



DERECH B'YAM HATALMUD



REBBI SHIMON IN THE CAVE

**A Guided Approach to Understanding
the Story of Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai**

From the Gemara (Shabbos 33b-34a)

**L'ilui Nishmas Chaim Rock (Chaim ben Kalman Shlomo)
and the other Meron Kedoshim**

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SECTION ONE



Why Was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai Permitted to Eat from the Fruit of the Tree?

OVERVIEW

The Gemara in Shabbos 33b-34a relates the events of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son in the cave, and the miraculous creation of the carob tree and stream of water. Among the issues which must be clarified is why they were permitted to eat from the tree; its fruit should have been forbidden due to the prohibition of Orlah.

מראה מקומות

- גמרא מס' שבת דף לג: מ- "ואמאי קרו ליה" עד "ועינא דמיא"
- מהרש"א (ד"ה ואיברו להו חרובא)
- דרך אמונה - חלק ג' (הלכות מעשר שני ונטע רבעי י:ו) ו- וביאור הלכה (ד"ה העולה מאליו במקום טרשים)

Summary of the Gemara

*The Gemara on Shabbos daf 33b brings a Baraisa which says that **Rebbi Yehuda** was called **ראש המדברים בכל מקום** – the first speaker in all public gatherings. **ראש המדברים בכל מקום** – The Gemara asks: why was he given this title?*

It relates the following episode to explain why he received this accolade:

*(Once,) Rebbi Yehuda, Rebbi Yosi and Rebbi Shimon (bar Yochai) were sitting together, **ויתבי יהודה בן גרים גביהו** – and Yehuda ben Geirim was sitting near them.*

-Rashi (ד"ה בן גרים) says that Yehuda ben Geirim was given this name because he was born to two converts.

כמה נאים – *Rebbi Yehuda began speaking, and said,* פתח רבי יהודה ואמר מעשיהן של אומה זו – *“How beautiful are the actions of this nation (the Roman Empire).”* – *“They established markets (and) built bridges (and) bathhouses.”*

רבי יוסי שתיק – *The Gemara records that Rebbi Yosi was silent (not arguing with him and not agreeing with him).*

נענע רבי שמעון בר יוחי ואמר כל מה שתקנו לא תקנו אלא לצורך עצמן – *Rebbi Shimon responded and said, “Everything they did, they did only for their own needs.”*

תקנו שווקין להושיב בהן זונות – *“They established markets to place in them prostitutes,”* מרחצאות לעדן בהן עצמן – *“bathhouses to beautify themselves,”* גשרים ליטול מהן מכס – *“(and) bridges to collect tolls.”*

הלך יהודה בן גרים וסיפר דבריהם ונשמעו למלכות – *Yehuda ben Geirim went out and told over the events, and his report reached the (Roman) authorities.*

-Rashi (ד"ה וסיפר דבריהם) says that Yehuda ben Geirim reported the conversation of the three Tannaim to his students or his parents, but he did not directly tell the מלכות (government). However, it still heard because of him.

(The identity of Yehuda ben Geirim and his actions will be analyzed further below.)

The Gemara continues and describes how the Romans responded to the actions of each Tanna:

אמרו יהודה שעילה יתעלה – *They (the Romans) announced, “(Rebbi) Yehuda who raised up (the status of the Romans), he will be elevated.”*

Rashi (ד"ה יתעלה) says that because of Rebbi Yehuda's words raising up the status of the Romans, they elevated him to be the ראש המדברים.

The **Ben Ish Chai** in (ד"ה שם ראש המדברים) says that it had already been decreed by Hashem that Rebbi Yehuda would be made the ראש המדברים.

(See there for why he deserved this role.)

יְוֹסִי שֶׁשָׁתָק יִגְלָה לְצִיפּוֹרִי – “(Rebbi) Yosi who was silent (and did not praise the Romans), he will be banished to (the city of) Tzippori.”¹

שֶׁמְעוֹן שְׂגִינָה יִהָרַג – “(Rebbi) Shimon who disparaged (the Romans), he will be killed.”

אֹזֵל הוּא וּבְרִיָּה טָשׁוּ בֵּי מְדֻרְשָׁא – The Gemara says that (upon hearing of the Roman decree to kill him), Rebbi Shimon and his son (Rebbi Elazar) ran away and hid in the study hall.

