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Bava Metzia Daf 84

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Daf Notes is currently being dedicated to the neshamot of

Moshe Raphael ben Yehoshua (Morris Stadtmauer) o”h

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May the studying of the Daf Notes be a zechus for their neshamot and may their souls find peace in Gan Eden and be bound up in the Bond of life

Sages' Appearances

The *Gemora* relates that Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yosi and Rabbi Elozar the son of Rabbi Shimon had such large stomachs that if they would face their stomachs together, a pair of cattle could pass under them, without touching them. A noblewoman once challenged them that if they are so large, they would not be able to have relations with their wives, and therefore their children must be illegitimate. They answered that in fact their wives were even larger than them, but that did not preclude marital relations, either because their organs were proportionately larger as well, or because love compresses flesh. Even though one is told by King Shlomo not to answer foolish questions, they needed to reply in order to remove any suspicion regarding their children. The *Gemora* then lists the large dimensions of the various Sages.

Rabbi Yochanan said that only he remained from the beautiful families of Yerushalayim. The *Gemora* says that if one wishes to see the beauty of Rabbi Yochanan, he should take a freshly minted silver cup, fill it up with red pomegranate seeds, line the rim of the cup with red roses, and place the cup at the edge of shade and sunlight. The luminance that emerges is akin to Rabbi Yochanan's beauty. Since Rabbi Yochanan did not have a beard, he was not listed in the chain of beauty that began with Adam, went to Yaakov Avinu, then to Rabbi Avahu, and then to Rabbi Kahana. Rabbi Yochanan would sit at the exit of the immersion baths, so that the women emerging would see his beauty, and so conceive children who are beautiful and Torah scholars, like Rabbi Yochanan. Rabbi

Yochanan explained that he was not concerned with an evil eye affecting him, since he came from the tribe of Yosef, which is immune to the evil eye. (84a)

Rabbi Yochanan and Rish Lakish

One day, Rabbi Yochanan was bathing in the Jordan River. Rish Lakish, who was at this point a robber, saw him, and jumped into the Jordan after him. Rabbi Yochanan said to Rish Lakish that his strength was fitting for learning Torah, and Rish Lakish replied that Rabbi Yochanan's beauty was fitting for a woman. Rabbi Yochanan offered Rish Lakish marriage to his sister – who was more beautiful than him – if he committed to learn Torah. Rish Lakish agreed, and immediately was unable to jump back to get his clothes, as Torah reduces one's physical strength. Rabbi Yochanan taught Rish Lakish Torah, and made him into a prominent Torah scholar.

One day, they were debating at what point various cutting vessels are complete, and can then become susceptible to impurity. Rabbi Yochanan said they are complete when they are put in the furnace to be formed, while Rish Lakish said they are only complete when they are cooled off in water afterwards. Rabbi Yochanan said that Rish Lakish was familiar with such implements, since he had experience from his day of robbing. Rish Lakish retorted that Rabbi Yochanan had not helped Rish Lakish, since he was considered a leader before learning Torah from Rabbi Yochanan, just as he was now considered a leader. Rabbi Yochanan replied that he brought Rish Lakish close to God.

Rabbi Yochanan was upset at Rish Lakish's statement, and Rish Lakish got deathly ill as a result. Rish Lakish's wife (*Rabbi Yochanan's sister*) pleaded with Rabbi Yochanan to pray for Rish Lakish to recover, for her and her children's sake, but Rabbi Yochanan felt he should not do so. Rish Lakish died, and Rabbi Yochanan was distraught at having caused his death, and at losing his outstanding student and Torah study partner. The Sages sent Rabbi Elozar ben Pdas, who was very sharp in his learning, to learn with Rabbi Yochanan. Whenever Rabbi Yochanan would make a point in learning, Rabbi Elozar would provide numerous proofs to it. Rabbi Yochanan complained that when Rish Lakish was alive, for every point Rabbi Yochanan would make, Rish Lakish would present numerous challenges, and Rabbi Yochanan would address each one, thereby expanding and elucidating the Torah being studied. Rabbi Elozar's proofs were not necessary, since Rabbi Yochanan already had reason to think he was correct, and did not contribute to any deeper understanding of the topic. Rabbi Yochanan walked around, and tore his clothes in his distress, crying out, "Where are you, Rish Lakish?", until he went mad. The Sages prayed for him to pass away, and he did. (84a)

Rabbi Elozar b'Rabbi Shimon

The *Gemora* returns to discuss Rabbi Elozar the son of Rabbi Shimon. Even though he saw that his doubtful arrests were justified, he was distressed that he may have caused innocent people to be killed when enforcing the Roman law. He therefore accepted physical suffering as punishment. He invited leprosy on himself, to the extent that he bled through numerous sheets, and still had to be cleaned up and nursed back to the health in the morning. Due to his frail physical condition, his wife did not allow him to learn Torah in the morning; for fear that the Sages would torment him over their relatives that he had handed over to the government. Therefore, at night, he would invite the physical suffering, but then send them off in the morning, to be able to learn Torah.

