

A Story of Rabbi Eliezer and Elazar ben Azaria

Before and After the Destruction of the Temple

מסכתות קטנות מסכת אבות דרבי נתן נוסחא א פרק ד

על גמילות חסדים כיצד הרי הוא אומר כי חסד חפצתי ולא זבח (הושע ו' ו') העולם מתחלה לא נברא אלא בחסד שנאמר כי אמרתי עולם חסד יבנה שמים תכין אמונתך בהם (תהלים פ"ט ג'). פעם אחת היה רבן יוחנן בן זכאי יוצא מירושלים והיה ר' יהושע הולך אחריו וראה בית המקדש חרב אמר ר' יהושע אוי לנו על זה שהוא חרב מקום שמכפרים בו עונותיהם של ישראל. א"ל בני אל ירע לך יש לנו כפרה אחת שהיא כמותה ואיזה זה גמילות חסדים שנאמר כי חסד חפצתי ולא זבח (הושע ו' ו').

Once Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai was travelling from Yerushalayim and Rabbi Yehoshua was with him, they saw the destroyed Temple. Rabbi Yehoshuah said, "Woe is us that the place that our sins were cleansed is now destroyed." Rabbi Yochanan replied, "worry not, my son. We have another vehicle for absolution: acts of kindness....."

Stove of Achnai

We learned elsewhere: 79 "If he cut it into separate tiles, placing sand between each tile: Rabbi Eliezer declared it clean, and the sages declared it unclean; and this was the oven of 'Aknai." 80 Why [the oven of] 'Aknai?—Said Rav Judah in Samuel's name: "[It means] that they encompassed it with arguments as a snake, 81 and proved it unclean."

It has been taught: On that day Rabbi Eliezer brought forward every imaginable argument, but they did not accept them. Said he to them: "If the halakhah agrees with me, let this carob-tree prove it!"

Thereupon the carob-tree was torn a hundred cubits out of its place. Others affirm, four hundred cubits.

"No proof can be brought from a carob-tree," they retorted.

Again he said to them: "If the halakhah agrees with me, let the stream of water prove it!"—whereupon the stream of water flowed backwards.

"No proof can be brought from a stream of water," they rejoined.

Again he urged: "If the halakhah agrees with me, let the walls of the schoolhouse prove it," whereupon the walls inclined to fall.

But Rabbi Joshua rebuked them, saying: "When scholars are engaged in a halakhic dispute, what have you to interfere?"

Hence they did not fall, in honor of Rabbi Joshua, nor did they resume their upright position, in honor of Rabbi Eliezer; and they are still standing thus inclined.

Again he said to them: "If the halakhah agrees with me, let it be proved from Heaven!" Whereupon a Heavenly Voice cried out: "Why do you dispute with Rabbi Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the halakhah agrees with him!" But Rabbi Joshua arose and exclaimed: "It is not in heaven." 82

What did he mean by this? Said Rabbi Jeremiah: That the Torah had already been given at Mount Sinai; we pay no attention to a Heavenly Voice, because You have long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, "After the majority must one incline." 83

Rabbi Nathan met Elijah (the prophet) and asked him: "What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do in that hour?—He laughed [with joy]," he replied, "saying, 'My sons have defeated Me, My sons have defeated Me.'"

It was said: On that day all objects which Rabbi Eliezer had declared clean were brought and burnt in fire. Then they took a vote and excommunicated him. 84 Said they, "Who shall go and inform him?"

"I will go," answered Rabbi Akiva, "lest an unsuitable person go and inform him, and thus destroy the whole world." 85

What did Rabbi Akiva do? He donned black garments and wrapped himself in black, and sat at a distance of four cubits from him.

"Akiva," said Rabbi Eliezer to him, "what has particularly happened today?"

