As kidneys... as golden dinars – יָדִי הָאָדָם... כְּדִינְרֵי כֶּסֶף. Wheat and barley kernels are roughly 6 mm in size nowadays, while lentils are 3–4 mm. Accordingly, the crops mentioned here were two to three times their regular size.

On Wednesday eves [רְבִּיָּיָוִית] – מִלְוַיָּוִית. Most commentators explain that this means the nights before the fourth [רְבִּיָּוָה] day of the week, i.e., Wednesday eves. However, some maintain that it is referring to the nights on which a downpour of rain [רְבִּיָּוָא] is expected. This interpretation is supported by a version of the text found in some manuscripts and early sources. On the days of רְבִּיָּוָא.

Like a member of Your household – בְּלֵי בֵּית. Some commentators maintain that this is as an expression of modesty: Honi HaMe’aggeg compared himself to an unimportant member of God’s household, who is able to enter his Master’s house and submit his requests whenever he wishes, on account of his insignificance (Maharsha).

This is reminiscent of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakka’s explanation as to why he himself did not pray for his son’s recovery but asked Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa to pray on his behalf instead (Berakhot 3b). Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakka viewed himself as the king’s slave, a slave, who appears regularly before his master, is more suited to submit a request before the king than is an officer, who is not accustomed to addressing him.

As we found in the days of Shimon ben Shetah that rain invariably fell for them on Wednesday eves and on Shabbat eves, until wheat grew as big as kidneys, and barley as big as olive pits, and lentils as golden dinars. And they tied up some of these crops as an example [דּוּגְמָא] for future generations, to convey to them how much damage sin causes, as it is stated: “The Lord our God, Who gives rain, the former rain and the latter rain, in its season that keeps for us the appointed weeks of the harvest. Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withheld the good from you” (Jeremiah 5:24–25).

And we likewise found that in the days of Herod that they were occupied in the building of the Temple, and rain would fall at night. And the next day the wind would blow, the clouds would disperse, the sun would shine, and the people would go out to work. And as rain would fall only at a time when it would not interfere with their labor, the nation knew that the work of Heaven was being performed by their hands.

S The mishna taught: An incident occurred in which the people sent a message to Honi HaMe’aggel. This event is related in greater detail in the following baraita. The Sages taught: Once, most of the month of Adar had passed but rain had still not fallen. They sent this message to Honi HaMe’aggel: Pray, and rain will fall. He prayed, but no rain fell. He drew a circle in the dust and stood inside it, in the manner that the prophet Habakkuk did, as it is stated: “And I will stand upon my watch and set myself upon the tower, and I will look out to see what He will say to me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved” (Habakkuk 2:1). This verse is taken to mean that Habakkuk fashioned a kind of prison for himself where he sat.

Honi said before God: Master of the Universe, Your children have turned their faces toward me, as I am like a member of Your household. Therefore, I take an oath by Your great name that I will not move from here until you have mercy upon Your children and answer their prayers for rain. Rain began to trickle down, but only in small droplets. His students said to him: Rabbi, we have seen that you can perform great wonders, but this quantity of rain is not enough to ensure that we will not die. It appears to us that a small amount of rain is falling only to enable you to dissolve your oath, but it is not nearly enough to save us.

Honi said to God: I did not ask for this, but for rain to fill the cisterns, ditches, and caves. Rain began to fall furiously, until each and every drop was as big as the mouth of a barrel, and the Sages estimated that no drop was less than a log in size. His students said to him: Rabbi, we have seen that you can call on God to perform miracles and we will not die, but now it appears to us that rain is falling only to destroy the world.

