

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 [311]

Remember What You Did Last Night. Insights into Babylonian Talmud Avoda Zara 76b



Background to Our Story

Mar Yehuda



[Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Avoda Zara – Horayot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 403.](#)

Mar Yehuda was a Babylonian Sage of the third generation of amora'im. Apparently, he was a disciple of the Sage Avimi, in whose name he transmits several halakhot, and he is involved in disputes with several of the Sages of his generation. The title Mar usually designates Sages of the family of the Exilarch, and this incident indicates that he was close to the king of Persia,

King Shapur



[Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Avoda Zara – Horayot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 403.](#)

This was the name of several Persian kings. The incident here apparently refers to Shapur I, the son of the founder of the Sassanid dynasty. This King Shapur successfully continued the war against Rome, conquered the town of Nisibis, and reached as far as Syria. In a series of invasions and wars in Syria he eventually succeeded, in a battle near Edessa, not only in defeating the Roman emperor Valerian but even in taking him captive and holding him until his death. He used captives from these wars to build important cities and dams. His domestic policy was tolerant of different religions, and the Gemara here depicts him as being aware and respectful of Jewish customs.

Kashering Knives

In a case where one purchases a knife from a gentile, if he wishes to use the knife with cold foods and the blade has no notches, he may thrust it into hard ground ten times. Each thrust must be in hard ground, so it must be thrust into a new place each time. This is sufficient to render the knife permitted for cutting even pungent items, as derived from the incident involving King Shapur.

The Rema rules that if one wishes to use such a knife on a permanent basis one should purge it, like any other gentile's utensil. If the blade has notches, or if the intention is to use it with hot foods or to slaughter animals with it, one must either heat it until white-hot in a fire or whet it thoroughly.

The Rema says that some say that whetting is effective only for cold use, and it should not be done for the purpose of hot use *ab initio*. If the knife was heated until white-hot but not purged, or purged but not heated until white-hot, and it does not have notches, food cut with the knife is not forbidden, even if the knife was within one day of its last forbidden use. If it was well whetted and purged, it may be used even *ab initio*, provided the notches are cleaned as well (Rambam *Sefer Kedusha, Hilkhot Ma'akhalot Assurot* 17:7; *Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'a* 121:7).

The Text: Babylonian Avoda Zara 76b

מתני' הלוקח כלי תשמיש מן הגוים, את שדרכו להטביל – יטביל, להגעיל – יגעיל, ללבן באור – ילבן באור. השפוד והאסקלא – מלבגן באור. הסכין – שפה והיא טהור.

”הסכין – שפה והיא טהורה”. אמר רב עוקבא בר תמא: ונועצה עשרה פעמים בקרקע אמר רב הונא בריה דרב יהושע: ובקרקע שאינה עבודה אמר רב כהנא: ובסכין יפה שאין בה גומות. תניא נמי הכי: סכין יפה שאין בה גומות, נועצה עשרה פעמים בקרקע. אמר רב הונא בריה דרב יהושע: לאכול בה צונן.

כי הא דמר יהודה ובאטי בר טובי הוי יתבי קמיה דשבור מלכא, אייתו לקמיהו ארתוגא, פסק אכל, פסק והב ליה לבאטי בר טובי. הדר דצה עשרה זימני בארעא, פסק הב ליה למר יהודה. אמר ליה באטי בר טובי: והוא גברא לאו בר ישראל הוא? אמר ליה: מר קים לי בגויה, ומר לא קים לי בגויה.

איכא דאמרי, אמר ליה: אידכר מאי עבדת באורתא.

mishna One who purchases cooking utensils from the gentiles must prepare them for use by Jews in the following manner: With regard to those utensils whose manner of preparation is to immerse them in a ritual bath, as they require no further preparation, he must immerse them accordingly. With regard to those utensils whose manner of preparation is to purge them with boiling water, as those utensils are used with boiling water, e.g., pots, he must purge them accordingly. With regard to those whose

manner of preparation is to heat until white-hot in the fire, as they are used for grilling, he must heat them until white-hot in the fire. Therefore, with regard to the spit [*hashappud*] and the grill [*veha'askela*], he must heat them until white-hot in the fire. With regard to the knife, he must polish it and it is rendered pure.

...

The mishna teaches: With regard to the knife, one must polish it and it is rendered pure.

Rav Ukva bar Hama says: And one must thrust it ten times into the ground.

Rav Huna, son of Rav Yehoshua, says: And this must be done in untilled earth, i.e., hard earth.

Rav Kahana says: And this applies to a good knife that does not have notches, so that the entire surface of the knife is scraped against the ground. This is also taught in a *baraita*: With regard to a good knife that does not have notches, one can thrust it ten times into the ground.

Rav Huna, son of Rav Yehoshua, says: This is sufficient for the purpose of eating cold food with it.

This is like that incident involving Mar Yehuda and Bati bar Tuvi, a wealthy man, who were sitting before King Shapur, the king of Persia. The king's servants brought an *etrog* before them. The king cut a slice and ate it, and then he cut a slice and gave it to Bati bar Tuvi. He then stuck the knife ten times in the ground, cut a slice, and gave it to Mar Yehuda.

Bati bar Tuvi said to him: And is that man, referring to himself, not Jewish?

King Shapur said to him: I am certain of that master, Mar Yehuda, that he is meticulous about *halakha*; but I am not certain of that master, referring to Bati bar Tuvi, that he is meticulous in this regard.

There are those who say that King Shapur said to him: Remember what you did last night. The Persian practice was to present a woman to each guest, with whom he would engage in intercourse. Mar Yehuda did not accept the woman who was sent to him, but Bati bar Tuvi did, and therefore he was not assumed to be meticulous with regard to eating kosher food.



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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why were Mar Yehuda and Bati bar Tuvi sitting before King Shapur?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why did King Shapur stick the knife ten times into the ground before cutting a slice of the etrog that he wanted to give to Mar Yehuda?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why didn't King Shapur do the same when he gave a slice of the etrog to Bati bar Tuvi?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Do you think Bati bar Tuvi ate the Etrog or not?

? How do we know King Shapur wasn't Jewish?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Do you think Bati bar Tuvi ate the Etrog or not?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from This Text



Building Credibility: A 24/7 Job!



In our story we encounter the tolerant and knowledgeable King Shapur in the company of two Jews, Mar Yehuda and Bati bar Tuvi. While the king, being a gentile, is not bound by the laws governing kosher food, he understands Mar

Yehuda is, and before cutting a slice of etrog for him, he sticks the knife ten times in the ground, according to the halakha, which he seems to be familiar with.

When Bati bar Tuvi complains that he didn't receive the same "kosher" treatment as Mar Yehuda, he is being reminded by the King of what he did last night, when he was being far from meticulous in his behavior.