"Master," he replied, "it appears to me that your companions hold aloof from you." 86 Thereupon he too rent his garments, put off his shoes, removed [his seat] and sat on the earth, 87 while tears streamed from his eyes. The world was then smitten: a third of the olive crop, a third of the wheat, and a third of the barley crop. Some say, the dough in women's hands swelled up. 88

משנה ח

רבן יוחנן בן זכאי קבל מהלל ומשמאי הוא היה אומר אם למדת תורה הרבה אל תחזיק טובה לעצמך כי לכך נוצרת חמשה תלמידים היו לרבן יוחנן בן זכאי ואלו הן רבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס ורבי יהושע בן חנניה ורבי יוסי הכהן ורבי שמעון בן נתנאל ורבי אלעזר בן ערך הוא היה מונה שבחן רבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס בור סיד שאינו מאבד טפה רבי יהושע אשרי יולדתו רבי יוסי חסיד רבי שמעון בן נתנאל ירא חטא ורבי אלעזר בן ערך מעין המתגבר [ח] הוא היה אומר אם יהיו כל חכמי ישראל בכף מאזנים ואליעזר בן הורקנוס בכף שניה מכריע את כולם אבא שאול אומר משמו אם יהיו כל חכמי ישראל בכף מאזנים ורבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס אף עמהם ורבי אלעזר בכף שניה מכריע את כולם:

Rabban Yochanan ben (son of) Zakkai had five [primary] students. The were: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkenos, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yossi the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Nesanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach He used to enumerate their praises: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkenos is a cemented pit which never loses a drop; Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya - fortunate is she who bore him; Rabbi Yossi the Priest is pious; Rabbi Shimon ben Nesanel fears sin; and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach is as an overflowing spring.

The Story of Yehudah ben Bava

his name is R. Judah b. Baba; were it not for him, the laws of kenas would have been forgotten in Israel.' Forgotten? Then they could have been learned. But these laws might have been abolished; because once the wicked Government,¹ [as an act of religious persecution],² decreed that whoever performed an ordination should be put to death, and whoever received ordination should he put to death, the city in which the ordination took place demolished, and the boundaries³ wherein it had been performed, uprooted. What did R. Judah b. Baba do? He went and sat between two great mountains, [that lay] between two large cities; between the Sabbath boundaries of the cities of Usha and Shefaram⁴ and there ordained five elders:⁵ viz., R. Meir, R.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף יז עמוד א

בטלו דיני קנסות מישאל. שפעם אחת גזרה מלכות הרשעה שמד על ישראל, שכל הסומך - יהרג, וכל הנסמך - יהרג, ועיר שסומכין בה - תיחרב, ותחומין שסומכין בהן - יעקרו. מה עשה יהודה בן בבא? הלך וישב לו בין שני הרים גדולים, ובין שתי עיירות גדולות, ובין שני תחומי שבת, בין אושא לשפרעם. וסמך שם חמשה זקנים, ואלו הן: רבי מאיר, ורבי יהודה, ורבי שמעון, ורבי יוסי, ורבי אלעזר בן שמוע. רב אויא מוסיף: אף רבי נחמיה. כיון שהכירו אויביהם בהן אמר להן: בניי, רוצו! אמרו לו: רבי, מה תהא עליך? - אמר להן: הריני מוטל לפנייהם

Judah, R. Simeon, R. Jose and R. Eliezer b. Shamua'. R. Awia adds also R. Nehemia in the list. As soon as their enemies discovered them he [R.J.b.B.] urged them: 'My children, flee.' They said to him, 'What will become of thee, Rabbi?' 'I lie before them like a stone which none [is concerned to] overturn,'⁶ he replied. It was said that the enemy did not stir from the spot until they had driven three hundred iron spear-heads into his body, making it like a sieve.⁷ — With R. Judah b. Baba were in fact some others, but in honour to him, they were not mentioned.