כָּל יוֹמָא הוּוּהּ הַמֵּייתִי לֵהוּ דְבִיתָהּוּ רִיפְתָּא וְכוּזָא דְמֵיא וְכַרְכֵּי – Every day, Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai’s wife brought them bread and a pitcher of water, which they would eat.

כִּי תְקִיף גּוֹזֵרְתָּא – When the decree (referring to the Roman’s search) intensified, אָמַר לִיהּ לְבְרִיָּה נְשִׁים דַּעְתָּן קְלָה עֲלֵיהֶן דִּילְמָא מְצַעְרֵי לָהּ וּמַגְלִיא לָן – Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai said to his son, “the minds of women are weak (meaning, easily swayed). Perhaps the Romans will torture her and she will reveal (our hiding place) to them.”

אִתְרַחֵישׁ גִּיסָא – A miracle occurred, אֹזֵלָא טָשׁוּ בַּמְעַרְתָּא – They went and hid in a cave. אֵיבְרֵי לֵהוּ חֲרוּבָא וְעֵינָא דְמֵיא – and a carob (charuv) tree and a spring of water were created for them.

Understanding the miracle of the carob tree

The **נס בתוך נס** – **נס בהרש"א** (ד"ה ואיברו להו חרובא) says that the growth of the tree was a miracle within a miracle – because a carob tree normally requires 70 years to produce fruit (citing Taanis 23a). However here it grew and began producing fruit immediately.

The **Anaf Yosef** on the **עין יעקב** (לג: ד"ה איתרחש) also says that a double miracle occurred, but that this refers to the growth of the tree and the fact that it nourished them for so long. (Carob trees do not normally provide sufficient nourishment to support a person. He cites the **Zohar** which learns from the verse "צדיק כתמר יפרח" [Tehillim 92:13] that only a date tree has this ability.)

QUESTION: How could Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son eat from the tree? Since it grew and produced fruit immediately, it should have been prohibited for them to eat the carobs when they arrived at the cave. The rule of Orlah prohibits the consumption of fruit from a tree within the first three years after it was planted.

¹ In numerous places, the Gemara mentions events which occurred to Rebbi Yosi in Tzippori, and rulings he issued there, following this episode.

The Achronim suggest several answers for why there was no prohibition of Orlah regarding the carob tree of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Among the approaches they present are the following, which elucidate the prohibition of Orlah and details of the story:

Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky suggests three approaches why there was no prohibition of Orlah on Rabbi Shimon's carob tree.

In **Derech Emunah** (הלכות מעשר שני ונטע רבעי י:ו) he explains the words of the **Rambam** in **Mishneh Torah** who says **העולה מאליו במקום טרשים פטור** – if a tree grows on its own in rough, unoccupied land – or it is planted in a **מקום שאינו יישוב** – an area far from civilization – the prohibition of orlah does not apply to it.

In **Biur Halacha** (ד"ה העולה מאליו במקום טרשים), Rav Chaim brings three approaches to explain why Rabbi Shimon was permitted to eat from the carob tree as soon as it grew:

First, he says that the Rambam holds that fruit which grew on its own in a **רשות הרבים** – public domain – is exempt from orlah. Rav Chaim says it must be that Rabbi Shimon and his son never acquired the cave as their own. If they had, the tree would be growing close to a place of regular human occupation, causing it to be obligated in orlah.

Second, he references opinions who argue with the Rambam and hold that whenever a person eats fruit from a tree which is normal to eat, the rule of orlah applies. He suggests that according to these opinions, Rabbi Shimon and his son only ate the fruit because they were in a **מקום סכנה** – dangerous, life-threatening situation, and they ate only the amount necessary to live.

If they had eaten in a normal fashion, this would have caused the tree to be considered a typical **עץ מאכל** – fruit-bearing tree (according to these opinions). However since Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar ate in an atypical fashion, even their eating did not cause the tree to become obligated in orlah.

Third, he says that the carob tree of Rabbi Shimon was created through a miracle, as seen by the fact that it immediately produced fruit like an old tree. The rule of orlah does not apply to a tree produced by a miracle.

