certain prohibitions, the word of a common person was not deemed reliable. These restrictions were relaxed during the Festival seasons. Toward the end of the mishnaic period most of the restrictions with regard to the common person were rescinded, partly due to concern lest it cause division within the Jewish people and partly because there was a significant improvement in the religious observance of the masses. The term no longer has halakhic significance.

Am Ha'aretz



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Am_ha%27aretz

Am ha'aretz (אִם הָאֶרֶץ) or the people of the Land is a term found in the Hebrew Bible and (with a different meaning) in rabbinic literature. The word usually is a collective noun in Biblical Hebrew but occasionally pluralized as *amei ha-aretz* "peoples of the land" or (in Late Biblical Hebrew) super-pluralized as *amei ha-aratzot* "peoples of the lands"

In Mishnaic Hebrew and later, the term is used as a euphemism for "ignoramus", such that an individual ignoramus is an *am ha-aretz* and multiple are *amei ha-aretz*.

The [Talmud](#) applies "the people of Land" to uneducated Jews, who were deemed likely to be negligent in their observance of the commandments due to their ignorance, and the term combines the meanings of "rustic" with those of "boorish, uncivilized, ignorant".

In antiquity (Hasmonean to the [Roman era](#), 140 BCE–70 CE), the *am ha'aretz* were the uneducated rustic population of [Judea](#), as opposed to the learned factions of the [Pharisees](#) or [Sadducees](#).

The *am ha'aretz* were of two types, the *am ha'aretz le-mitzvot*, Jews disparaged for not scrupulously observing the [commandments](#), and the *am ha'aretz la-Torah*, those stigmatized as ignoramuses for not having studied the Torah at all.

The *am ha'aretz* are denounced in a very late and exceptional passage in [Talmud Bavli Pesahim](#) 49, where they are contrasted with the [chachamim](#) ("wise") and [talmidei chachamim](#) ("wise students", i.e. scholars of the Talmud). The text contains the rabbinical teaching that no man should marry the daughter of an *am ha'aretz* because if he should die or be exiled, his sons will then also be *ammei ha'aretz*. A man should rather sell all his possessions in order to afford marriage to a daughter of a *talmid chacham*. Marriage of a *talmid chacham* to a daughter of an *am ha'aretz* is compared to the crossbreeding of grapevine with wild wine, which is "unseemly and disagreeable".

The *am ha'aretz* is often contrasted with the [chaber](#)- a term used to describe someone scrupulous enough in Jewish law (namely laws of ritual purity and tithes) for an observant Jew of Second temple times to eat in their house. It too later evolved into a term to describe Torah knowledge - in this case a high degree of it.

Chaber



Hebrew Bible

The word appears twice in the Hebrew Bible (Psalms 119:63, Proverbs 28:24), meaning "companion".

A friend

The term is ordinarily used in rabbinical texts in its Biblical sense of "companion". A Talmudic proverb says, "Your chaber has a chaber, and your chaber's chaber has a chaber", meaning that words spoken in front of a few people can be presumed to circulate and become public.

A scholar

The rabbis strongly recommended study in company, asserting that only in this way can knowledge be acquired; therefore, if necessary, one should even expend money for the purpose of acquiring a companion. A prominent teacher of the second century declared that, while he had learned much from his masters, he had learned more from his "chaberim". Hence the term came to mean a "companion in study," a "colleague". In the form talmid-haver or haver-talmid, it denotes one who is at once the student and colleague of a certain teacher, a scholar who from being a student has risen to be a colleague or fellow. Eventually "chaber" assumed the general meaning of "scholar",and appears as a title lower than hakham.

In the medieval period, the title "chaber" was known in the 11th century, when it probably referred to a member of a court of justice; but in Germany in later centuries it indicated that its possessor had devoted many years to the study of sacred literature. In some communities, particularly originating from Germany, this title is still used today. There is also a program organized by the Orthodox Union to bestow this title.

In congregational life it was conferred as a rule on married men, but often also on yeshiva graduates who were single. Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz conferred it on the Christian professor Tychsen.

Purity laws

"Chaber" also denotes a member of a society or order ("chaburah," "chaburta," "k'neset" = "aggregation," "company," "union"), or of a union of Pharisees, for the purpose of carrying out the observance of the laws of food purity to their fullest possible development. In their eyes, any person whose observance of the food purity or tithing laws was doubtful, was an am ha'aretz, whose contact was defiling. The term "chaber" is not synonymous with "Parush" (Pharisee), since not all Pharisees were chaberim, though sometimes the generic term "parush" is used instead. Occasionally, the more specific term "ne'eman" (trustworthy) takes the place of "chaber".

