

From the Rabbi's Desk  
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**Stories with a Twist**  
**[70]**

**And Should We Not Allow Rabban Gamliel the Eminent to Wait Upon Us and Serve Us Drink?**

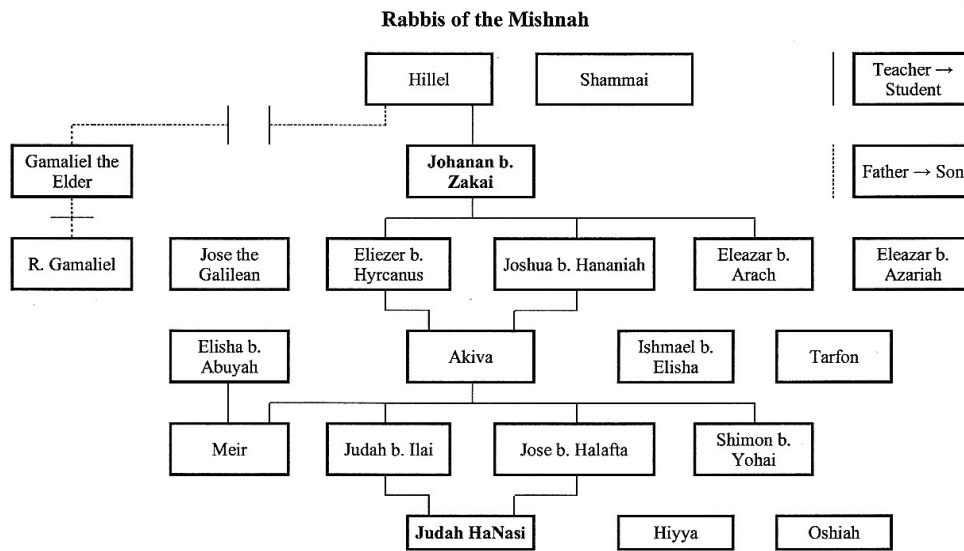
Insights into the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin 32b

Revised: April 2025 (Erev Pesach)

Tradition tells us not to pour ourselves wine. To celebrate that we are free, someone else should pour your wine for you and you should offer to pour others their wine.



**Background to Our Story**



**Rabban Gamliel**



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Berakhot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 7.

Nasi of the Sanhedrin and one of the most important tanna'im in the period following the destruction of the Second Temple. Rabban Gamliel's father, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel (the Elder), had also been Nasi of the Sanhedrin, as well as one of the leaders of the nation during the rebellion against Rome.

Rabban Gamliel was taken to Yavne by Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai after the destruction of the Temple, so that he became known as Rabban Gamliel of Yavne. After Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai's death, Rabban Gamliel presided over the Sanhedrin. Under Rabban Gamliel's leadership, Yavne became an important spiritual center. The greatest of the Sages gathered around him, including Rabbi Eliezer (Rabban Gamliel's brother-in-law), Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya.

Rabban Gamliel sought to create a spiritual center for the Jews that would unite the entire people, a role filled by the Temple until its destruction. Therefore, he strove to enhance the prominence and central authority of the Sanhedrin and its Nasi. His strict and vigorous leadership eventually led his colleagues to remove him from his post for a brief period, replacing him with Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya. However, since everyone realized that his motives and actions were for the good of the people and were not based on personal ambition, they soon restored him to his position.

We do not possess many halakhic rulings explicitly in the name of Rabban Gamliel. However, in his time, and under his influence, some of the most important decisions in the history of Jewish spiritual life were made. These included the decision to follow Beit Hillel, the rejection of the halakhic system of Rabbi Eliezer, and the establishment of fixed formulas for prayers. In those halakhic decisions attributed to Rabban Gamliel, we find an uncompromising approach to the halakha; in reaching his conclusions, he was faithful to his principles. We know that two of his sons were Sages: Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, who served as Nasi of the Sanhedrin after him, and Rabbi Ĥanina ben Gamliel.

### **Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus**



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Bava Metzia Volume I. Koren Publishers Jerusalem. Page 325.

When the name Rabbi Eliezer occurs in the Talmud without a patronymic, it refers to Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, also known as Rabbi Eliezer the Great, who was one of the leading Sages in the period after the destruction of the Second Temple. Rabbi Eliezer was born to a wealthy family of Levites, who traced their lineage back to Moses. Rabbi Eliezer began studying Torah late in life, but he quickly became an outstanding disciple of Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai. Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai remarked: If all the Sages of Israel were on one side of a scale and Eliezer ben Hyrcanus on the other, he would outweigh them all. Rabbi Eliezer was blessed with a remarkable memory. All his life, in his Torah study and his halakhic rulings, he attempted to follow the traditions of his Rabbis without adding to them. Nevertheless, although he was the primary student of Rabban Yoĥanan ben Zakkai, who was a disciple of Beit Hillel, he was considered one who tended toward the opinions of Beit Shammai. Rabbi Eliezer's close friend, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Ĥananya, completely followed the opinions of Beit Hillel, and many fundamental halakhic disputes between these Sages are recorded in the Mishna. Because of his staunch and unflinching adherence to tradition, Rabbi Eliezer was unwilling to accede to the majority opinion. Rabbi Eliezer's conduct generated so much tension among the Sages that Rabban Gamliel, who was the brother of his wife, Imma Shalom, was forced to excommunicate him to prevent controversy from proliferating. This ban was lifted only after Rabbi Eliezer's death. All of the Sages of the next generation were Rabbi Eliezer's students, most prominent among them Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Eliezer's son, also named Hyrcanus, was a Sage of the following generation.