He says that the tree was considered to be nourished from heaven, not from the ground. It grew in a place **שאינו ראוי לזריעה** – which was not fit for planting. No other tree would have grown there, demonstrating that this grew only due to the miracle.

Since this tree was produced and nourished miraculously, orlah and other rules regarding plants growing from the ground did not apply to it.

SECTION TWO



Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai in the Cave

OVERVIEW

The Gemara describes the activities of Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son, and their actions upon emerging from it.

מראה מקומות

- גמרא לג: מ- "והוּוּ מְשַׁלְחֵי מְנִייהוּ" עַד "עֲשְׂרִין וָאַרְבַּע פִּירוּקִי"
- גליון הש"ס (ד"ה שם בעידו צלויי)
- בן יהוידע (ד"ה שם אתא אליהו)

Summary of the Gemara

The Gemara says that while Rebbi Shimon and his son were in the cave, they removed their clothes and sat in sand up to their necks.

When it was time to pray, they donned their clothing and prayed, and then removed their clothes so that they would not wear out.

QUESTION: Why does the Gemara here say that Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai prayed while in the cave, since the Gemara on Shabbos 11a says that he was exempt from praying due to his full-time immersion in Torah learning?

Rabbi Akiva Eiger in (ד"ה שם בעידו צלויי) references the Gemara on 11a which says תורתן אומנתן – people whose Torah study is their fulltime occupation – are

exempt from praying. (However, they are still obligated to recite Krias Shema).² It says that an example of people in this group are ר"ש בר יוחי והבירי – Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his contemporaries.

According to this statement, why does the Gemara on 33b say that Rabbi Shimon and his son prayed in the cave?

Rabbi Akiva Eiger cites **Tosefos** (ד"ה כגון) on 11a who says that the reference of the Gemara on 33b to the prayers of Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar refers to their recitation of Krias Shema alone.

איתבו תיסר שני במערתא – The Gemara says that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son dwelled in the cave for twelve years.

אתא אליהו וקם אפיתא דמערתא – (One day), Eliyahu (HaNavi) came and stood at the mouth of the cave. אמר מאן לודעיה לבר יוחא דמית קיסר – He said, "Who will inform the son of Yochai that the Caesar had died," ובטיל גזירתיה – "and that the decree has been annulled?"

The **Ben Ish Chai** in (ד"ה שם אתא אליהו) בן יהוידע says that the decree on Rabbi Shimon was nullified with the death of the Caesar, as his successor did not renew it.

(It appears from the Gemara here and in other places that the common practice among non-Jewish leaders at the time was that a decree made personally by one ruler automatically expired upon his passing.)

נפקו – (Upon hearing this,) they emerged from the cave.

חזו אינשי דקא כרבי וזרעי – The Gemara says that they saw people plowing and sowing (a field).

אמר מניחין חיי עולם ועוסקים בחיי שעה – Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, "these people are forsaking the life of the world (referring to the World to Come, or to Torah study in this world) and are involving themselves with the concerns of this temporary life!"

-Rashi (ד"ה "ועוסקין בחיי שעה") says that he was upset because he saw people doing manual work which could have been done by others, (instead of dedicating themselves to Torah study and the observance of Mitzvos), והקב"ה מחלק מזון וריוח לעושי רצונו, – since Hashem gives sustenance to those who perform His will.

² Note that this allowance no longer applies.

כל מקום שגותנין עיניהן – *The Gemara says that everywhere that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son looked, מיד נשרף – was immediately burnt.*

יצתה בת קול ואמרה להם להחריב עולמי יצאתם – *A Divine voice called out, “did you emerge (from the cave) to destroy My world? “היזרו למערתכם” – “Return to your cave!”*

הדור אזול – *They went and returned to it. They dwelled (another) twelve months, a full year. אמרי משפט רשעים בגיהנם. – They said, “the sentence of the wicked in Gehinom is (no longer than) twelve months. (Perhaps we are now permitted to leave?)*

-The **Ben Ish Chai** in (ד"ה שם אתא אליהו) says that they assumed that they been commanded to return to the cave as punishment for destroying everything their eyes saw, and that twelve months in the cave was sufficient for them to be forgiven.

