

From the Rabbi's Desk  
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## Stories with a Twist [35]

### "Steal from a Thief and Feel the Taste" (Insights into Babylonian Talmud Berachot 5b)

Revised 2021



#### Background to Our Story

**"Quien roba a un ladrón tiene cien años de perdón" (He who robs a thief has a hundred years of forgiveness)" -Spanish Proverb**

**"It takes a thief to catch a thief"**

It's No Crime  
To Steal  
From A Thief

Proverbay.com

**?** What do you think of the above proverbs/sayings?

#### Rav Huna



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rav\\_Huna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rav_Huna)

Rav Huna was a Jewish Talmudist who lived in Babylonia, known as an amora of the second generation and head of the Academy of Sura; He was born about 216,<sup>[1]</sup> passed away in 296-297 (608 of the Seleucid era).<sup>[2]</sup>

Rav Huna lived in a town,<sup>[3]</sup> identified by Wiesener<sup>[4]</sup> with Tekrit.<sup>[5]</sup> He was the principal pupil of Rav, under whom he acquired so much learning that one of Rava's three wishes was to possess Rav Huna's wisdom.<sup>[6]</sup> He was also styled "one of the Babylonian Hasidim," on account of his great piety.<sup>[7]</sup> The esteem in which he was held was so great that, though not of a priestly family, he read from the Torah on Shabbat and holy days the first passage, which is usually read by a Kohen (priest). Rav Ammi and Rav Assi, honored Palestinian Kohanim, considered Huna as their superior.<sup>[8]</sup> Although Rav Huna was related to the family of the exilarch<sup>[9]</sup> he was so poor at the beginning of his career that in order to buy wine to consecrate the Shabbat he had to pawn his girdle.<sup>[10]</sup> But Rav blessed him with riches, and Rav Huna

displayed great wealth at the wedding of his son Raba bar Rav Huna.<sup>[11]</sup> He owned numerous flocks of sheep, which were under the special care of his wife, Hobah,<sup>[12]</sup> and he traveled in a gilded litter.<sup>[13]</sup> Rav Huna was very generous. When the houses of the poor people were thrown down by storms he rebuilt them; at meal-times the doors of his house would be left open, while his servants would call out: "He who is hungry, let him come and eat".<sup>[14]</sup>

After Rav's death, Huna lectured in his stead in the Academy of Sura, but he was not appointed head until after the death of Rav's companion, Samuel.<sup>[15]</sup> It was under Rav Huna that the Academy of Sura, which until then was called sidra, acquired the designation of mesivta (yeshivah), with Rav Huna being the first "Resh Mesivta" (rosh yeshivah).<sup>[16]</sup> Under Huna the academy increased considerably in importance, and students flocked to it from all directions; during his presidency their number reached 800, all supported by himself.<sup>[17]</sup> Their instant lecturers ("amora'e") were occupied in teaching them. When his pupils, after the lesson, shook their garments they raised so great a cloud of dust that when the Palestinian sky was overcast it was said, "Huna's pupils in Babylon have risen from their lesson".<sup>[18]</sup> Under Rav Huna, Palestine lost its ascendancy over Babylonia; and on certain occasions he declared the schools of the two countries to be equal.<sup>[19]</sup> In Babylonia, during his lifetime, the Sura academy held the supremacy. He presided over it for forty years, when he died suddenly, more than eighty years of age.<sup>[20]</sup> His remains were brought to Palestine and buried by the side of Hiyya Rabbah (<sup>[21]</sup>

Rav Huna's principal pupil was Rav Chisda, who had previously been his companion under Rav. Other pupils of his whose names are given were: Abba bar Zavda, Rav Giddel, R. Helbo, R. Sheishet, and Huna's own son, Rabbah.<sup>[22]</sup>

The following of Rav Huna's utterances may be given: "He who occupies himself with the study of the Law alone is as one who has no God".<sup>[33]</sup> "When leaving the synagogue, one must not take long steps".<sup>[34]</sup> "He who recites his prayer behind the synagogue is called impious or rasha."<sup>[35]</sup> "He who is accustomed to honor the Shabbat with light will have children who are scholars; he who observes the injunction of mezuzah will have a beautiful house; he who observes the rule as to the Tzitzit will have fine clothes; he who consecrates the Shabbat and the holy days as commanded will have many skins filled with wine".<sup>[36]</sup>

