

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [324]

Do You Imagine That I Am Granting You Authority? I Am Granting You Servitude!

Insights into Babylonian Talmud, Horayot 10a



Taught on the day of the solar eclipse - April 4, 2024

Background to Our Story

One Star (Halley's Comet?)



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Avoda Zara/ Horayot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 486.

There are comets that appear over the earth once in several years and are visible for a certain period of time in the sky. Halley's comet, for example, appears approximately once every seventy-six years. This may be the star to which Rabbi Yehoshua is referring. If so, this would constitute the first mention of this comet in world literature.

Rabban Gamliel



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Berakhot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 7.

Nasi of the Sanhedrin and one of the most important *tanna'im* in the period following the destruction of the Second Temple. Rabban Gamliel's father, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel (the Elder), had also been *Nasi* of the Sanhedrin, as well as one of the leaders of the nation during the rebellion against Rome.

Rabban Gamliel was taken to Yavne by Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai after the destruction of the Temple, so that he became known as Rabban Gamliel of Yavne. After Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai's death, Rabban Gamliel presided over the Sanhedrin. Under Rabban Gamliel's leadership, Yavne became an important spiritual center. The greatest of the Sages gathered around him, including Rabbi Eliezer (Rabban Gamliel's brother-in-law), Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya.

Rabban Gamliel sought to create a spiritual center for the Jews that would unite the entire people, a role filled by the Temple until its destruction. Therefore, he strove to enhance the prominence and central authority of the Sanhedrin and its *Nasi*. His strict and vigorous leadership eventually led his colleagues to remove him from his post for a brief period,

replacing him with Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya. However, since everyone realized that his motives and actions were for the good of the people and were not based on personal ambition, they soon restored him to his position.

We do not possess many halakhic rulings explicitly in the name of Rabban Gamliel. However, in his time, and under his influence, some of the most important decisions in the history of Jewish spiritual life were made. These included the decision to follow Beit Hillel, the rejection of the halakhic system of Rabbi Eliezer, and the establishment of fixed formulas for prayers. In those halakhic decisions attributed to Rabban Gamliel, we find an uncompromising approach to the *halakha*; in reaching his conclusions, he was faithful to his principles. We know that two of his sons were Sages: Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, who served as *Nasi* of the Sanhedrin after him, and Rabbi Hanina ben Gamliel.

Rabbi Yehoshua



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Sukkah. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page

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This is Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya the Levite, one of the leading Sages in the generation following the destruction of the Second Temple. He served as one of the Levite singers in the Temple. After its destruction, he was among the students who followed their primary teacher, Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai, to Yavne. Rabbi Yehoshua lived a life of poverty, working as a blacksmith, and was recognized by all as one of the leading Torah authorities. While he disagreed with Rabban Gamliel's rulings on several occasions, he ultimately accepted the authority of the *Nasi*. After Rabban Gamliel's death, he served as a leader of the Sages.

Rabbi Elazar Ĥisma



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Avoda Zara/ Horayot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 487

A fourth-generation tanna, Rabbi Elazar Ĥisma was primarily a student of Rabbi Akiva and was among his first students in the academy located in the vineyard of Yavne, where he also studied with Rabbi Yehoshua and other Sages of the generation. From the little that is known about him, it seems that he was impoverished. Based on the Gemara here and his statement in tractate Avot (3:18), it seems that he was also well versed in secular knowledge, particularly mathematics. His halakhic and aggadic statements are cited in the Mishna and in baraitot. The name Ĥisma is a nickname that means: One who grew strong or who overcame adversity. In Vayikra Rabba (23:4), an incident is related that explains the source of that nickname.

Rabbi Yoĥanan ben Gudgeda



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Avoda Zara/ Horayot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 487

Rabbi Yoĥanan ben Gudgeda was a Levite. As one of the Levites who served in the Temple, he was the official in charge of locking the gates. The Gemara relates that as an expression of piety he was accustomed to treating all his food as though it were being prepared according to the strictures of sacrificial food. After the destruction of the Temple, he remained active in the study hall in Yavne, and was responsible for several testimonies, cited in tractates Eduyyot and Ĥullin, relating to customs from earlier generations. The Gemara relates that he had children who were born as deaf-mutes due to a hereditary defect but were eventually cured and became prominent Torah scholars. The Tosefta also relates that while these sons were still deaf they were entrusted with the task of purifying impure items in Jerusalem.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Horayot 10a

כי הא דרבון גמליאל ורבבי יהושע הוּ אֲזַלִּי בְּסַפִּינְתָא, בְּהַדִּי דְרַבִּין גַּמְלִיאֵל הָוָה פִּיתָא, בְּהַדִּי רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ הָוָה פִּיתָא וְסוּלְתָא.
שְׁלִים פִּיתִיהּ דְרַבִּין גַּמְלִיאֵל, סַמְךָ אֲסוּלְתִיהּ דְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ. אָמַר לִיהּ: מִי הָוָה יָדַעְתָּ דְהוּהּ לֶן עַפּוּבָא כּוּלִי הָאִי דְאִיתִית סוּלְתָא?
אָמַר לִיהּ: כּוֹכַב אֶחָד לְשַׁבְעִים שָׁנָה עוֹלָה וּמִתְעָה אֶת [הַסְּפִינּוֹת] (הַסְּפִינּוֹת), וְאָמַרְתִּי: שָׁמָּא יַעֲלֶה וַיִּתְעָה [אוֹתָנּוּ].

