

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist
[61]

**My Brother, Every Day the Study Hall is Bright and
Today it is Dark**

Insights into Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 35b

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Background to Our Story

Hillel the Elder



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Pesachim Volume 2. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 9.

Hillel, referred to as the Elder due to his position in the Sanhedrin, was born in Babylonia and lived in Jerusalem during the time of King Herod and the Roman Emperor Augustus, about a hundred years before the destruction of the Second Temple. He and his colleague Shammai were the last of the *zugot*, the pairs of *tanna'im* who played a role in establishing the Mishna.

Although Hillel and Shammai established two distinct schools, Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, and their disciples were involved in many controversies, Hillel and Shammai themselves disagreed only with regard to three or four cases. The real difference between them was one of character. Hillel was a calm and gentle individual who avoided conflict whenever possible, whereas Shammai was stern and uncompromising. When approached by a potential convert whom Shammai had rejected because he wished to learn the entire Torah on one leg, Hillel offered him the maxim: That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah, and the rest is its interpretation; go and learn.

According to tradition, Hillel arrived in Eretz Yisrael to study at age forty in a state of poverty, but his perseverance brought him to the attention of Shemaya and Avtalyon, the heads of the academy, who welcomed him into the study hall.

Ultimately, serving those scholars allowed him to settle questions whose solutions were unknown to others, and he was appointed head of the Sanhedrin.

The Gemara compares Hillel to Ezra the Scribe, crediting him with reestablishing Torah at a period in history when it was being forgotten (*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 like Moses, thirty that the sun should stand still for them, as it did for Joshua the son of Nun, twenty were average, with the greatest among them Yonatan ben Uzziel and the least among them Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai (*Sukka* 28a).

Sh'maya



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shmaya_\(tanna\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shmaya_(tanna))

Sh'maya (or Shemaiah, Samaias or Sameas) was a rabbinic sage in the early pre-Mishnaic era who lived at the same time as Avtalyon. They are known as one of the *zugot* ("couples"): *Sh'maya and Avtalyon*. Both Sh'maya and Avtalyon were converts to Judaism and were both descendants of King Sancheriv of Assyria who destroyed the northern Kingdom of Israel.

He was a leader of the Pharisees in the first century BC; president of the Sanhedrin before and during the reign of Herod the Great.

Shemaiah said: "Love work. Hate authority. Don't get friendly with the government." (*Avoth* 1:10).

Of the private life of Shemaiah almost nothing is known, except that he was a pupil of Judah ben Tabbai. According to *Avoth* i. 10, his favorite maxim was, "Love handicraft, shun power, and make for thyself no friends of worldly might." This apothegm, like those of his colleague Avtalyon, is significant of the misery of the entire period.

Avtalyon

JewishEncyclopedia.com

By Louis Ginzberg

A leader of the Pharisees in the middle of the first century B.C. and by tradition vice-president of the great Sanhedrin of Jerusalem. He was of heathen descent. Despite this fact, Avtalyon, as well as his colleague, Shemaiah, the president of the Sanhedrin, was one of the most influential and beloved men of his time. Avtalyon used his influence with the people in persuading the men of Jerusalem, in the year 37 B.C., to open the gates of their city to Herod. The king was not ungrateful and rewarded Avtalyon, or, as Josephus calls him, "Pollion," with great honors.

Very little is known concerning the life of Avtalyon. He was a pupil of Judah ben Tabbai and Simon ben Sheṭaḥ, and probably lived for some time in Alexandria, Egypt, where he and his teacher Judah took refuge when Alexander Jannæus cruelly persecuted the Pharisees.

Avtalyon and Shemaiah are also the first whose Ḥalakot (legal decisions) are handed down to later times. Among them is the important one that the paschal lamb must be offered even if Passover fall on a Sabbath (*Pesachim* 66a).

Guard of the Study Hall



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Yoma. Koren publishers Jerusalem.
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Throughout Jewish history attitudes have varied with regard to payment for Torah study, especially at the highest levels.

Apparently, in early generations, the preference was to have students of means who were not financially dependent on the community and were thereby free of the pressure that could accompany such support. Therefore, a fee was charged to enter the study hall. These fees were abolished by Hillel when he assumed his position of *Nasi*. Still, for several additional generations, guards were instructed to restrict entry to the yeshiva to students. Elsewhere the Gemara quotes Rabban Gamliel as saying: Any student whose inside, his thoughts and feelings, are not like his outside, his conduct and character traits, will not enter the study hall, which greatly limited the number of students (*Berakhot* 28a, p. 182). Following severe upheavals, including the temporary impeachment of Rabban Gamliel of Yavne from his position as *Nasi*, this restriction was rescinded and the doors opened to all.

