

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [316]

Either a Proper Jew or a Proper Aramean! Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 74a & Jerusalem Talmud Shevi'it 4:2



Background to Our Story

- **Neveila:** An animal that was not slaughtered by shechita.
- **Shechita:** The Jewish religious method of slaughtering animals and poultry for food.
- **Treifa** (plural *treifos*): Literally 'torn', generally used to denote non-kosher food.

To explain, a *neveila* refers to an animal that simply died, where as a *treifa* refers to an animal that received a valid *shechita* yet had a grave anatomical issue. In both cases the animal cannot be consumed. An important difference however is that a *neveila* is a source of *tumah*, while a *treifa* is not.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 74a

א"ר יוחנן משום ר"ש בן יהוצדק נימנו וגמרו בעליית בית נתזה בלוד כל עבירות שבתורה אם אומרין לאדם עבור ואל תהרג יעבור ואל יהרג חוץ מעבודת כוכבים וגילוי עריות ושפיכות דמים

Rabbi Yoḥanan says in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yehotzadak: The Sages who discussed this issue counted the votes of those assembled and concluded in the upper story of the house of Nitza in the city of Lod: With regard to all other transgressions in the Torah, if a person is told: Transgress this prohibition and you will not be killed, he may transgress that prohibition and not be killed, because the preserving of his own life overrides all of the Torah's prohibitions. This is the *halakha* concerning all prohibitions except for those of idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed. Concerning those prohibitions, one must allow himself to be killed rather than transgress them.

The Text: Jerusalem Talmud Shevi'it 4:2

רבי אבא בר זמינא הוה מחייט גבי חד ארמאי ברומי. אייתי ליה בשר דנבלה אמר ליה אכול. אמר ליה לינא אכיל. אמר ליה אכול דילכן אנא קטילנא לך. אמר ליה אין בעית מיקטל קטול דאנא לינא מיכל בשר דנבלה. אמר ליה מהן מודע לך דאילו אכלת הוינא קטיל לך. או יהודיי יהודאי או ארמאי ארמאי. אמר רבי מנא אילו הוה רבי אבא בר זמינא שמע מיליהון דרבניו מיכל הוה.

Rebbi Abba bar Zemina was working as a tailor in Rome at the place of an Aramean (an Aramaic speaking Gentile).

He [the Gentile] brought him [Rabbi Abba bar Zemina] meat of a neveila (carcass) and told him to eat.

He [Rabbi Abba bar Zemina]: said to him [to the Gentile]: I will not eat.

He [the Gentile] said to him [to Rabbi Abba bar Zemina]: eat! Otherwise, I shall kill you.

He [Rabbi Abba bar Zemina] said to him, if you wish to kill, kill, for I shall not eat meat of a neveila (carcass).

He [the Gentile] said to him [to Rabbi Abba bar Zemina], certainly you should know that I would have killed you, had you eaten. Either be a proper Jew or be a proper Aramean!

Rebbi Mana said, if Rebbi Abba bar Zemina had followed the words of the rabbis, he would have eaten *[and then would have been killed]*.



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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? "With regard to all other transgressions in the Torah, if a person is told: Transgress and you will not be killed, he may transgress and not be killed, except for idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed." In which context do you think the Sages discussed this issue?

Bonus ? "...in the upper story of the house of Nitza in Lod." Why do you think the Talmud is giving us all these details about where the meeting took place?

Bonus ? Why was it necessary for the Sages to count the votes in the upper story of the house of Nitza?

? Why was Rebbi Abba bar Zemina working as a tailor for a gentile in Rome?

Extra Bonus ? The story tells us the reason why the gentile compelled Rebbi Abba bar Zemina to eat the meat of a carcass. If you didn't know the actual reason, what would you have thought the reason was?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Extra Bonus ? Why didn't Rebbi Abba bar Zemina eat the meat (even though he has the explicit consent of the Sages)?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

Extra Bonus ? Why do you think the story puts the words: "Either be a proper Jew or be a proper Aramean!" in the mouth of a gentile?

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

! Stand for what you believe, and others will respect you; compromise your beliefs, and you may die (spiritually if not physically).



In our story, Rebbi Abba bar Zemina goes against the ruling of the Sages and chooses to be killed rather than transgress a prohibition.

The happy ending of our story reminds us that we must stand up for what we believe without compromising our principles (whatever they might be), if we wish to be respected, even if the price we pay is very high.