

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 **[76]**

There is Nothing in the World I Care for More Than You! Insights into Song of Songs Rabbah 1:4

Translation: [Kleinman Ed Midrash Rabbah: Megillas Shir HaShirim by ArtScroll Mesorah Publications](#)

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Background to Our Story

Shimon bar Yochai



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

Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, (Shimon son of Yohai, Simon son of Yohai or Rashbi (*Hebrew*: רשב"י, pronounced "Rash-bee", an *acronym* from Rabbi Shimeon bar Yochai.), was a famous *rabbi* who lived in the era of the *Tannaim* (scholars of the *Mishnah*) in the area of what is today *Israel* during the *Roman* period, after the destruction of the *Second Temple* in 70 CE. He was one of the most eminent disciples of *Rabbi Akiva*, and is attributed by many with the authorship of the *Zohar* ("The Brightness"), the chief work of modern-day *Jewish mysticism*. In addition, the important legal homilies called *Sifre* and *Mekhilta* are attributed to him. In the *Mishnah*, he is often referred to as simply "Rabbi Shimon."

According to the *Talmud*, Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai criticized the Roman government and was forced to go into hiding with his son for thirteen years. They sheltered in a cave in nearby Peki'in where tradition states that next to the mouth of the cave a carob tree sprang up and a spring of fresh water gushed forth. Provided against hunger and thirst they cast off their clothing except during prayers to keep them from wearing out, embedded themselves in the sand up to their necks, and studied the *Torah* all day long.

According to historian Heinrich Graetz, Rabbi Shimon's anti-Roman sentiments led to his condemnation by Varna c. 161 CE. He escaped this doom and dwelt for some years in a cavern. Emerging from concealment, Rabbi Shimon settled in Tiberias and in other Galilean cities.

He acquired a reputation as a worker of miracles, and on this ground was sent to Rome as an envoy, where (legend tells) he exorcised from the emperor's daughter a demon who had obligingly entered the lady to enable Rabbi Shimon to effect his miracle.

This rabbi bore a large part in the fixation of law, and his decisions are frequently quoted. To him were attributed the important legal homilies called Sifre and Mekhilta, and above all the Zohar, the main work of the Kabbalah.

The fullest account of Rabbi Shimon's teachings is to be found in W Bacher's *Agada der Tannaiten*, ii. pp. 70-149. When the Talmud attributes a teaching to Rabbi Shimon without specifying which Rabbi Shimon is meant, it means Shimon bar Yochai.

Lag Ba'omer is traditionally regarded as his Yahrzeit (the anniversary of the death). Some dispute this.

Unlike other Yahrzeits, this one is widely known as a Yom Hillula, a day of celebration. This is based on the original text of *Shaar HaKavanot* by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, which refers to the day as Yom Simchato ("the day of his happiness"), rather than Yom SheMet ("the day that he died"). There is thus a very widely observed custom to celebrate on his yahrzeit, at Meron, the burial place of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son, Rabbi Eleazar ben Simon. With torches, song and feasting, the Yom Hillula is celebrated by tens of thousands of people. This celebration was a specific request by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai of his students. It is a custom at the Meron celebrations, dating from the time of Rabbi Isaac Luria, that three-year-old boys are given their first haircuts (called upshirin), while their parents distribute wine and sweets.

While it is widely accepted that Rabbi Shimon and his son were buried somewhere on Mount Meron, the building generally accepted as being his grave is an arched structure typical of crusader architecture, which is clearly shown in the photo of the building interior.

Sidon



No man may abstain from keeping the law "Be fertile and increase" (Gen. 1:28)



<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/infertile-wife-in-rabbinic-judaism>

The primary *halakhic* statement on procreation is found in *Mishnah* Yevamot 6:6 and is further elaborated in BT Yevamot 65b-66a. According to Mishnah Yevamot 6:6:

No man may abstain from keeping the law "Be fertile and increase" (Gen. 1:28), unless he already has children: according to the School of Shammai, two sons; according to the School of Hillel, a son and a daughter, for it is written, "Male and female He created them" (Gen. 5:2). If he married a woman and lived with her ten years and she bore no child, it is

not permitted him to abstain [from fulfilling this legal obligation]. If he divorced her she may be married to another and the second husband may live with her for ten years. If she had a miscarriage the space [of ten years] is measured from the time of the miscarriage. The duty to be fruitful and multiply falls on the man but not on the woman. R. Johanan b. Baroka [dissents from this view and] says: Of them both it is written, "God blessed them and God said to them, Be fertile and increase" (Gen. 1:28).

