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## Stories with a Twist [37]

### "I am Hâruta"

(Insights into Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 81b)



### Background to Our Story

#### Rav Hiyya bar Ashi



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiyya\\_bar\\_Ashi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiyya_bar_Ashi)

In his youth he studied under [Rav](#), and served as his janitor. In his service of Rav he learned many laws, which he transmitted to future generations. For example, he stated that on [Shabbat](#) he would wash Rav's leather clothes. From this statement, [the sages](#) concluded that the [law of Melabain](#) (Scouring/Laundrying) on Shabbat does not apply on leather materials. He also stated that when he used to wake Rav from his sleep, he would wash his hands, recite [Birkat HaTorah](#), and only then would teach the lesson. Hence, one should make a *Birkat HaTorah* also on the [Talmud](#), and not only on the [Bible](#). Later, R. Hiyya bar Ashi said, Rav would put on [tefillin](#), and then recite the [shema](#); from this the sages concluded that one should put on *tefillin* before the *shema*, even if it is already time for the *shema*.

Most of R. Hiyya bar Ashi's statements are made in the name of his teacher Rav, and rarely in the name of [Samuel of Nehardea](#). At times his own rulings are cited as well, and sometimes he disputes his teacher Rav. He was a colleague of [Rav Huna](#) and had debated him over rulings of their common teacher, Rav.

#### Tachanun



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

Tachanun or Taḥanun (Hebrew: תחנון "Supplication"), also called nefillat apayim ("falling on the face") is part of Judaism's morning (Shacharit) and afternoon (Mincha) services, after the recitation of the Amidah, the central part of the daily Jewish prayer services. It is omitted on Shabbat, Jewish holidays and several other occasions (e.g., in the presence of a groom in the week after his marriage). Most traditions recite a longer prayer on Mondays and Thursdays.

The source of the supplicatory prayer (Taḥanun) is in Daniel (9:3) and I Kings (8:54), where the verses indicate that prayer should always be followed by supplication. Based on this, Talmudic sages developed the habit of adding a personal appeal to God

following the set prayers (some examples are listed in the Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 16b). In the fourteenth century, these spontaneous supplications were standardized and turned into the prayer of Tachanun.

The custom of bending over and resting the face on the left hand is suggested by the first line of the text which includes the words "nip'lah na b'yad Adonai" ("let us fall into the hands of God"). It is also reminiscent of the Daily Sacrifice brought in the Temple, which was laid on its left side to be slaughtered. A person's arm should be covered with a sleeve, tallit, or other covering. This posture, developed in the post-Talmudic period, is symbolic of Temple practice, in which people knelt down until their faces touched the ground to show humility and submission to God. The pose was also used by Moses and Joshua, who fell on their faces before God after the sin of the Golden Calf. Because of this practice, Tahanun is also known as nefilat apayim ("falling on the face"). Because Joshua fell on his face before the Ark, one only puts one's head down when praying in front of an Ark containing a Torah scroll. Otherwise, it is proper to sit with the head up.

### Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination)



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yetzer\\_hara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yetzer_hara)

In Judaism, yetzer hara (for "evil inclination") refers to the inclination to do evil, by violating the will of God. The yetzer hara is not a demonic force, but rather man's misuse of things the physical body needs to survive. So the need for food becomes gluttony due to our yetzer hara. The need for procreation becomes sexual abuse, and so on. Judaism teaches that humans are born with a yetzer hara (physical needs that can become "evil"), but that we don't acquire a yetzer tov ("good" inclination) until an age of maturity -- 12 for girls and 13 for boys.

Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, also known by the Hebrew acronym RaMCHaL, wrote in Derekh Hashem (The Way of G-d) "Man is the creature created for the purpose of being drawn close to G-d. He is placed between perfection and deficiency, with the power to earn perfection. Man must earn this perfection, however, through his own free will. Man's inclinations are therefore balanced between good (Yetzer HaTov) and evil (Yetzer HaRa), and he is not compelled toward either of them. He has the power of choice and is able to choose either side knowingly and willingly..."

It is believed among some that, where as Christianity identifies evil with Satan, Judaism does not. However, in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Baba Bathra, Folio 16b, Rabbi Resh Lakish asserts that "Satan, the evil inclination, and the Angel of Death are all one."