On the Scriptural verse, "He shall... purify and sanctify it" the rabbis taught the maxim, "Purity leads to sanctity". This purity was understood to be closely connected with Levitical purity; of this there were several degrees, there being sections in the community which observed its rules more strictly and extensively than did others. Some even extended all the precautions necessary for the priest in eating holy things to the layman who lived on secular food.

Origin

The Bible requires the Israelite to give certain gifts from his farm and herd to the priest, Levite, and poor. The rules governing these gifts, as well as the rules of "clean" and

"unclean," were doubtless familiar to the people at large; but not all people found it convenient or possible to comply with them. Their observance must have been particularly difficult in the unsettled state of affairs during the Maccabean wars. Some suggest that in this period the so-called "am ha'aretz" (who included the great majority of the people), either driven by circumstances or seduced by temptation, neglected them; and that a certain more rigorous minority, not knowing whom to trust in such matters, formed among themselves associations ("chaburot"), the members ("chaberim") of which pledged themselves to keep faithfully the rules of tithes and Levitical purity. Accordingly, the chaber is one who strictly observes these laws.

Admission

To be admitted as a chaber, one must declare his determination never to give terumah or ma'aser to a priest or a Levite who is classified as an am ha'aretz; nor to allow his ordinary food to be prepared by an am ha'aretz; nor to eat his ordinary food (chullin, grain and fruit from which terumah and ma'aser have been separated) except in a certain state of Levitical cleanness. This declaration must be made before three members of the order. If they are satisfied that the candidate has lived up to the rules in his private life, he is accepted at once; otherwise he is admitted as a "ben ha-k'neset" (son of the union, neophyte) for thirty days. According to Beit Shammai, this period suffices only when membership is sought for the lesser degrees of purity, while for the higher degrees the probation period lasts for a year. After this period, if the candidate has proved his constancy, he becomes a chaber or ne'eman. No distinction is made between the learned and the ignorant; all must make this declaration. The only exception is for a scholar attached to a college, on the presumption that he took the pledge when he first joined the college.

Degrees of chaburah

There are several classes of chaberim, corresponding to the several degrees of Levitical cleanness. The lowest class pledges itself to practice Levitical cleanness of "k'nafayim" (literally "wings"). This is a very obscure term, for which no satisfactory explanation has been found. It is generally assumed to mean "hands"; inasmuch as the Pharisaic maxim is, "Hands are always busy," unintentionally touching both clean and unclean things, they are regarded as being in a state of uncertain cleanness; hence one must cleanse them before eating anything Levitically clean. This may be legally accomplished by pouring on them one-fourth of a log of water. But that process suffices only where a person wishes to eat chullin, ma'aser, or terumah. If he desires to eat the sacrificial portions, he must dip his hands into forty seahs of water; and if about to handle the water of lustration, he must first subject his whole body to immersion.

As the ordinary Israelite and the Levite are not permitted to handle the most sacred things, it naturally follows that not all men are eligible for the higher degrees; and even of those whose descent does not bar their admission, not all are willing to assume the correspondingly greater precautions incident to the privilege. Provision is therefore made for general admission to the lower degrees, of which most people availed themselves. It is ordained that if one desires to join the order of chaberim, but does not wish to subject himself to the duties devolving upon the members of the higher degrees—the precautions necessary to keep himself Levitically clean, as for the more sacred things—he may be accepted; but where, on the contrary, one seeks admission to the higher degrees while refusing to pledge himself to strict observance of the rules governing the lower degrees, he must be rejected.

Separation from the am ha'aretz

Having been admitted as reliable in matters of ma'aser, a chaber must tithe what he eats, what he sells of his own produce, and what he buys for the purpose of selling, and must not eat at the table of an am ha'aretz, lest he be served untithed food. A full chaber must, in addition, not sell to an am ha'aretz anything that moisture would render subject to

uncleanness, lest the am ha'aretz expose the goods to contamination; for rabbinical law forbids causing defilement even to secular things in the Land of Israel. Nor may he buy from an am ha'aretz anything exposed to moisture in that way, nor accept invitations to the table of an am ha'aretz, nor entertain one who is in his ordinary garments, which may have been exposed to defilement.

