

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [98]

"Foolish Galilean!"

Insights into the Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 53b



Background to Our Story

Berurya



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Berakhot. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 61

Berurya was the wife of the *tanna* Rabbi Meir. She was the daughter of the *tanna* Rabbi Hanina ben Teradyon, who was one of the ten martyrs. She was renowned not only for her character and personality, but also for her extensive Torah knowledge. Her aptitude for Torah study exemplified her exceptional genius. She disagreed with several Sages of her generation, and we find that the *halakha* in that dispute was ruled in accordance with her opinion.

As a result of decrees of persecution, nearly her entire family was martyred. Calamity continued to afflict her throughout her life when her two children died in a single day. The Gemara relates how she conducted herself with exceptional courage. From a story which is only alluded to in the Talmud, we know that her own death also came about in the wake of a series of painful events. (See Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 18 a, and Rashi there)

Aside from a few halakhic statements, we find several places in the Talmud where her modest and considerate characteristics are manifested even through sharp responses to various people.

Rabbi Yosei HaGelili



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Zebachim Part 1. Koren publishers Jerusalem. Page 320

Rabbi Yosei was known as HaGelili, from the Galilee, to distinguish him from Rabbi Yosei ben Halafta, who was also known as simply Rabbi Yosei. Rabbi Yosei HaGelili was a *tanna* in the first generation after the destruction of the Second Temple. It is not known who his initial teachers in the Galilee were, but from the story here it seems that he was already a respected Torah scholar even before his arrival in Yavne. Elsewhere the Gemara describes other disputes that he had with Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva, who accorded him special honor. It appears that he received the title of Rabbi very soon after arriving in Yavne and was counted among the elders. Rabbi Akiva's students often taught his statements.

Rabbi Yosei HaGelili's statements appear dozens of times in the Mishna, where he engages in disputes with the greatest scholars of the generation on various subjects. Even though his opinion was not accepted by all, there were places that followed his rulings.

While it seems that his primary area of expertise was in the realm of *halakha*, there are also several aggadic statements in his name.

Rabbi Yosei HaGelili was famous for his piety. He was also known as one who was humble and whose prayers were accepted.

His wife was ill-tempered, and he divorced her, although he required financial assistance to do so. Nevertheless, when he later discovered that she and her new husband were poor, he provided for them financially for the remainder of their lives. One of his sons died young. Two of his sons, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Hanina, were among the great Torah scholars of the next generation. Rabbi Eliezer was famous as a master of aggadic statements.

Mishnah Avot 1:5

יוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים אומר, יהי ביתך פתוח לרחוקה, ויהיו עניים בני ביתך, ואל תרבה שיחה עם האשה. באשתו אמרו, קל וחמור באשת חברי. מכאן אמרו חכמים, כל זמן שאדם מרבה שיחה עם האשה, גורם רעה לעצמו, ובוטל מדברי תורה, וסופו יורש גיהנום:

Yose ben Yochanan (a man) of Jerusalem used to say: Let thy house be wide open and let the poor be members of thy household.

Engage not in too much conversation with women. They said this with regard to one's own wife, how much more [does the rule apply] with regard to another man's wife. From here the Sages said: as long as a man engages in too much conversation with women, he causes evil to himself, he neglects the study of the Torah, and in the end he will inherit gehinnom.

248 limbs and organs of the human body

◆ AI Overview

In Jewish tradition, the 248 positive mitzvot (commandments to act) directly correspond to the 248 limbs and organs of the human body. This fundamental concept, first expounded by the Talmudic sage Rabbi Simlai in Tractate Makkot 23b, teaches that every physical part of a person is designed to be elevated, sanctified, and spiritually nourished through action.

The Structure of the 613 Mitzvot

The total number of Biblical commandments is 613 (known as the *Taryag Mitzvot*), which is divided into two distinct biological and spiritual categories:

- 248 Positive Commandments (*Mitzvot Aseh*): These are the "do's" of Jewish law (e.g., charity, prayer, wearing tefillin). They correspond to the 248 limbs (*evanim*).
- 365 Negative Commandments (*Mitzvot Lo Ta'aseh*): These are the "don'ts" or prohibitions (e.g., do not steal, do not murder). They correspond to the 365 sinews, blood vessels, and ligaments (*gidim*), as well as the 365 days of the solar year.