### The Text: Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 81b

רבי תניא בר אשי תהו רגיל כל עידן דהוה נפל לאפיה הוה אמר: תרחמן יצילנו מיצר הרע. יומא חד שמעתינהו דביתיהו, אמרה: מפדי הוה פמה שני דפריש ליה מינאי, מאי טעמא קאמר הכי?

יומא חדא הוה קא גריס בגינתיה, קשטה נפשה תלפה ותגיה קמיה. אמר לה: מאן את? אמרה: אנא חרותא, דהדרי מיומא. תבעה. אמרה ליה: אייתי ניהליה להך רומנא דריש צוציתא. שוור, אזל אתייה ניהלה.

כי אתא לביתיה הוה קא שגרא דביתהו תנורא. סליק וקא יתיב בגייה. אמרה ליה: מאי האי? אמר לה: הכי וקכי הוה מעשה. אמרה ליה: אנא הואי. לא אשגת בה, עד דדהבה ליה סימני. אמר לה: אנא מיהא לאיסורא איפונני.

כָּל יָמָיו נָשָׂא אֹתוֹ צְדִיק הָיָה מִתְעַנֶּה, עַד שֶׁנִּשְׁמַת בְּאוֹתָהּ מִיָּתָהּ.

Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Ashi was accustomed to say, whenever he would fall on his face in prayer: May the Merciful One save us from the evil inclination. One day his wife heard him saying this prayer. She said: After all, it has been several years since he has withdrawn from engaging in intercourse with me. What is the reason that he says this prayer?

One day, while he was studying in his garden, she adorned herself and repeatedly walked past him. He said: Who are you? She said: I am Ḥaruta, a well-known prostitute, returning from my day at work. He propositioned her. She said to him: Give me that pomegranate from the top of the tree.

He leapt up, went, and brought it to her, and they engaged in intercourse.

When he came home, his wife was lighting a fire in the oven. He went and sat inside it. She said to him: What is this? He said to her: Such and such an incident occurred; he told her that he engaged in intercourse with a prostitute.

She said to him: It was I. He paid no attention to her until she gave him signs that it was indeed she. He said to her: I, in any event, intended to transgress.

The Gemara relates: All the days of that righteous man he would fast for the transgression he intended to commit, until he died by that death in his misery.



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

### **Comprehension and Analysis Questions**

**?** Why had there been many years since Rabbi  $\hat{H}$ iyya bar Ashi had withdrawn from engaging in intercourse with his wife?

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

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

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

**?** What does Rabbi  $\hat{H}$ iyya bar Ashi's wife think is her husband's reason for abstention?

**?** Why was Rabbi  $\hat{H}$ iyya bar Ashi accustomed to saying, whenever he would fall on his face in prayer: May the Merciful One save us from the evil inclination?

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

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

**Bonus ?** How can you describe the feeling of Rabbi  $\hat{H}$ iyya bar Ashi's wife when she overheard her husband's personal prayer?

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

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

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

**?** Why did Rabbi  $\hat{H}$ iyya bar Ashi's wife adorn herself and repeatedly walk past her husband?

**?** Why did Rabbi  $\hat{H}$ iyya bar Ashi ask his wife "Who are you?"

**?** Why did Rabbi  $\hat{H}$ iyya bar Ashi's wife demand: Give me that pomegranate from the top of the tree?

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

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

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

**?** Why did Rabbi  $\hat{H}$ iyya bar Ashi climb to the top of the tree to get the pomegranate?

**?** Why did Rabbi Hiyya bar Ashi go and sit inside the oven when he came back home?

**?** What is the identifying evidence Rabbi Hiyya bar Ashi's showed her husband?

**?** Why didn't Rabbi Hiyya bar Ashi believe his wife when she told him the woman was her?

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

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

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

**?** What did Rabbi Hiyya bar Ashi mean by the words: "I, in any event, intended to transgress"?

**?** Why did Rabbi Hiyya bar Ashi fast until his death?

### **Analysis Questions**

**Bonus ?** What did Rabbi Hiyya bar Ashi's wife want to accomplish by her "performance"? Did she accomplish it? Why? Why not?

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

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

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

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

**Extra Bonus ?** What could have been a good course of action to be followed by Rabbi Hiyya bar Ashi to be "rescued" from the evil inclination? Why didn't he follow it?

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

**!** You may need *two to Tango* (to make it work), but sometimes one miserable person alone is enough to make everybody around him or her miserable.

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