אָמַר לִיהּ: כַּל כֵּךְ בְּיָדָךְ, וְאַתָּה עוֹלָה בְּסַפִּינָה?
אָמַר לִיהּ: עַד שְׂאֵתָה תִּמְהַ עָלַי, תִּמְהַ עַל שְׁנֵי תַלְמִידִים שְׁיִישׁ לָךְ בִּיבְשָׁה, רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר חֲסִמָּא וְרַבִּי יוֹחָנָן בֶּן גּוּדְגָדָא, שְׁיִוְדְעִין לְשַׁעַר כַּמָּה טַפּוֹת יֵשׁ בֵּינֵם, וְאִין לָהֶם פֶּת לְאֶכּוֹל וְלֹא כְּגַד לְלַבּוֹשׁ!
נָתַן דְעֵתוֹ לְהוֹשִׁיבֵם בְּרֵאשׁ.

כְּשַׁעֲלָהּ, שָׁלַח לָהֶם וְלֹא בָאוּ, תָּזַר וְשָׁלַח וּבָאוּ.
אָמַר לָהֶם: כְּמַדּוּמִין אַתֶּם שְׁשַׁרְרָה אֲנִי נוֹתֵן לָכֶם? עַבְדוֹת אֲנִי נוֹתֵן לָכֶם, שְׁנַאֲמַר: "וַיִּדְבְּרוּ אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר אִם הַיּוֹם תִּהְיֶה עָבֵד לְעַם הַזֶּה".

Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua were traveling together on a ship.
Rabban Gamliel had bread for the journey. Rabbi Yehoshua also had bread, and additionally he had flour.
The journey lasted longer than expected, and Rabban Gamliel's bread was finished. He relied on Rabbi Yehoshua's flour for nourishment.

Rabban Gamliel said to Rabbi Yehoshua: Did you know from the outset that we would have so substantial a delay? Is that the reason that you brought flour with you?

Rabbi Yehoshua said to Rabban Gamliel: There is one star that rises once in seventy years and misleads sailors at sea, causing their journeys to be extended. And I said: Perhaps that star will rise during our journey and mislead us.

Rabban Gamliel said to him [to Rabbi Yehoshua]: So much wisdom is at your disposal, and you board a ship?

Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: Before you wonder about me, wonder about two students that you have on dry land, Rabbi Elazar Hisma and Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Gudgeda, who are so wise that they know how to calculate how many drops of water there are in the sea, and yet they have neither bread to eat nor a garment to wear.

Rabban Gamliel made up his mind to seat them at the head of the academy.

When Rabban Gamliel ascended to dry land, he sent a messenger to them [to Rabbi Elazar Hisma and Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Gudgeda] to tell them to come so that he could appoint them, and they did not come.

He again sent a messenger to them and they came.

Rabban Gamliel said to them: Do you imagine that I am granting you authority, and since you did not want to accept the honor you did not come when I sent for you? I am granting you servitude, as it is stated: "And they spoke to him saying: If you will be a servant to this people today" (I Kings 12:7).



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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Bonus **?** Why were Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua traveling on a ship?

? Why did Rabban Gamliel have bread for the journey, but didn't have flour?

Bonus **?** Why did Rabbi Yehoshua bring flour to the journey, in addition to bread?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why didn't Rabbi Yehoshua bring more bread instead of flour?

? Why didn't Rabbi Yehoshua share the information about "the star" with Rabban Gamliel before they boarded the ship?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

? What did Rabban Gamliel imply with his question to Rabbi Yehoshua: "So much wisdom is at your disposal, and you board a ship?"

? What strong rebuke was implied in Rabbi Yehoshua's reply to Rabban Gamliel about Rabbi Elazar Hisma and Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Gudgeda?

? How do we know that Rabban Gamliel accepted Rabbi Yehoshua's rebuke?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why does Rabban Gamliel plan to seat Rabbi Elazar Hisma and Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Gudgeda at the head of the academy?

Bonus ? Why didn't Rabbi Elazar Hisma and Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Gudgeda come when Rabban Gamliel called them the first time?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why did Rabbi Elazar Hisma and Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Gudgeda come when Rabban Gamliel called them the second time?

Bonus ? How does Rabban Gamliel convince Rabbi Elazar Hisma and Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Gudgeda to accept the position he is offering them?

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



The pitfalls shortfall and greatness of Rabban Gamliel.



Our story is a combination of two stories into one.

The first story finds Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua traveling together on a ship. During their journey, Rabban Gamliel gets to appreciate the knowledge of his deputy and gets rebuked by him for his disconnection with his students. Rabban Gamliel accepts the rebuke and his shortcoming and uses his position of power to make things whole for his destitute students.

The second story finds Rabban Gamliel back on dry land in charge of the academy and the Jewish community in the Land of Israel.

When he calls Rabbi Elazar Hisma and Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Gudgeda to appoint them to a position of greatness, both in recognition of their knowledge and to

ease their financial burden, both, in their humility, refuse to come and accept the position offered to them.

Rabban Gamliel reminds Rabbi Elazar Hisma and Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Gudgeda -and all of us- that leadership implies servitude, more than honor, privileges, and prerogatives, and ultimately uses his sphere of influence to help his students.