One day, his wife heard him inviting the suffering, and she returned to her father's house, angry that Rabbi Elozar was knowingly inviting suffering, and incurring the large expenses to treat them.

Once, a large group of sailors came to Rabbi Elozar, bearing gifts of slaves carrying money, as well as much food. One day, Rabbi Elozar's wife sent their daughter to check on her father, and he told her to tell her mother that the Torah has enriched Rabbi Elozar more than his father in law, as the verse says – she (Torah) is like merchant ships, that bring food from far places. Rabbi Elozar then ate and drank, regaining his strength, and returned to the *Beis Medrash*.

Many specimens of women's blood were brought to him, and he ruled that all of them were not menstrual, and permitted the women to their husbands. The Sages mocked Rabbi Elozar's ruling, doubting that not even one of the specimens was impure. In response, Rabbi Elozar said that if he was correct, each woman would conceive a son, while if he was incorrect, one of them will conceive a daughter. All of the women conceived sons, and all were named Elozar in honor of Rabbi Elozar. Rebbe stated that the government that appointed Rabbi Elozar as a policeman prevented many births in the interim, since Rabbi Elozar was not available to view the specimens that women brought to the *Beis Medrash*. (84b)

Rabbi Elozar's Death

When he was dying, he told his wife that he knew that the Sages were upset at him, since he had handed some of their relatives over to the government, and they will not give him a proper funeral and burial. Therefore, he told her that when he dies, she should put his body in the attic, and not be afraid of him.

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeini said that Rabbi Elozar's wife told Rabbi Yonasan's mother that Rabbi Elozar's body was in the attic for 18-22 years. She would look at his hair, and when a hair fell out, blood could be seen at the wound,

just as in a live person. One day, she saw a worm exit his ear, and she was concerned that he may be decomposing. Rabbi Elozar told her not to worry, since the worm was simply a punishment for one time that he heard a Torah scholar being disgraced, and he didn't protest sufficiently. During this period, when two litigants would come to Rabbi Elozar's house, they would each present their arguments at the attic, and a voice from the attic would proclaim the verdict. (84b)

Rabbi Elozar's Burial

One day, Rabbi Elozar's wife was arguing with a neighbor. In the course of the argument, the neighbor cursed her, saying that she should not be buried, just like her husband. The Sages realized that they should bury Rabbi Elozar, since it was disrespectful for him that people knew that he was not buried. Another version says that Rabbi Shimon appeared to the Sages in a dream, and told them that Rabbi Elozar should be buried to join him in heaven. When the Sages starting working on burying Rabbi Elozar, the town residents of Achberaya, near Rabbi Elozar's house, prevented them, since in the interim no wild animals had attacked the town - in Rabbi Elozar's merit.

One Erev Yom Kippur, when the Achberaya people were busy in preparation for the fast, the Sages told the people of Biri to bury Rabbi Elozar in the cave where his father was buried. When they reached the cave, a snake blocked the entrance. They told the snake to open and allow the son to join his father, whereupon the snake allowed them in. (84b)

Rabbi Elozar's Widow

Rebbe inquired whether Rabbi Elozar's widow would marry him. She refused, indicating that Rebbe was inferior to Rabbi Elozar, and it was therefore not fitting for her to be married to him. Rebbe replied that while Rabbi Elozar was indeed superior to him in learning Torah, he was not superior to him in good deeds. Rabbi Elozar's widow responded that she can't judge the relative Torah scholarship levels (*to which Rebbe had already admitted inferiority*), but she could state that Rabbi Elozar was

superior to him in good deeds, since he willingly accepted suffering.