Rav Huna was very tolerant. He was also very modest. He was not ashamed, before he was rich, to cultivate his field himself, nor to return home in the evening with his spade on his shoulder.<sup>[37]</sup> When two contending parties requested him to judge between them, he said to them: "Give me a man to cultivate my field and I will be your judge".<sup>[38]</sup> He patiently bore Rav's hard words, because the latter was his teacher,<sup>[39]</sup> but he showed on several occasions that a scholar must not humiliate himself in presence of an inferior.<sup>[40]</sup>

### **References and further reading**

- Bacher, *Ag. Bab. Amor. pp. 52-60.*
  - Grätz, *Gesch. 3d ed., iv.291 et seq.*
  - Halevy, *Dorot Ha'Rishonim, ii.411 et seq (Hebrew).*
  - Heilprin, *Seder Ha'Dorot, ii (Hebrew).*
  - Lichtmann, *in Keneset Yisrael, iii.297-303.*
  - Weiss, *Dor, iii.182 et seq.*
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (212 according to Gratz)</li> <li>2. Sherira Gaon, in Neubauer, "M. J. C." i. 30 or in 290 according to Abraham ibn Daud ("Sefer ha-Kabbalah," in Neubauer, l.c. p. 58)</li> <li>3. (Ta'an. 21b)</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. ("Scholien zum Babylonischen Talmud," ii. 193)</li> <li>5. but read by Grätz (= "Diokart")</li> <li>6. (M. K. 28a)</li> <li>7. (Ta'an. 23b)</li> <li>8. (Meg. 22a; Git. 59b)</li> <li>9. (Sherira Gaon, l.c.)</li> </ol> |
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| 10. (Meg. 27b)  | 21. <i>ib.</i> 25a)                                   |
| 11. ( <i>ib.</i> )  | 22. (Yeb. 64b)  |
| 12. (B. K. 80a)   |   |
| 13. (Ta'an. 20b)  | 33. (inferred from II Chron. xv. 3; 'Ab. Zarah 17b)   |
| 14. ( <i>ib.</i> )  | 34. (Ber. 6b)   |
| 15. (c. 256)  | 35. (inferred from Ps. xii. 9 [A. V. 8]; <i>ib.</i> ) |
| 16. comp. Zacuto "Yuchasin," p. 118b, Königsberg, 1857; and see Talmudic Academies in Babylonia | 36. (Shab. 23b)                                       |
| 17. (Ket. 106a)   | 37. (Meg. 28a)  |
| 18. ( <i>ib.</i> )  | 38. (Ket. 105a)                                       |
| 19. (Git. 6a; B. K. 80a)  | 39. ('Er. 15a; Yer. 'Er. i. 3)                        |
| 20. (M. K. 28a)   | 40. (Ket. 69a; B. M. 33a)                             |

- This article incorporates text from the 1901–1906 Jewish Encyclopedia, a publication now in the public domain

**"If a person sees that afflictions are befalling him; - he should examine his deeds" (Berachot 5a)**

**Rava, and some say Rav Hisda, said: If a person sees that suffering has befallen him, he should examine his actions.** Generally, suffering comes about as punishment for one's transgressions, **as it is stated: "We will search and examine our ways, and return to God"** (Lamentations 3:40). **If he examined** his ways and **found no** transgression for which that suffering is appropriate, **he may attribute** his suffering **to dereliction** in the study of **Torah**. God punishes an individual for dereliction in the study of Torah in order to emphasize the gravity of the issue, **as it is stated: "Happy is the man whom You punish, Lord, and teach out of Your law"** (Psalms 94:12). This verse teaches us that his suffering will cause him to return to Your law.

**Maimonides' Introduction to Chapter Chelek**

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The Eleventh Fundamental Principle is that God rewards those who perform the commandments of the Torah and punishes those who transgress its admonitions...

**The Emperor's New Clothes**



<http://www.wikipedia.org>



"The Emperor's New Clothes" (*Keiserens nye Klæder*) is a fairy tale by Danish poet and author Hans Christian Andersen about an emperor who unwittingly hires two swindlers to create a new suit of clothes for him. The tale was first published in 1837 as part of *Eventyr, fortalte for Børn* (*Fairy Tales, Told for Children*).