Studying Aloud

It is proper to study Torah out loud, as in this way one's studies will endure and will not be quickly forgotten (*Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'a 246:22*).

The Text: Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 53b

רבי יוסי הגלילי הנה קא אָזיל באַרְחָא, אַשְׁפַּתְחָה לְבְרוּרְיָה, אָמַר לָהּ: בְּאִיזוֹ דֶּרֶךְ גֵּלָף לְלוֹד?
אָמְרָה לִיה: גְּלִילִי שׁוֹטָה, לֹא כֹךְ אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים אֶל תְּרֻבָּה שְׂיִתָּה עִם הָאִשָּׁה; הֲנָה לָךְ לֹמֶר: בְּאִיזָה לְלוֹד.

בְּרוּרְיָה אַשְׁפַּתְחָתִיהָ לְהֵהוּא תַלְמִידָא דְהוּהָ קָא גָרִיס בְּלַחֲשָׁה, בְּטָשָׁה בֵּיהּ, אָמְרָה לִיה: לֹא כֹךְ כָּתוּב:
"עָרוּכָה בְּפֶל וְשִׁמּוּרָה", אִם עָרוּכָה בְּרַמ"ח אַבְרִים שְׁלָף – מִשְׁתַּמֶּרֶת, וְאִם לֹא – אֵינָה מִשְׁתַּמֶּרֶת.

Short Story 1

Rabbi Yosei HaGelili was walking along the way and met Berurya.

He said to her: On which path shall we walk in order to get to Lod?

She [Berurya] said to him: Foolish Galilean, didn't the Sages say: Do not indulge in excessive conversation with a woman? You should have said your question more succinctly: Which to Lod?

Short Story 2

Berurya came across a certain student who was reviewing his studies quietly rather than raising his voice. She kicked him and said to him: Is the following not written (*II Samuel 23:5*) *Arranged in all and secure*? If [your learning] is arranged in [all] your two hundred and forty-eight limbs, [then] it is secure [and will not be forgotten]; but if not, it is not secure [and will be forgotten].



Explaining the Story

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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Short Story 1

? Why did Rabbi Yosei HaGelili ask Berurya "On which path shall we walk to Lod?"

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Extra Bonus ? What do you think about Berurya's reply?

Bonus ? Why do you think Berurya replied to Rabbi Yosei the way she did?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus ? Why do you think Rabbi Yosei didn't answer back to Berurya? ? How do you think he felt? ? What would you write in Rabbi Yose's "bubble thought"?



Extra Bonus ? What is ironic in Berurya's answer to Rabbi Yosei?

Short Story 2

? Why do you think the student was reviewing his studies quietly?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Why did Berurya kick the student who was quietly reviewing his studies?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus ? Why do you think the student didn't answer back to Berurya? ? How do you think he felt? ? What would you write in the student's "bubble thought"?



One Last Question

? We are all product of our stories (our journeys, our backgrounds) and our choices. Based on what you know of Berurya (the short bio above), and our two short stories, what do you think is Berurya's story? What would you write in her "bubble thought"?



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



- ! What's wrong with you?! – Understanding Berurya (but not excusing her).
- ! Being smart doesn't preclude being kind: the lesson Berurya has yet to master.
- ! You cannot go through life (forever) cursing and kicking people to make your point!



In our two short stories, we encounter a very belligerent Berurya. Self-confident, a product of her own intelligence and her rabbinic lineage, Berurya is quick to admonish students and Sages alike. We can only imagine the feelings and thoughts of Rabbi Yosei HaGelili and the student after their encounter with Berurya. Dumbfounded and too embarrassed to answer back, they let Berurya continue to live in her own thoughts, giving the reader the feeling that "something is wrong here" and that things may not turn out well for Berurya if she were to continue on this path.