The *Gemora* tells the story that shows that Rabbi Elozar was superior to Rebbe in Torah learning. When Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karchah were sitting on benches in the *Beis Medrash*, Rebbe and Rabbi Elozar were on the floor, as students in front of their mentors, debating the Torah topics being studied. The teachers remarked that they were gaining so much from the debates of the students in front of them, that these students should also sit on benches. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, Rebbe's father, objected to Rebbe's conspicuous placement on the benches, due to fears of an evil eye, and returned Rebbe to the floor. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karchah said that we should also be concerned for Rabbi Elozar, even though he has no father here to advocate for him, so they returned Rabbi Elozar to the floor as well.

Rabbi Elozar was upset that Rebbe was put on equal footing with him. Until that point, when Rebbe would say something, Rabbi Elozar would bring proofs to his statement. From then on, when Rebbe would begin to say something, Rabbi Elozar would preempt him, stating what Rebbe was planning on saying, as well as the challenges to his statement, finally complaining that Rebbe was wasting time with statements of no merit. Rebbe was upset that Rabbi Elozar was so further advanced in Torah study than him, and discussed his concern with his father. His father told him that it was not his fault, but due to his lineage – while Rabbi Elozar's father was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who was like a lion, Rebbe's father was Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, who was only like a fox. This humility prompted Rebbe to say that there are three truly humble people – his father, the sons of Besaira, and Yonasan, the son of King Shaul.

This story illustrates the humility of his father. The sons of Besairah were the leaders of the Jews in Israel when Hillel



came and taught a law that all had forgotten, whereupon they appointed him the leader, indicating their humility. The *Gemora* challenges this by suggesting that they may have done this in recognition of Hillel's superior knowledge, and not from humility. Yonasan showed humility when he accepted Dovid becoming king, offering to serve under him, even though he was next in line to rule after his father. The *Gemora* challenges this by suggesting that Yonasan accepted Dovid's leadership since Dovid was popular, and not from humility. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, however, was truly humble, as evidenced by this story. (84b – 85a)

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

Sages' Appearance

The *Gemora* discusses the large dimensions of a number of the Sages. Tosfos understands the *Gemora* to be discussing the dimensions of these Sages' organs, and explains that the *Gemora* only does this to dispel any suspicion of illegitimacy of large people's children.

Rabbeinu Peretz says that *Gemora* is referring to how much each of the Sages would eat, while the Ritva says the *Gemora* is discussing the arm or thigh of these Sages, as an indication of their overall size.

Rish Lakish's Life Story

The *Gemora* tells us the story of how Rish Lakish came to learn Torah with Rabbi Yochanan, leaving behind a life of robbery.

Rabbeinu Tam (Tosfos 84a Ee) notes the phrase Rabbi Yochanan used in addressing Rish Lakish – if you return (*to learn Torah*), I will give you my sister in marriage. This phrase indicates that Rish Lakish was originally a Torah scholar before being a robber. Therefore, Rabbi Yochanan implored him to *return* to learning Torah. If Rish Lakish had never studied Torah before, and began his life as a robber, Rabbi Yochanan could not call his acceptance of Torah study a return. Rabbeinu Tam explains that when Rish Lakish told Rabbi Yochanan that “I was a leader

before I met you,” he was referring to his earlier Torah scholarship days, and not to his robbery days. Indeed, true *teshuvah* (*repentance, but literally, returning*) is for someone who began free of sin, then sinned, and then *returns* to his pre-sin state. Although one may feel that to have fallen from a sin-free state makes one worse than one who always sinned, true *teshuvah* is only in such a situation.

The Ben Yehoyada explains that Rabbi Yochanan did not mean to insult Rish Lakish when he remarked that Rish Lakish has experience with cutting tools. Instead, he sincerely meant that Rish Lakish's life experience gives him insight into the use of such utensils, and he is therefore correct in his ruling. Rish Lakish was still slighted at the mention of his earlier activities.

Rish Lakish and Rabbi Yochanan's Deaths

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz asks why the Sages prayed for Rabbi Yochanan to pass away, instead of praying for him to get better. In addition, Rabbi Yochanan lost ten sons, and remained steadfast in his service of God, so why was he not able to handle the loss of Rish Lakish?

Rav Chaim answers that when he lost Rish Lakish, he lost the ability to delve deeply and insightfully into Torah, and that was more unbearable than the loss of his sons. If the Sages were to pray for Rabbi Yochanan to feel better, he would once more fall into his mad state, due to the loss of Rish Lakish. Rav Chaim explains that Rabbi Yochanan felt he could not pray for Rish Lakish's recovery, since his mocking reply to Rabbi Yochanan damaged the position of a Torah teacher, and there is no room for forgiveness in that area. See Sichos Musar (5731:19. 5732:33, 5733:13)