יצתה בת קול ואמרה צאו ממערתכם – *A Divine voice called out, “emerge from your cave!”*

The **Aruch HaShulchan** (אורח חיים תצג:ז) says that they left the cave on Lag B'Omer. This is one of the reasons that it is a day of joy.

נפקו. כל היכא דהוה מחי רבי אלעזר הוה מסי רבי שמעון – *They emerged. Wherever Rabbi Elazar destroyed through his sight, Rabbi Shimon healed.*

אמר לו בני די לעולם אני ואתה – *Rebbi Shimon said, “my son, it is sufficient for the world that you and I are in it.”*

-**Rashi** (ד"ה די לעולם) explains that he was saying that our complete dedication to Torah (is sufficient to maintain the world).

-(See Sukkah daf 45b which says that the merits of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son were sufficient to protect the entire world.)

חזו ההוא – *As night began to fall on Erev Shabbos, בהדי פניא דמעלי שבתא סבא דהו נקט תרי מדאני אסא – they saw an old man who was bringing two bundles of myrtles, ורהיט בין השמשות, – and was running (home) with them as darkness set in.*

אמר לו למה לך – *They said to him, “why do you need these?”*

אמר להו לכבוד שבת – *He said, “they are in honor of Shabbos.”*

חד כנגד – *“But could you not suffice with one?” He replied, חד כנגד שמור – “One corresponds to Zachor (the command to mark*

Shabbos through positive actions), and one corresponds to Shamor (the command to refrain from transgressing Shabbos)."

-Rashi (ד"ה תרי מדאני) says that the man was bringing them להריח בשבת – to create a pleasant aroma on Shabbos.

אמר ליה לבריה חזי כמה חביבין מצות על ישראל – *Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai said, "see how precious the mitzvos are to the Jewish people."*

יתיב דעתייהו – *They were appeased (by this sight).*

The Gemara describes an event which occurred after they left the cave, which illustrates the depths of learning which Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai achieved in it.

שמע רבי פנחס בן יאיר התניה – *Rebbi Pinchas ben Yair, the son-in-law³ of Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai, heard (subsequently) that he had returned, ונפק לאפיה – and he went out to greet him.*

הוה קא אריך ליה – *He brought him into the bathhouse. עייליה לבי בניה – As he was massaging his flesh, חזי דהוה ביה פילי בגופיה – he saw that there were cracks in his skin (due to the abrasiveness of the sand).*

וקא נתרו דמעת היניה וקמצותא ליה – *Rebbi Pinchas began to cry, והוה הקא בכי – and as his tears fell from his eyes, they (fell onto Rebbi Shimon's skin and) caused him to cry out.*

-Rashi (ד"ה וקצווחו) says that the saltiness of the tears exacerbated Rebbi Shimon's wounds.

אמר ליה אוי לי שראיתך בכך – *He said to Rebbi Shimon, "how sad it is to be seeing you like this!"*

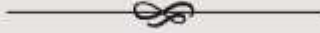
אמר לו אשריך שראיתני בכך – *He replied, "how fortunate are you to see me like this," שאילמלא לא ראיתני בכך לא מצאת בי כך – "since if you did not see me in such a state, you would not have found within me (such insights)."*

דמעיקרא כי הוה מקשי רבי שמעון בן יוחי קושיא – *The Gemara explains his comment: Originally when Rebbi Shimon ben Yochai would ask a question, פירוקי הוה מפרק ליה רבי פנחס בן יאיר תריסר – Rebbi Pinchas ben Yair would respond with twelve (possible) answers.*

לסוף כי מקשי רבי פנחס בן יאיר – *In the end, when Rebbi Pinchas ben Yair asked a question, הוה מפרק ליה רבי שמעון בן יוחי עשרין וארבעה פירוקי – Rebbi Shimon ben Yochai would respond with twenty-four answers.*

³ Numerous sources point out that Rebbi Pinchas was the father-in-law of Rebbi Shimon, and therefore the Gemara should read "הותניה" and not "התניה".

SECTION THREE



Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai Confronts his Accuser

OVERVIEW

The Gemara on 34a describes the dramatic events of Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai of meeting up with Yehuda ben Geirim. An analysis of their confrontation can help to clarify numerous details of the overall story.