An emperor of a prosperous city who cares more about clothes than military pursuits or entertainment hires two swindlers who promise him the finest suit of clothes from

the most beautiful cloth. This cloth, they tell him, is invisible to anyone who was either stupid or unfit for his position. The Emperor cannot see the (non-existent) cloth, but pretends that he can for fear of appearing stupid; his ministers do the same. When the swindlers report that the suit is finished, they dress him in mime. The Emperor then goes on a procession through the capital showing off his new "clothes". During the course of the procession, a small child cries out, "But he has nothing on!" The crowd realizes the child is telling the truth. The Emperor, however, holds his head high and continues the procession.

**?** Why don't the Emperor's ministers tell him that he is naked?

### The Text: Babylonian Talmud Berachot 5b

רב הונא תקיפו ליה ארבע מאה דיני דתמרא, על לגביה רב יהודה אחיה דרב סלא חסידא ורבנן, ואמרי לה: רב אדא בר אהבה ורבנן, ואמרו ליה: לעיין מר במיליה.

אמר להו: ומי חשידנא בעיניכו? אמרו ליה: מי חשיד קודשא בריה הוא דעביד דינא בלא דינא?

אמר להו: אי איפא מאן דשמיע עלי מלתא – לימא. אמרו ליה: הכי שמיע לן דלא נהיב מר שבישא לאריסיה.

אמר להו: מי קא שביק לי מידי מיניה? הא קא גניב ליה כוליה! אמרו ליה: היינו דאמרי אינשי: בתר גנבא גנוב, וטעמא טעים. אמר להו: קבילנא עלי דיהיבנא ליה. איפא דאמרי: הדר חלא ונהו תמרא; ואיכא דאמרי: אייקר חלא ואיזדבן בדמי דתמרא.

Four hundred barrels of Rav Huna's wine fermented and turned into vinegar, causing him great financial loss.

Rav Yehuda, the brother of Rav Sala the Pious, along with the Sages, and some say Rav Adda bar Ahava, along with the Sages, entered to visit him, and said: The Master should examine his actions, as perhaps he committed a transgression for which he is being punished.

Rav Huna said to them: Am I suspect in your eyes? Have I committed a transgression on account of which you advise me to examine my behavior?

They said to him: Is the Holy One, Blessed be He, suspect that He exacts punishment without justice?

Rav Huna said to them: If someone has heard something improper that I have done, let him say so. They said to him: We have heard that the

Master does not give a share of his grapevines to his tenant farmers. A tenant farmer is entitled to a portion of the crop grown on his landlord's property, as well as a share of the vines planted during a given year.

Rav Huna said to them: Does this tenant farmer leave me anything from the produce that he grows on my property? He steals it all! Consequently, in denying him his share of the grapevines I am simply recouping that which was stolen from me by this tenant farmer.

They said to him: That is the meaning of the folk saying: One who steals from a thief has a taste of theft.

He [Rav Huna] said to them: I accept upon myself to give my tenant farmer his portion.

Some say his vinegar turned back into wine, and some say that the price of vinegar rose and it was sold at the price of wine.

### **Comprehension and Analysis Questions**

**?** Why did Rav Yehuda, the brother of Rav Sala the Pious, along with the Sages (and some say Rav Adda bar Ahava, along with the Sages) go to visit Rav Huna?

**?** What is the relationship between Rav Huna and the other sages?

**?** Why do the Sages address Rav Huna in the third person ("The Master should...")?

**?** What did the Sages mean by their remarks: "The Master should examine his actions"?

**?** After the first exchange of words with his students, Rav Huna said to them: "If someone has heard something improper that I have done, let him say so!" Why didn't the students speak what they had to say right from the beginning?

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

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

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

Answer 4 \_\_\_\_\_

**?** How do the tenant farmers get paid?

**?** Why didn't Rav Huna give a share of his grapevines to his tenant farmers?

**Bonus ?** How do we know that Rav Huna's determination to change was sincere?

**?** What did the students mean by quoting the popular adage "One who steals from a thief has a taste of theft!"?

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

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

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

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

**!** How to Deal with Unfairness: A Lesson the Master has to Master