

From the Rabbi's Desk
Rabbi Manes Kogan
Hillcrest Jewish Center
183-02 Union Turnpike, Flushing, NY 11366
rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org

Stories with a Twist [48]

In all My Days, No Person Defeated Me Except for a Woman, a Young Boy, and a Young Girl. (Insights into the Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 53b)



Background to Our Story

Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Bava Metzia Volume I. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 55

This *tanna*, often referred to simply as Rabbi Yehoshua, lived in the generation following the destruction of the Temple. He had been one of the Levite singers in the Temple and he married the daughter of a priest. While in Jerusalem he studied under Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai, and he even aided Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai's famed escape from the siege of Jerusalem. After the Sanhedrin was reestablished in Yavne, Rabbi Yehoshua became one of the most prominent members there. Later, he moved to Peki'in, where he established his own study hall. Rabbi Yehoshua was well-known for his sharp mind as well as for his great modesty. There are many stories told of his encounters with a Roman emperor, apparently Hadrian, as well as with the sages of other nations.

Women and Children in the Greco-Roman Society

"For although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female, just as the elder and full-grown is superior to the younger and more immature." (From: Aristotle: Politics. Book 1, Chapter 12)

Have the final/last word

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

1. To say the last statement in a discussion or argument (*Tim can't bear to lose an argument. He always has to have the last word.*)
2. To make the final decision about something (usually + *on*) (*Our head chef has the final word on what is served each week.*)

Talmudic Adage: Shtika k'hodaah dami - "silence is tantamount to an agreement" or "silence is the same as acquiescence"

Leaving food on your plate

WordReference.com Cultural questions, comments and observations

My sister and I recently got into a discussion about the attitude in the United States towards leaving food on your plate, when you've been invited to someone's house for a meal. We are not American, but we have both spent a significant amount of time in the United States, so we were both speaking from experience.

My impression was that it was generally not acceptable to leave food on your plate, as this might imply that the food did not taste good. I know that this is the case in many other parts of the world, and I thought the US was no exception. My sister, however, maintained that it was very common to leave food on your plate, and that it was not at all frowned upon.

What are the thoughts of our American members? Do you think leaving food on your plate is rude, or not at all unacceptable? Is this something that you don't even think about, whether as a host or as a guest?

While I'm mostly interested in the opinions of members from the US (and it's not just because I want to settle the debate with my sister, I'm also curious as to how this matter is viewed in other countries and cultures.

I look forward to your contributions.

1. My impression was that it was generally not acceptable to leave food on your plate, as this might imply that the food did not taste good. I know that this is the case in many other parts of the world, and I thought the US was no exception.
 - I wouldn't dare leave food on my plate at another person's house. Even if I felt that I could eat no more, I would finish, to be polite. I think in a lot of households in America it is this way, where it is frowned upon to leave food on your plate as it is understood as "the food didn't taste good."
2. It was once taught as etiquette in USA that one should A.) eat most of the food on the plate but B.) leave just a small amount of food on the plate. This was supposed to indicate to the host that A.) you enjoyed the meal but B.) were not left hungry for more.
 - Such is exactly the case in Thailand, where cleaning the plate is considered extremely rude. People will always leave a small amount of untouched food, even when eating at street stalls. As a starving backpacker in the Thai-Malay border, I found it a pretty hard etiquette to follow! I'd like to know whether there're any other cultures where the same habit applies.
 - If you are ever invited by your Chinese host to dine in their home or in a fine restaurant, try to remember that finishing your plate or eating the last of an item on a dish is NOT the thing to do. For "British-brought-up" Westerners, finishing your plate is polite manners and indicates to your host that you have fully enjoyed your meal. By contrast, finishing your plate in a Chinese meal situation is not polite and indicates you have not been satisfied and are still hungry. This can lead to embarrassment on both sides; the host scrambling to find more food for you, and you being seriously persuaded to eat more food than you can manage. Lesson: - At the end of your meal, always leave some food on your plate and in the serving dishes.

Jewish Sources

- “And Rabbi Elazar said whoever does not leave over bread on his table will never see a sign of blessings” (Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 92a)
- And there came a man from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of G-d bread of the first-fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of corn in his sack. And he said: 'Give unto the people, that they may eat.' And his servant said: 'How should I set this before a hundred men?' But he said: 'Give the people, that they may eat; for thus said HaShem: They shall eat, and shall leave thereof.' So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of HaShem. (II Kings 4:42-44)
- Tzur Mishelo is one of the most well known of the Shabbat Zemirot. It is used as an introduction to Birkat Hamazon, the Grace after meals for all three of the Shabbat meals. The refrain, (The Rock from Whom we have eaten, bless Him, my faithful friends. We have eaten our fill and left over – according to God’s word) by inviting everyone to join in thanking God for food, approximated the “Zimun”, the call to say Birkat Hamazon. The first three stanzas of the poem follow the first three blessings as ordained by the Torah and the fourth stanza represents the cup of wine over which we traditionally recite Birkat Hamazon.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 53b

אמר רבי יהושע בן חנניה: מימי לא נצחני אדם חוץ מאשה תיבוק ותיבוקת. אשה מאי היא?

פעם אחת נתארחתי אצל אכסניא אחת, עשתה לי פולין.
ביום ראשון אכלתיים ולא שניירתי מהן פלום. שנייה ולא שניירתי מהן פלום. ביום שלישי
הקדיחתן במלת. כיון שטעמתי – משכתי ידי מהן.
אמרה לי: רבי, מפני מה אינך סועד?
אמרתי לה: כבר סעדתי מבעוד יום.
אמרה לי: הנה לך למשוך ידיך מן הפת. אמרה לי: רבי, שמא לא הנחת פאה בראשוני? ולא כף
אמרו חכמים: אין משניירין פאה באלפס, אבל משניירין פאה בקערה.