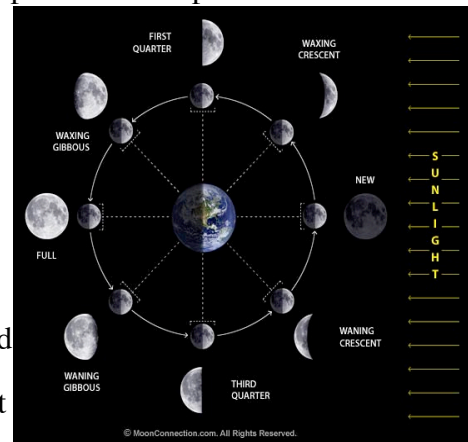
כאבן שאין לה הופכים. אמרו: לא זזו משם עד שנעצו בו שלש מאות לונביאות של ברזל, ועשאוהו ככברה. - רבי יהודה בן בבא אחרוני הווי בהדיה, והאי דלא חשיב להו - משום כבודו דרבי יהודה בן בבא. - ורבי מאיר רבי יהודה בן בבא סמכיה? והא אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: כל האומר רבי מאיר לא סמכו רבי עקיבא - אינו אלא טועה! - סמכיה רבי עקיבא ולא קיבלו, סמכיה רבי יהודה בן בבא - וקיבלו.

A Story of Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria

It is related that a certain disciple came before R. Joshua and asked him, Is the evening Tefillah compulsory or optional? He replied: It is optional. He then presented himself before Rabban Gamaliel and asked him: Is the evening Tefillah compulsory or optional? He replied: It is

compulsory. But, he said, did not R. Joshua tell me that it is optional? He said: Wait till the champions¹⁴ enter the Beth ha-Midrash. When the champions came in, someone rose and inquired, Is the evening Tefillah compulsory or optional? Rabban Gamaliel replied: It is compulsory. Said Rabban Gamaliel to the Sages: Is there anyone who disputes this? R. Joshua replied to him: No. He said to him: Did they not report you to me as saying that it is optional? He then went on: Joshua, stand up and let them testify against you! R. Joshua stood up and said: Were I alive and he [the witness] dead, the living could contradict the dead. But now that he is alive and I am alive, how can

the living contradict the living?¹⁵ Rabban Gamaliel remained sitting and expounding and R. Joshua remained standing, until all the people there began to shout and say to Huzpith the turgeman,¹⁶ Stop! and he stopped. They then said: How long is he [Rabban Gamaliel] to go on insulting him [R. Joshua]? On New Year last year he insulted him;¹⁷ he insulted him in the matter of the firstborn in the affair of R. Zadok;¹⁸ now he insults him again! Come, let us depose him! Whom shall we appoint instead? We can hardly appoint R. Joshua, because he is one of the parties involved. We can hardly appoint R. Akiba because perhaps Rabban Gamaliel will bring a curse on him because he has no ancestral merit. Let us then appoint R. Eleazar b. Azariah, who is wise and rich and the tenth in descent from Ezra. He is wise, so that if anyone puts a question to him he will be able to answer it. He is rich, so that if occasion arises for paying court¹⁹ to Caesar he will be able to do so. He is tenth in descent from Ezra, so that he has ancestral merit and he [Rabban Gamaliel] cannot bring a curse on him. They went and said to him: Will your honour consent to become head of the Academy? He replied: I will go and consult the members of my family. He went and consulted his wife. She said to



him

Perhaps they will depose you later on. He replied to her: [There is a proverb:] Let a man use a cup of honour¹ for one day even if it be broken the next. She said to him: You have no white hair. He was eighteen years old that day, and a miracle was wrought for him and eighteen rows of hair [on his beard] turned white. That is why R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: Behold I am about seventy years old,² and he did not say [simply] seventy years old. A Tanna taught: On that day the doorkeeper was removed and permission was given to the disciples to enter. For Rabban Gamaliel had issued a proclamation [saying]. No disciple whose character does not correspond to his exterior³ may enter the Beth ha-Midrash. On that day many stools⁴ were added. R. Johanan said: There is a difference of opinion on this matter between Abba Joseph b. Dosethai and the Rabbis: one [authority] says that four hundred stools were added, and the other says seven hundred. Rabban Gamaliel became alarmed and said: Perhaps, God forbid, I withheld Torah from Israel!⁵ He was shown in his dream white casks full of ashes.⁶ This, however, really meant nothing; he was only shown this to appease