Honi again said before God: I did not ask for this harmful rain either, but for rain of benevolence, blessing, and generosity. Subsequently, the rains fell in their standard manner, until all of the people sought higher ground and ascended to the Temple Mount due to the rain. They said to him: Rabbi, just as you prayed that the rains should fall, so too, pray that they should stop. He said to them: This is the tradition that I received, that one does not pray over an excess of good.
Honi continued: Nevertheless, bring me a bull. I will sacrifice it as a thanks-offering and pray at the same time. They brought him a bull for a thanks-offering. He placed his two hands on its head and said before God: Master of the Universe, Your nation Israel, whom You brought out of Egypt, cannot bear either an excess of good or an excess of punishment. You grew angry with them and withheld rain, and they are unable to bear it. You bestowed upon them too much good, and they were also unable to bear it. May it be Your will that the rain stop and that there be relief for the world. Immediately, the wind blew, the clouds dispersed, the sun shone, and everyone went out to the fields and gathered for themselves truffles and mushrooms that had sprouted in the strong rain.

Shimon ben Shetah relayed to Honi HaMe'aggel: If you were not Honi, I would have decreed ostracism upon you. For these were years like the years of Elijah, when the keys of rain were entrusted in Elijah's hands, and he swore it would not rain, wouldn't the name of Heaven have been desecrated by your oath not to leave the circle until it rained? Once you have pronounced this oath, either yours or Elijah's must be falsified.

However, what can I do to you, as you nag God and He does your bidding, like a son who nags his father and his father does his bidding. And the son says to his father: Father, take me to be bathed in hot water; wash me with cold water; give me nuts, almonds, peaches, and pomegranates. And his father gives him. About you, the verse states: “Your father and mother will be glad and she who bore you will rejoice” (Proverbs 23:25).

The Sages taught: What message did the members of the Chamber of the Hewn Stone, the Great Sanhedrin, send to Honi HaMe'aggel? About you, the verse states: “You shall also decree a matter, and it shall be established for you; and the light shall shine upon your ways. When they cast down, you will say: There is lifting up, for He saves the humble person. He will deliver the one who is not innocent and he will be delivered through the cleanliness of your hands” (Job 22:28-30).

They interpreted: “You shall also decree a matter”; you, Honi, decree from below, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, fulfills your statement from above. “And the light shall shine upon your ways”; a generation that was in darkness, you have illuminated it with your prayer.

“When they cast down,” you will say: There is lifting up; a generation that was cast down, you lifted it up with your prayer. “For He saves the humble person”; a generation that was humble in its transgression, you saved it through your prayer. “He will deliver the one who is not innocent”; a generation that was not innocent, you have delivered it through your prayer. “And he will be delivered through the cleanliness of your hands”; you have delivered an undeserving generation through the clean work of your hands.

The Gemara relates another story about Honi HaMe'aggel. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: All the days of the life of that righteous man, Honi, he was distressed over the meaning of this verse: “A song of Ascents: When the Lord brought back those who returned to Zion, we were like those who dream” (Psalms 126:1). He said to himself: Is there really a person who can sleep and dream for seventy years? How is it possible to compare the seventy-year exile in Babylonia to a dream?

For were these years like the years of Elijah — שֶׁחָיוֹן כִּי לִשְׁמַר פּוּרְ威尼斯人. Some commentaries explain that Shimon ben Shetah argued that Honi deserved to be placed under a ban for two reasons: First, he addressed God in a disrespectful manner. Second, he might have created a situation that would have led to the desecration of the divine name. Consequently, this sentence should be read as though it began with the word: And, as it introduces a new reason (Gevurat Ar). The Vilna Gaon’s version of the Gemara reads explicitly: And moreover.

In the Jerusalem Talmud, it is explained that the name of Heaven would have been desecrated if a decree had been issued that rain should be withheld in the days of Elijah, as in that case everyone would have seen Honi’s prayers go unanswered. Some commentaries add that in that case the name of Heaven would have been desecrated because Honi’s oath would have been proven false (Maharsha). Rashi writes that in that case, one oath or the other, either Honi’s oath not to move from the circle until there was rain or the divine decree withholding rain, would have been falsified, causing a desecration of the name of Heaven.