מראה מקומות

- גמרא מ-לג: "אמר הואיל ואיתרחיש" עד לד. "גל של עצמות"
- עיון יעקב על העין יעקב (לד. ד"ה אמר הואיל)
- רש"י (לג: ד"ה בן גרים) ו- (לג: ד"ה וסיפר דבריהם)
- תוס' (לג: ד"ה ה"ג)
- ענף יוסף על העין יעקב (לג: ד"ה הלך יהודה בן גרים)
- חפץ חיים - הלכות לשון הרע (ב:ב-ג, ה)
- באר מים חיים (ג:ג מ- "במעשה דיהודה בן גרים" עד "הראיות הראשונות עיקר")
- באר מים חיים (ג:יב מ- "ובזה יהיה" עד "לא שייך גבייה כלל זה")

Summary of the Gemara

The Gemara towards the bottom of daf 33b presents the end of the episode after Rebbi Shimon ben Yochai emerged from the cave.

אמר הואיל ואיתרחיש ניסא איזיל אתקין מילתא – Rebbi Shimon ben Yochai said, "since a miracle was performed to rescue me (from the Romans), I will go and correct something (to benefit the community).

The Gemara says that Rebbi Shimon ben Yochai learned to do this from the example of Yaacov Avinu, who acted similarly after he was saved from danger. The Gemara cites the verse regarding Yaacov's actions:

"ויבא יעקב שלם" – דכתיב – *As the verse (Bereishis 33:18) teaches, "And Yaacov arrived intact (at the city of Shechem, after leaving Lavan's house and confronting Esav)."*

ואמר רב שלם בגופו שלם בממונו שלם בתורתו – *And Rav said this means that Yaacov was intact regarding his body, intact regarding his money and intact regarding his Torah (knowledge).*

"ויחן את פני העיר" – *The verse continues and says "and he encamped before the city."*

The Gemara says that at this time, Yaacov created a particular item to benefit the city of Shechem. The Amoraim differ on the item he made.

ושמואל, אמר רב מטבע תיקן להם – *Rav said that he minted coins for them,* אמר שמואל – *and Shmuel says that he created marketplaces for them,* ורבי יוחנן אמר מרחצאות תיקן להם – *and Rabbi Yochanan says he built bathhouses for them.*

-See the commentators on the Gemara and the Ein Yaacov who explain the debate and the particulars of each item which the Amoraim say that Yaacov established.

אמר איכא מילתא דבעי לתקוני – *Rebbi Shimon ben Yochai said (to the community leaders in the city of Tiveria), "is there an item (here) that needs improvement?"*

-The Talmud Yerushalmi (Sheviis 9:1) says that Rebbi Shimon ben Yochai decided to do this while bathing in one of the hot springs in the city.

-The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 79:6) says he did so due to a kindness which the people of Tiveria had done for him and his son.

אמרו ליה דוכתא דאית ביה ספק טומאה ואית להו צערא לכהנים – *They said, "there is a place which has a questionable status regarding ritual impurity,"* – לאקופי – *"and it is difficult for the Kohanim to go around it."*

אמר איכא איניש דידע דאיתחזק הכא טהרה – *He said, "is someone aware that this area was known to be pure?"*

אמר ליה ההוא סבא כאן קיצץ בר זכאי תורמסי תרומה – *An old man said, "(I recall that Rebbi Yochanan) ben Zakkai cut lupines from this area and that they were Terumah."*

-**Rashi** (ד"ה תורמסי תרומה) says that since Terumah is not permitted to become impure, this was a sign that the area was ritually pure. In addition, Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was a Kohen and would not have gone to the area had it been tamei.

עבד איהו נמי הכי – Rabbi Shimon did the same. כל היכא דהוה קשי – Anyplace (in which the ground) was firm, טהריה – he pronounced it pure. וכל היכא דהוה רפי צייניה – and every place that it was soft, he marked it.

The Rishonim differ on how to understand these lines of the Gemara.

Rashi (ד"ה עבד איהו) explains the Gemara based on the Talmud Yerushalmi (Sheviis 9:1). He says that Rabbi Shimon copied the actions of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai and cut branches of lupines and placed them on the ground.

