

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [36]

"Rabbi Meir Was Accustomed to Scoff at Sinners" (Insights into Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 81a)



Background to Our Story

Rabbi Meir



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Eirubin Part 1. Koren publishers Jerusalem. 60.

One of the greatest *tanna'im* of the generation that preceded the redaction of the Mishna. There is no clear information available concerning Rabbi Meir's parents, though it is told that he descended from a family of converts from the house of the Roman emperors.

His exceptional brilliance in Torah study was evident from a very early age, and he was a student of the two greatest scholars of the generation, Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva. He was also the lone Sage who continued to study with Elisha ben Avuya, despite the latter's estrangement from Judaism. His primary teacher was Rabbi Akiva, who ordained him at a very young age, which is the reason that he was ordained a second time by Rabbi Yehuda ben Bava.

In recognition of his outstanding scholarship, Rabbi Meir was officially appointed *hakham*, literally, wise man, the third level below *nasi*, head of the Sanhedrin. The halakhic discussions between him and his colleagues Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Yosei, Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Elazar form one of the most important foundations of the Mishna.

Rabbi Meir's greatest undertaking appears to have been a structured, oral redaction of the Oral Law, including establishing specific formats for the *halakhot*. Apparently, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi followed in Rabbi Meir's footsteps and incorporated his work in the Mishna. Consequently, it is a well-known principle that the author of an

unattributed statement in the Mishna is Rabbi Meir, as the assumption is that this was one of the *mishnayot* he formulated.

Due to his involvement in the attempt to depose Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, the head of the Sanhedrin, he was punished by the latter, and for a long period his teachings were not cited in his name but were introduced with the words: Others say.

His private life was full of suffering. His two sons died during his lifetime, and his extraordinary wife Beruria also died in painful circumstances. Nevertheless, it is known that a daughter of his survived. He was eventually forced into exile to Asia Minor, where he died, with the order that his coffin be transferred to Eretz Yisrael and that he be temporarily interred on the shore of the sea whose waves reach the Holy Land.

Rabbi Meir was famous in his lifetime, not only for his sharp intellect, which exceeded that of all his peers, but also for his personal attributes, his efforts as a peacemaker, and his willingness to relinquish personal honor for the good of others. He was known as a magnificent public speaker. It is said that following his death, those who composed parables ceased. Several of his animal parables were repeated for many generations. He was also renowned as a miracle worker, and for many years a charity fund named after him, Rabbi Meir the Miracle Worker [*Ba'al HaNes*] served as the main source of funding for the Jews in Eretz Yisrael.

Rabbi Akiva



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Kiddushin. Koren publishers Jerusalem. 459.

Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef was one of the greatest of the *tanna'im*. He lived from just after the destruction of the Second Temple until the bar Kokheva revolt. According to legend, Rabbi Akiva began his studies at the age of forty, when Raḥel, the daughter of the wealthy Kalba Savua, consented to marry him on condition that he would study Torah.

Rabbi Akiva became the student of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Ḥananya. Ultimately, he became a prominent Torah scholar with twenty-four thousand students. Among Rabbi Akiva's first students were Shimon ben Azzai and Shimon ben Zoma, with whom he entered the orchard (see *Ḥagiga* 14b), i.e., engaged in the study of esoteric elements of the Torah.

Subsequently, Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai, among others, became his students. He was a staunch supporter of bar Kokheva's revolt against Rome and even declared him the Messiah. During the period of the Roman emperor Hadrian's decrees, Torah study was prohibited, but Rabbi Akiva continued convening assemblies and teaching Torah. Ultimately, he was apprehended and executed, and he is one of the ten martyrs whose execution is described in liturgy.

Rabbi Akiva collected early rabbinic statements and began organizing the material of the Oral Torah. The Mishna, redacted by Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and his disciples, is based on his work.

Satan



<http://www.wikipedia.org/>

Satan, (Standard Hebrew Satan'el, English *accuser*), is a term that originates from the Abrahamic faiths, being traditionally applied to an angel in Judeo-Christian belief, and to a jinn in Islamic belief.

Where Satan does appear in the Bible, he plays the role of the Accuser.