A chaber's wife, and his child or servant, have the same status as the chaber himself. Even after the chaber's death, his family enjoys this status, unless there is reason to doubt their fidelity. Even if they join the family of an am ha'aretz, they are presumed to continue their observant habits, unless there is reasonable suspicion to the contrary. Similarly, family members of an am ha'aretz joining the family of a chaber are not considered trustworthy unless they pledge themselves to live up to the rules of the chaburah. (An exception to these rules is a child or servant of either group who enters a household of the other group for the purpose of study: he then receives the status of the house.) If a man is recognized as reliable while his wife is not (as when a chaber marries the widow or daughter of an am ha'aretz), chaberim may buy food from him, but must not eat in his house if it is presided over by his wife. If, however, the wife is reliable (being the widow or daughter of a chaber) and the husband is an am ha'aretz, chaberim may eat at his table, but must not buy from him.

Suspension from the order

The status of chaber continues indefinitely, unless one is reasonably suspected of backsliding. In that case, he is suspended from the chaburah until he reestablishes his trustworthiness. Similarly, where a chaber accepts an office that is considered suspicious (such as that of tax-collector or publican) he is suspended from the chaburah, but is reinstated upon leaving the office.

Am Ha'aretz



WIKIPEDIA
The Free Encyclopedia

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

Corpse uncleanness (**Hebrew**: tum'at met) is a state of [ritual uncleanness](#) described in Jewish [halachic law](#). It is the highest grade of uncleanness, or defilement, and is contracted by having either directly or indirectly touched, carried or shifted a [dead human body](#), or after having entered a roofed house or chamber where the corpse of a Jew is lying (conveyed by overshadowing).

Corpse uncleanness is first described in the [Books of the Law](#) conveyed by [Moses](#) to the nation of Israel, and where (for example, in [Numbers 31:19](#), among other places) is the requisite to allow for a seven-day purification period after making physical contact with a human corpse.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Chagigah 22a

וְנִיחוּשׁ לְשֵׁאֵלָה?

דְּתַנּוּ: כְּלֵי קָרֶס מְצִיל עַל הַכֹּל, דְּבָרֵי בֵּית הַלֵּל.

בֵּית שְׂמַאי אוֹמְרִים: אֵינוֹ מְצִיל אֶלָּא עַל אוֹכְלִים וְעַל הַמְשַׁקִּים וְעַל כְּלֵי קָרֶס.

אָמְרוּ לָהֶם בֵּית הַלֵּל לְבֵּית שְׂמַאי: מִפְּנֵי מָה?

אָמְרוּ בֵּית שְׂמַאי: מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּא טָמֵא עַל גְּבִי עִם הָאָרֶץ, וְאֵין כְּלֵי טָמֵא חוּצָין.

אָמְרוּ לָהֶם בֵּית הַלֵּל: וְהֵלֵא טִיְהַרְתֶּם אוֹכְלִין וּמְשַׁקִּין שְׁבִתוּכוֹ!

אָמרוּ לָהֶם בֵּית שְׂמַאי: כְּשִׁטְיָהֶרְנוּ אוֹכְלִין וּמִשְׁקִין שְׁבִתוֹכוֹ לְעֲצָמוֹ טְהָרָנוּ. אָבֵל נִטְהַר אֶת הַכְּלִי שֶׁטְהָרְתוּ לָהּ וְלוֹ?

תְּנֵיא, אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ: בּוֹשְׁנֵי מִדְּבָרֵיכֶם, בֵּית שְׂמַאי!
אֶפְשָׁר, אִשָּׁה לְשָׂה בְּעֵרִיבָה – אִשָּׁה וְעֵרִיבָה טְמֵאִין שְׁבַעָה וּבִצְקַ טְהוֹר?!
לוֹגִין מְלֵא מִשְׁקִין, – לוֹגִין טְמֵא טוֹמְאֵת שְׁבַעָה וּמִשְׁקִין טְהוֹרִין?!

נִטְפַל לוֹ תַלְמִיד אֶחָד מִתְלַמְּדֵי בֵּית שְׂמַאי, אָמַר לוֹ: אוֹמֵר לָהּ טַעֲמָן שֶׁל בֵּית שְׂמַאי.
אָמַר לוֹ: אָמור.

אָמַר לוֹ: כְּלִי טְמֵא חוֹצֵץ אוֹ אֵינוֹ חוֹצֵץ?