Tarpik (*Istera*)



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Yoma. Koren publishers Jerusalem.
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A half-dinar (zuz) was a very low wage even for unskilled laborers. According to tradition, Hillel the Elder worked part time chopping wood for that negligible payment.

Shabbat Laws and Pikuach Nefesh



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pikuach_nefesh

Pikuach nefesh (Hebrew: פיקוח נפש, "saving of human life") is the principle in Jewish law that the saving of a human life is paramount, overriding virtually any other religious consideration. When the life of a specific human being is in danger, almost any negative commandment of the Torah may be broken, with just three exceptions.

If it cannot be ascertained whether or not a situation is life-threatening, the situation must be considered life-threatening until proven otherwise, thereby allowing action to be taken.

It is of prime importance that if one believes a life may be in danger, and seconds may count, that persons involved not delay helping the victim out of fear of violating halakha, or in order to determine if such a violation is permissible according to halakha.

The laws of Shabbat and the Jewish holidays may be suspended for the purposes of *pikuach nefesh*. The earliest known example of this took place in 167 BCE, when Mattathias and the Hasmoneans declared that it was permitted for their followers to fight on the Sabbath day to defend themselves from attack. One is allowed to travel in order to save another's life, and medical care may be provided to critically ill patients (see Driving on Shabbat). According to Moshe Feinstein, it is permissible to travel to accompany a woman in labor to a hospital because the Talmud is especially solicitous of health with respect to pregnancy and childbirth. Shabbat laws can also be bent for a woman who has given birth in the last three days to make sure that she is comfortable and healthy.

One is allowed to drive a woman to a hospital on Shabbat to give birth, since birth can be life-threatening without medical supervision. Similarly, one may sign a consent form for surgery on Shabbat if the surgery will otherwise be delayed.

If one's close relative is transported to the hospital under emergency circumstances during Shabbat, one is allowed to drive or accept a ride to the hospital in order to provide company to their relative at the hospital, since this may be life-saving. One may also be needed at the hospital to sign potentially life-saving consent forms.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 35b

אָמְרוּ עָלָיו עַל הַלֵּל הַזֶּקֶן שֶׁבָּכַל יוֹם וַיּוֹם הָיָה עוֹשֶׂה וּמִשְׁתַּפֵּר בְּטַרְפְּעִיקָה, חָצְיוֹ הָיָה נוֹתֵן לְשׁוֹמֵר בֵּית הַמְדָּרֶשׁ, וְחָצְיוֹ לְפִרְנָסָתוֹ וּלְפִרְנָסַת אֲנָשֵׁי בֵּיתוֹ. פַּעַם אַחַת לֹא מָצָא לְהִשְׁתַּפֵּר, וְלֹא הִנְיָחוּ שׁוֹמֵר בֵּית הַמְדָּרֶשׁ לְהַכְנִיס.

עָלָה וְנִתְלָה וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל פִּי אַרְוֵבָה כְּדֵי שְׁיִשְׁמַע דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים מִפִּי שְׁמַעְיָה וְאַבְטָלְיוֹן.

אָמְרוּ: אוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם עָרַב שַׁבַּת הָיָה, וְתַקּוּפַת טַבַּת הָיְתָה, וַיֵּרַד עָלָיו שֶׁלֵּג מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם. כְּשֶׁעָלָה עֲמוּד הַשַּׁחַר אָמַר לוֹ שְׁמַעְיָה לְאַבְטָלְיוֹן: אַבְטָלְיוֹן אַחִי! בְּכָל יוֹם הַבַּיִת מֵאִיר, וְהַיּוֹם אֲפֵל, שָׁמָּא יוֹם הַמְעוֹנָן הוּא? הַצִּיצוּ עֵינֵיהֶן וְרֵאוּ דְמוֹת אָדָם בְּאַרְוֵבָה, עָלוּ וּמָצְאוּ עָלָיו רוּחַ שְׁלֹשׁ אַמּוֹת שֶׁלֵּג. פִּרְקוּהוּ, וְהִרְחִיצוּהוּ, וְסִיכּוּהוּ, וְהוֹשִׁיבוּהוּ כְּנֶגֶד הַמְדוּרָה.