### **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 Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, and he even aided Rabban Yoḥanan 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.

### **Rabbi Tzadok ben Eleazar**

One of the closest scholars to Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai. This was the same Rabbi Tzadok for whose healing Rabban Yoḥanan asked the services of a doctor. Just as Rabban Yoḥanan visualized the destruction of the Temple forty years before it occurred, so did Rabbi Tzadok fast every day for forty years that the Temple might not be destroyed. It is told that when Rabban Yoḥanan presented Rabbi Tzadok to Vespasian in the Roman camp outside Jerusalem, he showed more reverence to Rabbi Tzadok than he did to Vespasian. When Vespasian noted this, he asked, "What distinction has this man?" and Rabban Yoḥanan replied: "I can assure you that had there been another one like him, you could not have triumphed over our people even if you had brought twice as many soldiers as you did."

### **The Text: Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin 32b**

מעשה ברבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע ורבי צדוק שהיו מסובין בבית המשטה בנו של רבן גמליאל, והיה רבן גמליאל עומד ומשקה עליהם.

נתן הכוס לרבי אליעזר ולא נטלו. נתנו לרבי יהושע וקיבלו.  
אמר לו רבי אליעזר: מה זה יהושע? אנו יושבין ורבן גמליאל בריבי עומד ומשקה עלינו?

אמר ליה: מצינו גדול ממנו ששמש. אברהם גדול ממנו – ושמש. אברהם גדול הדור הזה, וכתוב בו: "והוא עמד עליהם". ושמה תאמרו: כמלאכי השרת נדמו לו – לא נדמו לו אלא לערבים. ואנו לא יהא רבן גמליאל בריבי עומד ומשקה עלינו?

אמר להם רבי צדוק: עד מתי אתם מניחים כבודו של מקום ואתם עוסקים בכבוד הבריות? הקדוש ברוך הוא משיב רוחות, ומעלה נשיאים, ומוריד מטר, ומצמיח אדמה, ועורף שולחן לפני כל אחד ואחד, ואנו לא יהא רבן גמליאל בריבי עומד ומשקה עלינו?

There was an incident involving Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Tzadok, who were reclining at the wedding of Rabban Gamliel's son. And Rabban Gamliel, who was Nasi of the Sanhedrin at the time, was standing over them and serving them drinks.

He gave the cup to Rabbi Eliezer, and he would not accept it; he gave it to Rabbi Yehoshua and he accepted it.

Rabbi Eliezer said to him: What is this, Yehoshua? We sit and the esteemed Rabban Gamliel stands over us and serves us drinks?

Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: We found one greater than him who served his guests, as our forefather Abraham was greater than him and he served his guests. Abraham was the greatest man of his generation, and it is written about him: "And he stood over them under the tree, and they ate" (Genesis 18:8). And lest you say: His guests appeared to him as ministering angels, and that is why he honored them, in fact they appeared to him only as Arabs. And if so, should not the esteemed Rabban Gamliel stand over us and serve us drinks?

Rabbi Tzadok said to them: For how long will you ignore the honor due to the Omnipresent, and deal with the honor of people? You could cite a proof from God Himself. After all, the Holy One, Blessed be He, makes the winds blow, and raises the clouds, and brings the rain, and causes the earth to sprout, and sets a table before each and every creature. And should not the esteemed Rabban Gamliel stand over us and serve us drinks?



### **Explaining the Story**

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

### **Comprehension and Analysis Questions**

**?** Why was Rabban Gamliel serving drinks at his son's wedding?

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

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

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

**?** Why didn't Rabbi Eliezer accept the cup from Rabban Gamliel?

**?** Why did Rabbi Yehoshua accept it?

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

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

**?** What did Rabbi Eliezer mean by his words to Rabbi Yehoshua: "What is this, Yehoshua? We sit and the esteemed Rabban Gamliel stands over us and serves us drinks?"

**?** What was Rabbi Yehoshua's reply to Rabbi Eliezer?

**?** What was Rabbi Tzadok's bold contribution to support the words of Rabbi Yehoshua?

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

**!** No person is too great, and no job is too demeaning; so, get up and help clean up the table! Or "If it's not beneath God, it's definitely not beneath you!"