תיבוקת מאי היא? פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך, והיתה דרך עוברת בשדה והייתי מהלך בה.
אמרה לי תיבוקת אחת: רבי, לא שדה היא זו?
אמרתי לה: לא, דרך כבושה היא.
אמרה לי: ליסטים כמותך כבושה.

תיבוק מאי היא? פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך, וראיתי תיבוק יושב על פרשת דרכים. ואמרתי
לו: באיזה דרך גלך לעיר?
אמר לי: זו קצרה וארוכה, וזו ארוכה וקצרה. והלכתי בקצרה וארוכה, כיון שהגעתי לעיר
מצאתי שמקיפין אותה גנות ופרדיסין.
תזרתי לאתורי. אמרתי לו: בני, הלא אמרת לי קצרה!
אמר לי: ולא אמרתי לך ארוכה!?

נשקתיו על ראשו, ואמרתי לו: אשריכם ישראל שכולכם חכמים גדולים אתם, מגדולכם ועד
קטונכם.

Opening Statement

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hânanya said: In all my days, no person defeated me in a verbal encounter except for a woman, a young boy, and a young girl.

First Incident

What is the encounter in which a woman got the better of me?

One time I was staying at a certain inn and the hostess prepared me beans. On the first day I ate them and left nothing over. On the second day I again ate and left nothing over. On the third day she over-salted them. As soon as I tasted them, I withdrew my hands from them.

She said to me: My Rabbi, why aren't you eating?

I said to her: I have already eaten during the daytime.

She said to me: You should have withdrawn your hand from bread and left room for some beans.

She then said to me: My Rabbi, perhaps you did not leave a remainder of food on your plate on the first days, which is why you are leaving over food today. Isn't this what the Sages said: One need not leave a remainder in the pot, but one must leave a remainder on the plate as an expression of etiquette?

Second Incident

What is the incident with a young girl?

One time I was walking along the path, and the path passed through a field, and I was walking on it.

A certain young girl said to me: My Rabbi, isn't this a field? One should not walk through a field, so as not to damage the crops growing there.

I said to her: Isn't it a well-trodden path in the field, across which one is permitted to walk?

She said to me: Robbers like you have trodden it.

Third Incident

What is the incident with a young boy?

One time I was walking along the path, and I saw a young boy sitting at the crossroads. And I said to him: On which path shall we walk in order to get to the city?

He said to me: This path is short and long, and that path is long and short.

I walked on the path that was short and long. When I approached the city I found that gardens and orchards surrounded it.

I went back and met the young boy again and said to him: My son, didn't you tell me that this way is short?

He said to me: And didn't I tell you that it is also long?

I kissed him on his head and said to him: Happy are you, O Israel, for you are all exceedingly wise, from your old to your young.



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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Questions on the Opening Statement

? In his opening statement, "Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya said: In all my days, no person defeated me in a verbal encounter except for a woman, a young boy, and a young girl."

What do you think about Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya's opening statement? What does this statement tell us about the status of women and children in his time?

Questions on the First Incident

? Why did Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya eat all his beans the first two days he stayed at the inn?

? Why didn't Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya eat his beans the third time he was served by his hostess?

? Why didn't Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya tell his hostess the real reason why he didn't eat the beans on the third day?

? Do you think Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya's hostess burned the beans inadvertently or on purpose? And if you think she did it on purpose, what was her purpose?

Questions on the Second Incident

Bonus ? Why did Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya walk through the middle of a field?

Bonus ? The little girl first addresses Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya in a very deferential way – "My Rabbi, isn't this a field?" and later on in a very challenging way - "Robbers like you have trodden it!" How can you explain the change in the little girl's way of addressing Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya? Why do you think didn't Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya scold the girl for her disrespectful reply?

Questions on the third Incident

Bonus ? Why do you think the little boy didn't explain to Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya the nature of the two different roads when the Rabbi asked him the question?

Answer.1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus ? Why do you think Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya took the "short and long" road as opposed to the "long and short" one?

General Questions

? What are the three lessons Rabbi Yehoshua ben H^ananya learned from the woman, the little girl and the little boy?

Answer.1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus ? What is the common element to the three incidents?

Bonus ? What are the character traits Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hânanya needed to work on?

Answer.1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus ? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hânanya was a great Torah scholar, to the extent that no one ever defeated him in a verbal encounter. Nevertheless, he failed until the moment of our story in learning the three important lessons the woman, the little girl and the little boy needed to teach him. How was that possible?

Answer.1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! A few lessons we can all learn from Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hânanya’s incidents:

- Humbling experiences can be wonderful lessons!
- Not every important lesson you can learn is in school!
- You can always grow in wisdom, menschlichkeit, and spirit, if you are attuned to the many learning opportunities that life can provide for you, and if you are ready to learn from everybody!



- In our story, filled with humor, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hânanya learned three lessons the hard way from three unlikely “teachers” (at least in his time). Regardless of the specific of each lesson, each good in its own merit, the story in general leaves the reader with the most

important lesson of all: You can always grow in wisdom, menschlichkeit, and spirit, if you are attuned to the many learning opportunities that life can provide for you (sometimes the hard way), and if you are ready to learn from everybody!