The Text: Song of Songs Rabbah 1:4

תמן תנינו, נשא אדם אשה ושהה עמה עשר שנים ולא ילדה, אינו רשאי לבטל. אמר רבי אידי מעשה באשה אחת בצידון ששהתה עשר שנים עם בעלה ולא ילדה, אתון גבי רבי שמעון בן יוחאי בעין למשתבקה דין מדין, אמר להון חייכון בשם שגזדוגתם זה לזה במאכל ובמשתה, כך אין אתם מתפרשים אלא מתוך מאכל ומשתה. הלכו בדרכיו ועשו לעצמן יום טוב ועשו סעודה גדולה ושפרתו יותר מדאי, פיון שנתישבה דעתו עליו אמר לה בתי ראי כל חפץ טוב שיש לי בבית, וטלי אותו ולכי לבית אביך, מה עשתה היא, לאחר שישן רמזה לעבדיה ולשפחותיה ואמרה להם, שאוהו במטה וקחו אותו והוליכוהו לבית אבא. בחצי הלילה נער משנתיה פיון דפג חמריה, אמר לה בתי היכן אני נתון, אמרה ליה בבית אבא, אמר לה מה לי לבית אביך, אמרה ליה ולא כך אמרת לי בערב, כל חפץ טוב שיש בביתי טלי אותו ולכי לבית אביך. אין חפץ טוב לי בעולם יותר ממך. הלכו להם אצל רבי שמעון בן יוחאי ועמד והתפלל עליהם ונפקדו.

We have learned in a Mishnah there (Yevamot 6:6): If a man married a woman and remained with her for ten years, but she did not bear him children, he is not permitted to abstain from fulfilling his obligation to procreate.

Rabbi Idi said: There was an incident involving a woman in Sidon, who had remained with her husband for ten years but she did not bear him children.

They came before Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai seeking to part from each other.

[Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said to them, "By your lives! Just as you joined together as husband and wife with festive eating and drinking, so too, you shall not separate except through festive eating and drinking."

They followed his guidance and made a celebration for themselves, - and they prepared a great feast, and [the wife] gave [the husband] an overabundance of intoxicating drink.

When [the husband's] mind became calm and relaxed, he said to her - "My daughter! Look at any valuable object that I have in the house, and take it for yourself and go to your father's house.

What did [the wife] then do? After [her husband] fell asleep, she signaled to her servants and to her maidservants and she said to them, "Lift [my husband] in his bed, and take him and bring him to my father's house."

In the middle of the night [the husband] awoke from his sleep. Since the effects of his wine had dissipated, he said to [his wife], "My daughter! Where am I found?"

She answered him, "In my father's house."

He said to her, "What do I have to do with your father's house? Why am I here?"

She answered him, "Did you not say to me in the evening, 'Any valuable item that I have in my house take and go back with it to your father's house'? There is no object in the world more valuable to me than you!"

They returned to Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai. Upon hearing the story, [Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai] arose and prayed on their behalf, and they were granted fertility.



Explaining the Story

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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why did the couple go to Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why didn't the husband plan to divorce his wife before the years had passed?

Bonus ? What do you think Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai had in mind when he told the couple: "By your lives! Just as you joined together as husband and wife with festive eating and drinking, so too, you shall not separate except through festive eating and drinking"?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why did the couple follow the advice of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why does the husband call his wife "my daughter"?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why was the wife supposed to go to her father's house?

? What did the husband mean by his statement "My daughter, pick out any article you want in my house and take it with you to your father's house"?

? Why did the wife take her husband to her father's house?

Bonus ? Why did the wife take her husband to her father's house when he was asleep and intoxicated as opposed to waiting for her husband to wake up and then tell him how much she loves him?

? What do you think about the appendix to our story: "They returned to Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai. Upon hearing the story, [Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai] arose and prayed on their behalf, and they were granted fertility"?

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

! Rabbi Shimon's lesson: If you have to terminate a relationship, strive to do it on good terms, highlighting good memories. This will help you as you engage in new relationships.

! The wife's lesson: You need two to break a relationship, but many times one alone can save it!



Our story, one of the most beautiful love stories in the Rabbinic tradition, presents us with a couple at the verge of divorce. Jewish law commands that a husband

leaves his wife and remarries if they cannot conceive, so they go to Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, so he could arrange for their divorce.

Using his rabbinic authority, Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, as any great family therapist or good mediator would do, tells the couple that their parting should be on amicable terms and that their last memory together should be a good one.

When the husband tells his wife to take any item she likes as a parting gift, she takes him, reminding us that while you usually need two sides to break a relationship, many times one side alone, if she or he is smart, can save it.