ונעשה נס וצף המת במקום שהוא – Rashi explains that a miracle occurred, and wherever there was a dead body, it rose to the surface. (This was caused by the tahor status of the branches, as explained by the **Ben Yehodaya** and **Maharal**.)

וצייני המקום הקבר – And he marked the place of any graves he found.

Tosefos (ד"ה עבד איהו) says that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai imitated Yaacov Avinu, and rectified the problem with the tumah of the area.

QUESTION: Why did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai feel that the appropriate response to his miraculous salvation was to resolve the tumah status of the location in Tiveria?

The **Iyun Yaacov** on the (ד"ה אמר הואיל) **עין יעקב** cites the teaching of the Rabbis that when a miracle occurs to a person, **מנכין לו מזכותיו** – it deducts from his merits. Therefore, **ראוי לו לתקן מלתא** – it is appropriate for him to fix an item for the community.

He cites two specific benefits a person in this situation gains by providing to the community.

First, **כדי שיהא זכות רבים תלוי בו** – so that the merit of the many rests on him.

Second, it is possible that Hashem made the miracle for him specifically so that he could then create a merit for the community.

The **Ben Ish Chai** in (ד"ה שם הואיל ואתרחיש ניסא) **בן יהודע** also cites the rule **מנכין לו מזכותיו**. However he says that when Hashem creates a miracle for a Tzaddik, He does so as **חסד בחנם** – undeserved kindness, and that it does not detract from his merits.

Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai was aware of this, and felt it would be most appropriate to respond by creating a benefit from which he would not derive any personal gain. Therefore, he chose to assist the community of Tiveria, where he did not live, and to help the Kohanim know whether the area was impure, even though he was not a Kohen.

The Gemara continues

אמר ההוא סבא טיהר בן יוחי בית הקברות – The Gemara says, that (same) elderly man said (critically), “Ben Yochai has purified a cemetery!”

אמר לו אילמלי לא היית עמנו ואפילו הייתי עמנו ולא נמנית עמנו – Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai said to him, “if you had not been with us (when we did this), and even if you had been with us, but had not been counted among us (to help us by providing information regarding the status of the area),” יפה יפה – “your words now would be acceptable.”

עכשיו שהיית עמנו ונמנית עמנו – “(However) now that you were with us, and you were counted among us (but are now criticizing us),” אמרו מפרכסות – “People will say, ‘(even) prostitutes braid one another’s hair,’” זו את זו – “Torah scholars should certainly do so as well!”

יהב ביה עיניה ונח נפשיה – Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai set his eyes on the man, and he died (because he had denigrated a Torah scholar).

The Gemara concludes and describes the final interaction between Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai and Yehuda ben Geirim.

נפק לשוקא – (Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai later) went out to the marketplace, חזייה ליהודה בן גרים – and he saw Yehuda ben Geirim.

אמר – (Rebbi Shimon) said, עדיין יש לזה בעולם – “Is this one still in the world?”

נתן בו עיניו ועשהו גל של עצמות – He gazed at Yehuda ben Geirim and turned him into a heap of bones.

Several questions need to be resolved regarding the end of the episode to understand the overall events, including:

QUESTION ONE: Who was Yehuda ben Geirim? Can any insight into his identity be derived from the way he died?

QUESTION TWO: Yehuda ben Geirim is the only person mentioned by name in the episode on daf 33b who does not have the title Rabbi. Was he not on the level of the other Tannaim who were present? (The Gemara elsewhere mentions a Rabbi Yehuda ben Geirim. Does the Gemara here refer to the same person?)

QUESTION THREE: The abnormal way in which Yehuda ben Geirim dies implies that he had sinned by improperly repeating Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's critical comment about the Romans. But since Rabbi Shimon made his statement in a group of people, he should have expected his words to be repeated. Why was Yehuda ben Geirim punished for doing so?

The Meforshim differ on the identity of Yehuda ben Geirim and how to understand his actions.

Approach Once

Tosefos (ד"ה ה"ג) on daf 33b quotes **Rabbeinu Tam** who says that Yehuda ben Geirim was a **גברא רבה** (prominent Rabbi), and a Tanna, as seen in an episode regarding him and others brought by the Gemara in Moed Katan 9a.