אָמַר לֵיהּ: אֵינוֹ חוֹצֵץ.

כְּלִי שֶׁל עִם הָאָרֶץ טְמֵא אוֹ טְהוֹר?

אָמַר לוֹ: טְמֵא.

וְאִם אֵתָה אוֹמְרָלוֹ "טְמֵא", כְּלוּם מִשְׁגִּיחַ עָלֶיךָ? וְלֹא עוֹד, אֲלֵא שְׂאֵם אֵתָה אוֹמֵר לוֹ "טְמֵא", אוֹמֵר לָהּ "שְׁלִי טְהוֹר וְשִׁלָּה טְמֵא", וְזֶהוּ טַעֲמָן שֶׁל בֵּית שְׂמַאי.

מִיָּד הִלָּךְ רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְנִשְׁתַּטַּח עַל קְבָרֵי בֵּית שְׂמַאי, אָמַר: נִעֲנִיתִי לָכֶם עֲצָמוֹת בֵּית שְׂמַאי, וּמָה סְתוּמוֹת שְׁלָכֶם כִּךָ – מְפֹרְשׁוֹת עַל אֵתָת כְּמָה וְכְמָה

אָמְרוּ: כָּל יָמָיו הוֹשְׁתָרוּ שִׁינָיו מִפְּנֵי תַעֲנִיּוֹתָי



Our story (a short story concealed within a difficult halachic exchange), assumes the familiarity of the reader with the complex laws of ritual purity/impurity. While I provided an extensive background on the different status of a "chaver" and an "Am'ha'aretz" in connection with these laws, our story is full of Jewish legal minutia, which makes it difficult to comprehend. Therefore, I will read the story and explain it as it unfolds, without asking questions about its technical aspects. Then I will include a few comprehension and analysis questions at the end.

Background to Our Story

We have established that the reason for leniency with regard to immersing one vessel inside another for *teruma* is based on the fact that we do not care if the vessels *amei ha'aretz* use for *teruma* are improperly purified, since we do not accept *teruma* from them in any event.

The Gemara asks: But let us be concerned about borrowing vessels from them. Although *haverim* do not accept *teruma* from an *am ha'aretz*, they do sometimes borrow their vessels and use them for *teruma*. It should therefore be a matter of concern for us if those vessels are not properly purified.

The Gemara proves that it is acceptable to borrow vessels from an *am ha'aretz*:

As we learned in a mishna (*Eduyyot 1:14*): An earthenware vessel of an *am ha'aretz* shields all kinds of items from the ritual impurity imparted by a corpse. There are two applications of this fact: If there are objects or foods inside a tightly sealed earthenware vessel located inside a room containing a corpse, the vessel prevents the impurity from reaching the items inside it. Also, if there is a corpse in the first floor of a house and food or vessels are located in a second story of the same building, with an opening such as a skylight in the floor between the two stories, an earthenware vessel plugging up the opening will prevent the ritual impurity from spreading to the second story. This is the statement of Beit Hillel. Beit Shammai say: It shields only food, drink, and earthenware vessels, but not utensils of metal, wood, cloth, etc.

The mishna continues: Beit Hillel said to Beit Shammai: For what reason do you make this distinction? It is clear that a closed, pure earthenware vessel serves as a barrier, blocking the spread of impurity in a room with a corpse (see Numbers 19:15).

Beit Shammai said to them: Because the earthenware vessel itself is impure on account of its contact with an *am ha'aretz*. The Sages decreed that anything touched by an *am ha'aretz* is impure, since such people are not meticulous or sufficiently knowledgeable about the *halakhot* of purity; therefore his vessels are considered impure. And the principle is that an impure vessel does not serve as a barrier from impurity.

Beit Hillel said to them: But didn't you declare the food and drink inside the earthenware vessel to be pure? If the vessel of an *am ha'aretz* cannot serve as a barrier, why do you say that some items inside it are pure?

Beit Shammai said to them: When we declared the food and drink inside it to be pure, we declared them pure for the *am ha'aretz* himself, not for *haverim*, since *haverim* in any event do not consider anything touched by an *am ha'aretz* to be pure. A *haver* would therefore never relate to the food of an *am ha'aretz* as pure, and he would not use the earthenware vessels of an *am ha'aretz* for preparation of pure food, since an earthenware vessel cannot be purified through immersion. However, he might borrow a metal vessel, for instance, and purify it through immersion before using it for pure food.