אָמְרוּ: רָאוּי זֶה לְחַלֵּל עָלָיו אֶת הַשַּׁבַּת.

They said about Hillel the Elder that each and every day he would work and earn a half-dinar, half of which he would give to the guard of the study hall and half of which he spent for his sustenance and the sustenance of the members of his family.

One time he did not find employment to earn a wage, and the guard of the study hall did not allow him to enter. He ascended to the roof, suspended himself, and sat at the edge of the skylight in order to hear the words of the Torah of the living God from the mouths of Sh'maya and Avtalyon, the spiritual leaders of that generation.

The Sages continued and said: That day was Shabbat eve and it was the winter season of Tevet, and snow fell upon him from the sky. When it was dawn, Sh'maya said to Avtalyon: Avtalyon, my brother, every day at this hour the study hall is already bright from the sunlight streaming through the skylight, and today it is dark; is it perhaps a cloudy day? They focused their eyes and saw the image of a man in the skylight. They ascended and found him covered with snow three cubits high. They

extricated him from the snow, and they washed him and smeared oil on him, and they sat him opposite the bonfire to warm him.

They said: This man is worthy for us to desecrate Shabbat for him. Saving a life overrides Shabbat in any case; however, this great man is especially deserving.



Explaining the Story

What's going on in our story? (The sequence of events)

Comprehension Questions

? How did Hillel make a living?

? Why didn't the guard of the study hall let Hillel enter without payment?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why did Hillel climb to the roof when he was denied entrance to the study hall?

? What prompted Sh'maya to say to Avtalyon; "my brother, every day at the study hall it is bright, and today it is dark; is it perhaps a cloudy day"?

? Why did Sh'maya and Avtalyon ascend to the roof?

Bonus ? What did Sh'maya and Avtalyon mean by the words: "This man is worthy for us to desecrate Shabbat for him?"

Analysis Questions

Bonus ? For how long do you think Hillel went to the House of Study before our story took place?

? Are you surprised to find a guard at the House of Study's door collecting an admission fee? Who do you think put this guard in charge?

? How does Hillel relate daily to this guard?

? What is our story telling us about Hillel's personality?

Extra Bonus ? Sh'maya noticed that the House of Study was darker than usual. What didn't Sh'maya and Avtalyon notice?

Extra Bonus ? What do you think is the real reason why “every day the house is illuminated, but today it is dark”?

Bonus ? What is this story telling us about Sh’maya and Avtalyon and the academy they lead?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Extra Credit ? How do you reconcile the image of Sh’maya and Avtalyon as it emerges from our story with the fact that their mouths teach daily “the words of the Living God”?

? What do you think is missing at the end of our story?

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

! The “Ivory Tower Syndrome” as a double edge sword: the more you become insensitive to the outside, the more your own world darkens!

Ivory Tower



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivory_tower

The term Ivory Tower originates in the Biblical Song of Solomon (7:4). From the 19th century it has been used to designate a world or atmosphere where intellectuals engage in pursuits that are disconnected from the practical concerns of everyday life. As such, it usually carries pejorative connotations of a willful disconnect from the everyday world; esoteric, over-specialized, or even useless research; and academic elitism, if not outright condescension.

What is the Ivory Tower Syndrome in Leadership?

<https://bacalassociates.com/why-is-the-ivory-tower-syndrome-so-dangerous-to-leadership-effectiveness/>

Most people know the term "ivory tower". It's come to mean being out of touch with the "real" world or the rest of the world. It's a major problem with respect to leaders.

With respect to leadership, it means the same thing. Due to the pressures of leadership, and the time demands, there is a tendency for leaders to spend most of their time with other leaders in the organization, or other managers, focusing on the "big" issues, or the strategic issues. Those things are important, of course.

However, what happens is that over time, the leader can become out of touch with the experiences and problems of those that actually get the work done -- often the people at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy who make and design products

and services, or who interact directly with the people who pay the bills -- the customers.

When leaders get out of touch or get stuck in the isolated ivory tower syndrome, their decision making loses focus and tends to cater to the issues and problems associated with other leaders and managers. Decisions get made that interfere with customer service or production. Strategic decisions don't take into account the everyday implications for customers and employees.

The ivory tower syndrome process is a natural and common process that can affect most busy leaders, unless the leader pays conscious attention, and allocates time, to staying in touch with those towards the bottom of the organization. One of the critical steps is to take steps to ensure that the leader has access to information from employees.



? What do you think is funny about this cartoon? How does this cartoon illustrate the "Ivory Tower Syndrome"?