

From the Rabbi's Desk  
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## Stories with a Twist [328]

**Say that I said only after the fact; did I say *ab initio*?**  
Insights into Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 81b



### Background to Our Story

#### Drinking Wine in Antiquity

Ancient Greeks drank wine by mixing it with water, usually in a ratio of 1:3 (one part wine to three parts water). They had special containers for mixing and for cooling the libation. Drinking wine that was not mixed with water was considered barbaric. Such wine without water was used only as medicine for the sick or during travel, as a tonic.

#### Unique Yom Kippur Prohibitions

There are five areas of pleasure that we avoid on —from sundown on the eve of the holiday until the following nightfall

1. Eating or drinking.
2. Wearing leather footwear.
3. Bathing or washing.
4. Applying ointment, lotions, or creams.
5. Engaging in any form of spousal intimacy.

#### Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (also known as "Rabbi")



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Sanhedrin Part 1. Koren publishers Jerusalem

Rabbi closed the tannaitic period with his arrangement of the Mishna. The son of Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel II, and a seventh-generation descendant of Hillel the Elder, Rabbi Yehuda lived in 135–220 CE during the fifth, and last, generation of tanna'im. According to tradition, Rabbi Yehuda was born on the day of Rabbi Akiva's death, leading people to later proclaim: "the sun sets, and the sun rises" (Ecclesiastes 1:5). Indeed, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was a successor to Rabbi Akiva, who had begun to assemble the statements of

the Oral Law into a format that later became the Mishna. During his youth, Rabbi Yehuda studied under the five great students of Rabbi Akiva: Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda bar Elai, Rabbi Yosei, Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Elazar. In addition, he learned Torah from his father Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel. In an effort to collect all the statements of the previous generations, Rabbi Yehuda moved from yeshiva to yeshiva, obtaining most of his knowledge from Rabbi Ya'akov bar Krashai. The wide breadth of his learning and his position as Nasi, to which he was appointed at age thirty upon his father's death, gave him the standing to undertake the greatest Torah enterprise of the era, the compilation of the Mishna. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi surrounded himself with the most prominent Sages of his time, who assisted him in establishing the accuracy of the corpus he wanted to produce. Fortunately for him, the relative political calm of the time, and his favorable relationship with the Roman government, permitted the development of such an ambitious project. Due to his position as head of the community, the Mishna of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was universally accepted, and earlier and other collections of halakha were set aside. This phenomenon unified the nation, as all of the Jewish people began to study the identical corpus of Oral Law. Due to poor health in his later years, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi moved to Tzipori. His students were the Sages of the first generation of amora'im, including Rabbi Yoĥanan, Rabbi Ĥiyya, bar Kappara and Rav. The Gemara reports (Gittin 59a) that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was the first individual since Moses to have such a broad mastery of Torah, and his great scholarship led him to be referred to in the Talmud as simply: Rabbi, or: Our holy Rabbi.

### **Rav Giddel bar Menashe from the town of Birei DeNeresh**

- A Babylonian Amora. Possibly a student of Rava

### **Mishna Yoma 8:3**

...אָכל אַכּליוֹן שְׂאִינֵן רְאוּיֵין לְאָכִילָהּ, וְשָׁתָה מִשְׁקִין שְׂאִינֵן רְאוּיֵין לְשָׁתִיהָ, וְשָׁתָה צִיר אוֹ מְרִיס, פְּטוּר:

...If he ate foods that are not fit for eating, or drank liquids that are not fit for drinking, or drank fish brine or the briny liquid in which fish are pickled, he is exempt, as that is not the typical manner of eating or drinking.

### **The Text: Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 81b**

“שָׁתָה צִיר אוֹ מְרִיס — פְּטוּר. הָא חוּמָץ — חַיִּיב. מִתְּנִיתִין מִנֵּי? רַבִּי הִיא. דְּתַנָּא: רַבִּי אוֹמֵר: חוּמָץ מְשִׁיב אֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ. דְּרַשׁ רַב גִּידֵל בַּר מְנַשֶּׁה מִבִּירֵי דְנַרְשׁ: אִין הִלְכָה כְּרַבִּי. לְשָׁנָה נִפְקִי כּוּלֵי עֲלָמָא מְזוּגוּ וְשָׁתוּ חֵלָא. שְׂמַע רַב גִּידֵל וְאִיקְפַּד. אָמַר: אִימַר דְּאִמְרֵי אָנָּא — דִּיעֲבַד, לְכַתְּחֵלָה מִי אִמְרֵי? אִימַר דְּאִמְרֵי אָנָּא — פּוֹרְתָא, טוֹבָא מִי אִמְרֵי? אִימַר דְּאִמְרֵי אָנָּא — חֵי, מְזוּג מִי אִמְרֵי?”

It was taught in the mishna that if on Yom Kippur one drank fish brine or the briny liquid in which fish are pickled, he is exempt.

The Gemara comments: From the language of the mishna it may be inferred that if one drank vinegar, he is liable.

Who is the *tanna* of the mishna? It is Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, as it was taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi says: Vinegar revives the spirit and is therefore considered a beverage.

Rav Giddel bar Menashe from the town of Birei DeNeresh taught that the *halakha* is not in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, and vinegar is not considered a beverage.

The next year everyone went out and mixed vinegar with water and drank vinegar on Yom Kippur.

Rav Giddel heard this and became angry.

He said: Say that I said one is not liable for drinking vinegar only after the fact; however, did I say it is permitted to drink it *ab initio*? Furthermore: Say that I said my statement with regard to one who drinks a little, but did I say it is permitted to drink a lot? Furthermore: Say that I said my statement in reference to pure vinegar, but did I say anything about diluted vinegar?



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

### Comprehension and Analysis Questions

**?** Why is one exempt if he or she drinks fish brine or the briny liquid in which fish are pickled on Yom Kippur?

**Bonus ?** How do the Sages infer from the language of the Mishnah that one who drinks vinegar on Yom Kippur is exempt?

**?** What was Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's justification for forbidding drinking vinegar on Yom Kippur?

**Bonus ?** What was Rav Giddel's justification for ruling against Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi?

**?** How do we know that Rav Giddel issued his ruling on vinegar in the context of a public lecture?

**Bonus ?** Why did everyone go out and drink diluted vinegar on Yom Kippur the year after Rav Giddel issued his ruling?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** Why did Rav Giddel become angry?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** What lessons could Rav Giddel have learned if he had not become angry?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** Rav Giddel appears only once in the entire Talmud (in our story). Why do you think he wasn't more successful as a halachic decisor (a rabbi who decides matters in Jewish religious law)?

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

! Not everything you believe must be said, and not everything you say will be taken the way you meant it – a lesson Rav Giddel learned the hard way.



In our story, Rav Giddel, an obscure amora, decides to rule leniently against Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, permitting people to drink vinegar on Yom Kippur. The people enthusiastically adopt Rav Giddel's ruling, albeit taking it further than he had intended.

Rav Giddel then becomes angry at the people, not realizing that his own pride and narrow perspective had contributed to their unintended response.