

From the Rabbi's Desk  
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## Stories with a Twist [338]

### One Who Forgot His Purse atop God's Chosen Place of Residence, Would He Not Ascend to Retrieve It? Insights into Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 53b



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

**Deuteronomy 8:10**

וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לְךָ:

*And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.*

**Hillel and Shammai**



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Beitza – Rosh Hashanah. Koren publishers Jerusalem Page 109

Hillel the Elder and Shammai were the last of the pairs of Sages who transmitted the Oral Torah to successive generations over a period of about two centuries; Hillel served as *Nasi* of the Sanhedrin while Shammai was the president of the court. Hillel and Shammai lived about one hundred years prior to the destruction of the Temple, at the beginning of Herod's reign. Hillel and Shammai founded two schools, Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, which flourished for many years after their passing, but they themselves disagreed about only three or four issues. The main difference between Hillel and Shammai was one of personality. Hillel treated himself and others in an easygoing manner, avoiding conflict whenever possible. Shammai, by contrast, took a more severe approach, attempting to scrutinize people's motivations and habits.

Tradition has it that Hillel began as an impoverished student who took on menial labor in order to pay to attend the lectures of Shemaya and Avtalyon. The Gemara compares Hillel to Ezra the Scribe, crediting him with reestablishing Torah study at a period in history when it was utterly neglected (*Sukka* 20a). His disciples were praised as well. According to the Gemara, Hillel the Elder had eighty students: thirty of them were worthy that the Divine Presence should rest upon them as it rested upon Moses; thirty were worthy that the sun should stand still for them, as it did for Joshua bin Nun; and twenty were average. The greatest among Hillel's students was Yonatan ben Uzziel and the least among them was Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai (*Sukka* 28a).

## Mishna Berakhot 8:7

מי שאכל ושכח ולא ברך, בית שמאי אומרים, יחזור למקומו ויברך. ובית הלל אומרים, יברך במקום שגזפר. עד אימתי הוא מברך. עד כדי שיתעכל המזון שבמעיו:

One who ate and forgot and did not recite a blessing; Beit Shammai say: He returns to the place where he ate and recites the blessing. Beit Hillel say: That is unnecessary. He recites the blessing at the place where he remembered. Both agree, however, that there is a limit with regard to how long after eating one may recite Grace after Meals. And until when does he recite the blessing? Until the food is digested in his intestines.

**?** The Mishna doesn't give us a reason for Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel's opinions. Just from reading the mishna, what do you think is the logic behind their ruling?

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

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

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

## The Text: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 53b

תנא, אמרו להם בית הלל לבית שמאי: לדבריכם, מי שאכל בראש הבירה ושכח וירד ולא ברך, יחזור לראש הבירה ויברך?! – אמרו להן בית שמאי לבית הלל: לדבריכם, מי ששכח ארנקי בראש הבירה, לא יעלה ויטלנה?! לכבוד עצמו הוא עולה – לכבוד שמים לא כל שכן?

It was taught in a *baraita* that Beit Hillel said to Beit Shammai: According to your statement, one who ate atop the Temple Mount, God's chosen place of residence, and forgot and descended without reciting a blessing, must he return to the top of the Temple Mount, God's chosen place of residence, to recite a blessing?

Beit Shammai said to Beit Hillel: Why not? And according to your statement, one who forgot his purse atop the Temple Mount, God's chosen place of residence, would he not ascend to retrieve it? If one ascends in deference to his own needs, all the more so he should ascend in deference to Heaven.



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

## Comprehension and Analysis Questions

**?** What is Beit Hillel's reasoning for not demanding that an individual who forgot to bless, goes back to where he/she ate and recites the blessing?

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

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

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

**?** What is Beit Shammai's reasoning for demanding that an individual who forgot to bless, goes back to where he/she ate and recites the blessing?

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

**!** The purse test: one that never fails!



*Of the many forms of charity, the most powerful is monetary. Why? Because money is how most people measure their self-worth. Because we invest so much time, energy, and labor into earning money, therefore, it represents the very energy of life itself. From: Toward a Meaningful Life. The Wisdom of the Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Adapted by Simon Jacobson. Morrow. 1995. Page 103.*

In this short aggadic exchange, Beit Shammai presents Beit Hillel -and all of us- with "the purse test." How much time, effort, and energy would you invest to retrieve a purse (full of) money? Once you come up with the answer, then apply it to the values you yourself declare to hold sacred: your relationship with your loved ones, your people, and your God.