According to the article on 'Satan' in the Jewish Encyclopedia, Satan's role as the accuser is found in the prologue to the Book of Job, where Satan appears, together with other celestial beings before the Deity, replying to the inquiry of God as to whence he had come, with the words: 'From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.' (Job 1:7) Both question and answer, as well as the dialogue which follows, characterize Satan as having the evil purpose of searching out men's sins and appearing as their accuser. He is, therefore, the celestial prosecutor, who sees only iniquity; for he persists in his evil opinion of Job even after the man of Uz has passed successfully through his first trial by surrendering to the will of God, whereupon Satan demands another test through physical suffering. (ib. ii. 3-5.)

Yet it is also evident from the prologue that Satan has no power of independent action, but requires the permission of God, which he may not transgress. He cannot be regarded, therefore, as an opponent of the Deity; and the doctrine of monotheism is disturbed by his existence no more than by the presence of other beings before the face of God. This view is also retained in Zech. 3:1-2, where Satan is described as the adversary of the high priest Joshua, and of the people of God whose representative the hierarch is; and he there opposes the 'angel of the Lord' who bids him be silent in the name of God.

Satan and the Evil Inclination



<http://www.beingjewish.com/>

The Hebrew word "Satan" means "Hinderer." To hinder someone means to hold him back, to try to prevent him from doing something. G-d created the Hinderer to give us work to do in this world. Satan is here to make things difficult for us, so we can overcome our evil temptations, and pass the test. That is the purpose of Satan. Satan is an angel whose purpose has been determined by G-d.

Temptation is there to try and deter us. It gives us the ability to do the wrong thing. More importantly, it gives us the ability to look at evil and refuse to do it. By presenting us with the opportunity to do evil, it gives us the ability to choose between good and evil.

The ability to choose between good and evil is what gives us free will.

The truth is that Satan has a job to do, just like every other angel. And angels have no free will. They do as Hashem commands them.

A man once came to a great Rabbi, very troubled. He said to the Rabbi, "Please pray to Hashem to take away my Evil Inclination. I do so many sins, and I want to stop sinning!"

The Rabbi answered, "Then what would be your purpose in this world, if you had no Evil Inclination? Your purpose in life is to overcome your personal Evil Inclination.

That is what you were created for! Hashem has enough angels in heaven. He doesn't need one more. He created you human, so that you could improve yourself."

And how do we do it? By constant battle with the Evil Inclination.

So now we have to revise our understanding of Satan. Satan is not a fallen angel. Satan is merely an angel with a dirty job. Satan does not have a rival kingdom. Satan is not in competition with G-d, and Satan does not want followers or worshipers. He's not even happy when people obey him and sin.

Satan is the angel who tempts us, and the angel who prosecutes us in Heaven. He is also the Angel of Death. The angel who tries to make us sin is the same angel who accuses us in the Heavenly Court, and the same angel who carries out the death sentence.

So, no, Satan does not wear a red suit, or carry a trident. Nor does he wear a business suit. Satan is a force of evil in the world that we must resist. Satan most often appears as a desire within *you*. Of course, there is no shortage of things in the world to tempt us to sin.

And Satan has many "helpers," many of whom don't even know they are helping him. A shady-looking character in the street walks over to you and offers to sell you some stolen property, for example.

None of us are capable of destroying Satan. What we are expected and commanded to do is to gain the upper hand over our personal Satans. And Hashem helps us do this, constantly. The Talmud says that the Evil Inclination constantly attempts to destroy us spiritually, and Hashem constantly helps us and gives us the means with which to overcome our Evil Inclinations.

Ma'ah/ Gerah



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerah>

A gerah ([Hebrew](#): גרה, [romanized](#): *gêrāh*) is an ancient Hebrew unit of [weight](#) and [currency](#), which, according to the [Book of Exodus](#) (30:13), was equivalent to 1/20 of a [shekel](#). God tells Moses, the payment for life ransom during the census taking is half a shekel, "which weighs ten gerah". This would make a whole shekel equal to 20 gerah.

A gerah is in [Aramaic](#) a *ma'ah* (מעה; [Mishnah](#) Hebrew *pl.* ma'ot "מעות" which means "coins"). It was originally a fifth of a [denarius](#) or [zuz](#), as seen in [Exodus](#) ("20 gerah is a shekel"), then became a sixth of a denar/zuz, such as the [Yehud](#) coins which came in two denominations, approximately 0.58 gram as a *ma'ah* and approximately .29 gram as a half *ma'ah* (*chatzi ma'ah*), and (.58 X 6 = 3.48) which is about the weight of a Zuz/Denarius based on a 14 gram [Shekel](#).

