

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 [69]

Are These the Protectors of the City? These Are None Other Than the Destroyers of the City!

Insights into Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Hagigah 1:7



Background to Our Story

Rabbi Yehuda Nesia



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Eruvin Part 2. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 91

Rabbi Yehuda Nesia was the son of Rabban Gamliel, who was the son of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. He was called Nesia to differentiate him from his illustrious grandfather, the editor of the Mishna. One of the earliest *amora'im* in Eretz Yisrael, he was a colleague of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's great students. His own students included Rabbi Yoĥanan and Reish Lakish. Rabbi Yehuda Nesia's court enacted various decrees. It was considered the great Torah center in the Jewish world, to the extent that even the great *amora* Rav deferred to its authority.

Rabbi Yehuda Nesia served as *nasi* for many years and was probably the last *nasi* to have outstanding Torah knowledge and to serve as the head of the Sanhedrin. In his honor, he, like his grandfather, is sometimes referred to simply as Rabbi (especially in the Jerusalem Talmud). He was succeeded as *nasi*, but not as head of the Sanhedrin, by his son, Rabban Gamliel.

Neturei Karta



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

Neturei Karta (*Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*: literally "Guardians of the City") is a *Haredi* (ultra-orthodox) *Jewish* group formally created in *Jerusalem, Israel* in 1938 splitting off from *Agudas Yisroel*. Neturei Karta opposes *Zionism* and calls for a peaceful dismantling of the *State of Israel*, in the belief that Jews are forbidden to have their own state until the coming of the *Messiah*.

The Text: Jerusalem Talmud Hagigah 1:7

תני רבי שמעון בן יוחי. אם ראית עיירות שנתלשו ממקומן בארץ ישראל דע שלא תקזיקו בשכר סופרים ומשנים. מה טעם. על-מה אבדה הארץ נצתה כמדבר מבלי יושב: ויאמר יי על-עזבם את-תורתתי.

רבי יודן נשייא שלח לרבי חייה ולרבי אסי ולרבי אמי למיעבור בקרייתא דארעא דישראל למתקנא לון ספרין ומתניינין. עלון לחד אתר ולא אשכחון לא ספר ולא מתניין. אמרין לון. אייתון לן נטורי קרתא. אייתון לון סנטורי קרתא. אמרון לון. אילין אינון נטורי קרתא. לית אילין אלא חרובי קרתא. אמרין לון. ומאן אינון נטורי קרתא. אמרון לון. ספרייא ומתניינייא. הדא היא דכתיב אם יי לא-יבנה בית וגוי.

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai taught: if you see cities in the Land of Israel whose inhabitants were plucked away from their locations, know that those people did not support the wages of their teachers of Scripture and Mishnah. What is the source for this assertion? For Scripture states regarding the destruction of the Land of Israel: *Why has the land been ruined and laid waste like a desert that no one can cross? The Lord said, it is because they have forsaken my Torah (Jeremiah 9:12-13).*

Rabbi Yudan Nesia, the grandson of Rebbi. sent Rebbi Ḥiyya bar Abba., Rebbi Assi, and Rebbi Immi to visit the cities of the Land of Israel, to establish for them teachers of Scripture and Mishnah.

They [Rebbi Ḥiyya, Rebbi Assi, and Rebbi Immi] entered a certain place and they did not find either a teacher of Scripture or a teacher of Mishnah.

They [Rebbi Ḥiyya, Rebbi Assi, and Rebbi Immi] said to them [the townspeople], bring us the protectors of the city.

They [the townspeople] brought them the city's watchmen.

They [Rebbi Ḥiyya, Rebbi Assi, and Rebbi Immi] said to them [the townspeople], these are the protectors of the city? These are none other than the destroyers of the city!

They [the townspeople] said to them [Rebbi Ḥiyya, Rebbi Assi, and Rebbi Immi], and who then are the protectors of the city?

They [Rebbi Ḥiyya, Rebbi Assi, and Rebbi Immi] told them, the protectors of the city are the teachers of Scripture and Mishnah.

That is what is written (Psalms 127:1): *Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.*



Explaining the Story

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

Analysis Questions

? What was exactly the mission of Rebbi Hiyya, Rebbi Assi, and Rebbi Immi? Why weren't they able to carry on their mission?

? Why do you think the townspeople brought the city's watchmen when Rebbi Hiyya, Rebbi Assi, and Rebbi Immi asked them to see the protectors of the city?

Extra Bonus **?** Granted that the watchmen are not the "real" protectors of the city, but why are they the "destroyers of city"?

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

! When you get your priorities wrong...



Our story lies at the center of a very fiery debate in the Israeli society regarding the necessity (or not) of Torah scholars to serve in the army.

However, our story can also be read as a reflection on priorities in general. The sharp retort of Rebbi Hiyya, Rebbi Assi, and Rebbi Immi to the townspeople, is a reminder to all of us that where we invest our energy, money, and time, reflects our values and priorities. Moreover, in a world with limited resources, the prioritization of some values comes inexorably at the expense of others.