Rabbeinu Tam says that according to this, the Gemara here should read, “*Rebbi* Yehuda ben Geirim.”

Tosefos notes that the simple reading of the conclusion of the Gemara conflicts with this explanation:

ובסוף שמעתא – He cites the statement of the Gemara on daf 34a which says that Yehuda ben Geirim died by being turned into a pile of bones. This appears to be a **לשון גנאי** (disrespectful statement regarding this death), which would imply that Yehuda ben Geirim was a wicked person. However, Tosefos says that this is not the intent of the Gemara. **אלא נה נפשיה** – Rather, it is merely indicating that he died.

Rashi (ד"ה גל מעצמות) on daf 34a says similarly, that Yehuda ben Geirim's flesh (suddenly) rotted and fell off him, as it would in other people after a long amount of time.

Approach Two

The **Anaf Yosef** on the (לג: ד"ה הלך יהודה בן גרים) says: **תמיהני** (an expression of wonderment)! According to Tosefos (and Rashi) that Yehuda ben Geirim was a prominent Rav, why did he deserve to be killed by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai?

He suggests a different understanding of the story. He says that Yehuda ben Geirim was not the Tanna mentioned by the Gemara in Moed Katan. Rather, he was an ordinary Jew who acted inappropriately, and so deserved to be killed in a **דרך גנאי ובזיון** – disrespectful and embarrassing way.

For this reason, he is called Yehuda ben Geirim and not Rabbi Yehuda ben Geirim.

He says that the real Rabbi Yehuda ben Geirim was a student of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (which indicates as well why he would not kill him). He says that the Gemara itself in Moed Katan supports this explanation, because it says that the episode mentioned there occurred long after Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai left the cave, indicating that he did not kill Yehuda ben Geirim soon after emerging from it.

In Summary

The Rishonim differ on the identity of Yehuda ben Geirim and how to understand his actions:

Tosefos (and possibly **Rashi**) both learn from the description in the Gemara of Yehuda ben Geirim's actions and death that he did not act maliciously when he repeated the comment of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Tosefos holds further that he was a Tanna.

The **Anaf Yosef** argues and holds that he acted inappropriately by repeating Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's words and deserved to be killed for this.

An insight into the story can be gained from seeing how it is discussed by the **Chofetz Chayim**.

The **Chofetz Chayim** in (ב:ב-ה) **הלכות לשון הרע** discusses the rules of whether an item said in public can be repeated.⁴ He cites an opinion which holds that if an item is said in front of three people, any of the listeners are permitted to repeat it. The reason for this is that each person can assume that the item is now public knowledge, since the others will tell others about it. This is due to the rule **חברא חברא אית ליה** – each person has a friend (causing people who hear news to share it with others).

This rule applies only if the original item is not an obviously negative statement, and it can be understood in more than one way. The original speaker will be careful with his words because he knows that they might be repeated to the subject.

⁴ Note that this is a summary of the sources, and should not be considered a guide to the practical halacha.

However, the Chofetz Chayim says if the three listeners are known to be **יראי אלקים** (those who fear G-d) who refrain from forbidden speech, then it must be assumed that they will not repeat it. Therefore, there is a Torah prohibition for any of them to repeat it. This applies even if only one of the three listeners has this status.

The **Chofetz Chayim** in **באר מים חיים** (ג:ג) (from the words **במעשה דיהודה בן גרים**) and in **באר מים חיים** (ג:יב) (from the words **ובזה יהיה**) directly addresses the actions of Yehuda ben Geirim in this case. He says that it is problematic to say that he was a Tanna (as Tosefos holds), since he knowingly repeated loshon hora.

The Chofetz Chayim explains that even though Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said his statement in front of three people, he said it in the presence of the **גדולי הדור** (leaders of the generation) who were careful with the rules of proper speech. Yehuda ben Geirim should have known that the others would not repeat it, and therefore he could not do so as well. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai specifically killed him because he spoke loshon hora.

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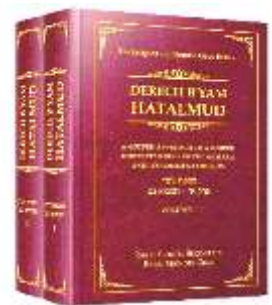
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