Mishna Kiddushin 4:12

A man may not be secluded with two women lest he sin with them, but one woman may be secluded with two men. Rabbi Shimon says: Even one man may be secluded with two women when his wife is with him, and in that situation he may even sleep in the same inn with two women, because his wife guards him from sinning with them. They further said that a man may be secluded with his mother, and with his daughter, and sleep alongside them with bodily contact. And when they, the son or daughter, have grown up, this one sleeps in her garment and that one sleeps in his garment, but they may share a bed.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 81a

רבי מאיר הוה מתלוצץ בעוברי עברה.
יומא חד אידמי ליה שטן כאיתתא בהו גיפסא דנהרא. לא הוה מבכרא – נקט מצרא וקא עבר.
כי מטא פלגא מצרא – שבקיה, אמר: אי לא דקא מכרזי ברקיעא "הזקרו ברבי מאיר ותורתו" –
שויתיה לדמד תרמי מעי.
רבי עקיבא הוה מתלוצץ בעוברי עברה.
יומא חד אידמי ליה שטן כאיתתא בריש דיקלא, נקטיה לדיקלא וקסליק ואזיל.
כי מטא לפלגיה דדיקלא שבקיה, אמר: אי לאו דמכרזי ברקיעא "הזקרו ברבי עקיבא ותורתו" –
שויתיה לדמד תרמי מעי.

Rabbi Meir would ridicule transgressors.

One day, Satan appeared to him as a woman standing on the other side of the river.

There was no ferry to cross the river. He [Rabbi Meir] took hold of a rope bridge and crossed the river. When he reached halfway across the rope bridge, the evil inclination left him and said to him: Were it not for the fact that they proclaim about you in heaven: Be careful with regard to Rabbi Meir and his Torah, I would have made your blood like two *ma'a*, i.e., completely worthless.

Rabbi Akiva would likewise ridicule transgressors.

One day, Satan appeared to him as a woman at the top of a palm tree. Rabbi Akiva grabbed hold of the palm tree and began climbing. When he was halfway up the palm tree, the evil inclination left him and said to him: Were it not for the fact that they proclaim about you in heaven: Be careful with regard to Rabbi Akiva and his Torah, I would have made your blood like two *ma'a*, i.e., completely worthless.



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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Bonus  Why did Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva ridicule transgressors?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why did Satan release Rabbi Meir, in one story, and Rabbi Akiva, in the other?

? What does Satan mean by the expression "I would have made your blood like two *ma'a*"?

? Why would the Talmud tell a similar story twice with two different rabbis?

? What is the lesson Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva are learning the hard way in our story?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from These Texts

! Beware of arrogance, the mother (and father) of all sins



In our almost identical Talmudic stories, Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva, two of the greatest sages of all times, are portrayed as falling in the trap of Satan, the evil inclination. The average reader may be puzzled by our stories, depicting the scholarly Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva lusting after women. And yet, these stories were included in the Talmud, to remind us that nobody should say, "It won't happen to me." Moreover, it is Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva's hubris, their ridiculing of transgressors, and their screaming "it won't happen to me," which invites Satan to prove them wrong.

While there are many sins out there, our story directs us to beware of arrogance, the mother (and father) of all sins.



	patient	impatient	
	appreciative	unappreciative	
	respectful	disrespectful	
	genuine	phony	
	sincere	insincere	
	soft-spoken	loud	
	sensitive	insensitive	
	generous	greedy	
	kind	mean	
	selfless	selfish	
	friendly	unfriendly	
	sympathetic	unsympathetic	
	complimentary	critical	
	moral	immoral	
	ethical	unethical	
	faithful	unfaithful	
	happy	despondent	
	positive	negative	
	polite	impolite	
	honest	dishonest	
	charitable	stingy	
	spiritual	materialistic	
	agreeable	argumentative	
	fair	unfair	
	cooperative	uncooperative	
	serious	foolhardy	
	peaceful	hostile	
	forgiving	unforgiving	
	constructive	destructive	