But how can we purify a vessel of metal and other materials, whose purity would be relevant both for you and for him? A *haver* may one day borrow a metal vessel from the *am ha'aretz*, and not realize that it was once inside an earthenware vessel in the same room as a corpse and as a result requires extensive purification from corpse contamination through the ashes of the red heifer, rather than mere immersion.

Therefore, the *am ha'aretz* is informed that his vessels of metal and other materials have contracted impurity from the corpse, and must undergo the extensive purification process, and after this is done these vessels will now be fit for use of the *haver* after mere immersion.

The Story

It is taught in a *baraita* with regard to this debate between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel: Rabbi Yehoshua said: I am ashamed of your words, Beit Shammai, for they are illogical. Is it possible that there should be a corpse on the first floor, with an earthenware vessel blocking the opening to the second story, and a woman is standing upstairs kneading dough in a metal bowl, and the woman and the bowl are impure for seven days owing to the impurity of the corpse, while the dough inside the trough is pure? For that would be the result according to Beit Shammai, who distinguishes between food and earthenware vessels on the one hand and metal vessels on the other. Similarly: Is it possible that there is a metal pitcher [*login*] full of liquid in the second story, and the pitcher should be impure with impurity of seven days, while the liquids remain pure?

One student from among the students of Beit Shammai approached him and said to him: I will tell you Beit Shammai's reasoning.

He [Rabbi Yehoshua] said to him: Speak.

He [the student] said to him: Does an impure vessel serve as a barrier to corpse contamination or does it not serve as a barrier?

Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: It does not serve as a barrier.

The student asked further: And is a vessel of an *am ha'aretz* pure or impure? He said to him: Impure.

The student responded: And if you tell him that his vessel is impure, will he pay attention to you at all? Clearly he will not. What is more, if you say to him that it is impure, he will say to you: On the contrary, my vessel is pure and yours is impure.

And that is Beit Shammai's reasoning: Food, drink, and earthenware vessels inside a sealed earthenware vessel remain pure, as, since they belong to an *am ha'aretz*, a *haver* will not eat the food or borrow the earthenware vessel. Vessels of metal or similar materials may one day be borrowed by a *haver*, however, and therefore Beit Shammai declared these to be impure.


Once he heard the logic behind Beit Shammai's opinion, Rabbi Yehoshua immediately went and prostrated himself on the graves of Beit Shammai, i.e., the students and proponents of Shammai, and said: I humble myself before you, bones of Beit Shammai. If such clarity and wisdom is found in your rulings that you stated and left unexplained, all the more so must this be the case in your rulings when they were stated and explained.

People said of Rabbi Yehoshua: Throughout his days his teeth darkened because of all his fasts that he undertook to atone for having spoken inappropriately of Beit Shammai.



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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Extra Bonus  Why did Rabbi Yehoshua, one of the main disciples of Beit Hillel, tell the disciples of Beit Shammai, "I am ashamed of your words"?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Bonus ? One of the disciples of Beit Shammai wishes to reply to Rabbi Yehoshua. Rabbi Yehoshua tells him: speak! Why do the disciples of Beit Shammai need permission from Rabbi Yehoshua to speak?

? What was the logic behind the ruling of Beit Shammai?

? Why did Rabbi Yehoshua prostrate himself on the graves of Beit Shammai?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why did Rabbi Yehoshua fast throughout his life?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? How do you explain Rabbi Yehoshua's final comment: "If such clarity and wisdom is found in your rulings that you stated and left unexplained, all the more so must this be the case in your rulings when they were stated and explained"?

? What did the exchange with Beit Shammai's disciple teach Rabbi Yehoshua (and all of us)?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus ? What is Rabbi Yehoshua's greatness?

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

! People may not be as stupid as you think they are, and you are not as smart as you think you are! – the lesson Rabbi Yehoshua learned the hard way



A complex halachic exchange provides the background for our story, in which Rabbi Yehoshua, one of the main leaders of the generation, disparages the deceased Shammai and his followers.

When one of Beit Shammai's students, humbly explains to Rabbi Yehoshua his teacher's logic, the former realizes that he spoke rashly, and thoughtlessly underestimated Beit Shammai's greatness.

Our story invites us to remain humble, to think before we speak, and to remember that other people may not be as stupid as we think they are, and that we may not be as smart as we think we are!