

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist **[333]**

Anyone Who Recites an Orphaned Amen, his Children Will be Orphaned

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 47a



Background to Our Story (What you need to know to better understand the story)

Babylonian Talmud Yevamot 63b

It is taught in a baraita that Rabbi Eliezer says: Anyone who does not engage in the mitzvah to be fruitful and multiply is considered as though he sheds blood, as it is stated: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (Genesis 9:6), and it is written immediately afterward: "And you, be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 9:7).

Rabbi Ya'akov says: It is as though he diminishes the Divine Image, as it is stated: "For in the image of G-d He made man" (Genesis 9:6), and it is written immediately afterward: "And you, be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 9:7).

Ben Azzai says: It is as though he sheds blood and also diminishes the Divine Image, as it is stated: "And you, be fruitful and multiply," after the verse that alludes to both shedding blood and the Divine Image.

They said to ben Azzai: There is a type of scholar who expounds well and fulfills his own teachings well, and another who fulfills well and does not expound well. But you, who have never married, expound well on the importance of procreation, and yet you do not fulfill well your own teachings.

Ben Azzai said to them: What shall I do, as my soul yearns for Torah, and I do not wish to deal with anything else. It is possible for the world to be maintained by others, who are engaged in the mitzvah to be fruitful and multiply.

Ben Azzai



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Berakhot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 141.

Ben Azzai is Shimon ben Azzai, one of the *tanna'im* in Yavne. Shimon ben Azzai was never ordained, which is why he is called by his name alone, without a title. He is usually referred to simply as ben Azzai. He was considered one of the outstanding Sages and his wisdom was celebrated for many generations.

Apparently, he did not study Torah in his youth until he met Rabbi Akiva's daughter. She promised to marry him if he studied Torah. Consequently, he went to study with Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Yishmael and was the primary student and even a disciple-colleague of Rabbi Akiva, whom he considered to be the preeminent Sage of his generation in Israel. It is unclear whether he never married, or whether he married Rabbi Akiva's daughter and left her a short time later due to his overwhelming desire to study Torah. He completely devoted himself to the study of Torah, as can be seen in the mishna in *Sota*, which says: Since ben Azzai died, there are no more diligent people. His statements can be found in the Mishna, in *baraitot* and in the Gemara dealing with both *halakha* and *aggada*. Apparently, he had several disciples in Tiberias, his city of residence. Ben Azzai engaged in the study of esoterica and is one of the four who entered the mystical orchard. The *baraita* in tractate *Hagiga* says that he peeked and died. The verse: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalms 116:15), was quoted in reference to his death.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 47a

תנו רבנן: אין עונין לא אמן קטופה, ולא אמן קטופה, ולא אמן יתומה, ולא יזרוק ברכה מפיו.

בן עזאי אומר: כל העונה אמן יתומה – יהיו בנני יתומים, קטופה – יתחטפו ימיו, קטופה – יתקטפו ימיו, וכל המאריך באמן – מאריךני לו ימיו ושנותיו.

With regard to answering amen, the Sages taught: One should not respond with an abbreviated [*hatufa*] amen, in which the first syllable is not properly enunciated, and a truncated [*ketufa*] amen, in which the second syllable is not properly enunciated, and an orphaned [*yetoma*] amen, in which the respondent is unaware of the blessing to which he is responding. Similarly, one should not quickly and indifferently discharge a blessing from his mouth.

Ben Azzai says: Anyone who recites an orphaned amen, his children will be orphaned; one who recites an abbreviated amen, his days will be abbreviated and incomplete; one who recites a truncated amen, his days will be truncated. One who extends his amen, they will extend his days and years for him.



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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why shouldn't someone respond with an abbreviated [*hatufa*] amen, a truncated [*ketufa*] amen, or an orphaned [*yetoma*] amen?

? Why shouldn't someone discharge a blessing from his mouth?

? What does Ben Azzai add to the Sages' statements? How do you feel about his statement?

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

! With all due respect, Ben Azzai, conceivably if you had a wife and children, your statements would be less categorical.



Ben Azzai wishes to convey the utmost importance of pronouncing a "proper" amen. However, the way he does so, is by cursing with death anyone who fails to achieve the mandatory high standard. The statement: *Anyone who recites an orphaned amen, his children will be orphaned;* makes the reader wonder if Ben Azzai's strong statement isn't a product of him never having a family.