When they cast down — שְׁמַר פּוּרְ威尼斯人: In the Jerusalem Talmud, the explanation of this verse is in even more daring: When God said that His people would be cast down, you, Honi, said that they would be lifted up, as God’s decree was canceled while Honi’s oath was fulfilled.

All the days of that righteous man — שֶׁחָיוֹן כִּי לִשְׁמַר פּוּרְ威尼斯人. According to the Jerusalem Talmud, there were two different Honis, and the Honi who slept for seventy years was an ancestor of the Honi who petitioned God for rain. The first Honi lived at the end of the First Temple period, and slept for the seventy years of the Babylonian captivity. The second Honi lived during the Second Temple period.

Many commentaries see this story, either in whole or in part, as a parable. The exile is viewed as a period of sleep during which there is a pressing need to make adequate preparations for the generations to come (see Maharsha, Keren Ora, and Derash Moshe).
One day, he was walking along the road when he saw a certain man planting a carob tree. Honi sat to him: This tree, after how many years will it bear fruit? The man said to him: It will not produce fruit until seventy years have passed. Honi said to him: Is it obvious to you that you will live seventy years, that you expect to benefit from this tree? He said to him: That man himself found a world full of carob trees. Just as my ancestors planted for me, I am too planting for my descendants.

Honi went home and said to the members of the household: Is the son of Honi HaMe'aggel alive? They said to him: His son is no longer with us, but his son's son is alive. He said to them: I am Honi HaMe'aggel. They did not believe him. He went to the study hall, where he heard the Sages say about one scholar: His halakhot are as enlightening and as clear as in the years of Honi HaMe'aggel, for when Honi HaMe'aggel would enter the study hall he would resolve for the Sages any difficulty they had. Honi said to them: I am he, but they did not believe him and did not pay him proper respect. Honi became very upset, prayed for mercy, and died. Rava said: This explains the folk saying that people say: Either friendship or death, as one who has no friends is better off dead.

**Carob tree – מִדְרָשָׁא:** Carob trees live for many years. Female carob trees generally produce enough fruit for commercial use only six to eight years after planting. Some commentaries explain that the seventy-year period mentioned here is based on the fact that carob trees are dioecious, meaning that there are female carob trees with pistillate flowers and male carob trees with staminate flowers. At first, the male trees do not bear fruit.

When male trees age, roughly after sixty or seventy years, they become monoecious, or hermaphrodite, and begin to produce fruit. Since the gender of the tree is unclear at the time of planting, it is possible that the tree will begin yielding fruit only seventy years later.
Abba Hilkia was the son of Honi HaMe'aggel's son. And when the world was in need of rain, the Sages sent a pair of Sages to him so that he would pray for mercy and rain would fall. They went to his house but they did not find him there. They went to the field and found him hoeing the ground. They greeted him,

but he did not return their greetings. Toward evening, as he was gathering firewood, he placed the wood and hoe on one shoulder and his cloak on the other shoulder. Along the entire way he did not wear his shoes, but when he reached water he put on his shoes. When he reached an area filled with shrubs and thorns he lifted up his clothes. When he reached the city, his wife came out to greet him, adorned with finery. When he reached his house, his wife entered first, he entered afterward, and afterward the two Sages entered. He sat and ate bread, but he did not say to the Sages: Come and eat, as was customary and polite. He divided bread to his children; to the elder child he gave one piece and to the younger one he gave two.

Abba Hilkia said to his wife: I know that these Sages have come due to the rain. Let us go up to the roof and pray for mercy. Perhaps the Holy One, Blessed be He, will be appeased, and it will rain, and we will not receive credit ourselves for the rainfall. They went up to the roof. He stood in one corner and she stood in the other corner. Clouds began to form on that side where his wife stood. When he descended, he said to the Sages: Why have the Sages come? They said to him: The other Sages have sent us to the Master, so that you should pray for mercy for rain. He said to them: Blessed is God, Who did not require you to petition Abba Hilkia, as the sky has filled with clouds and rain is certainly on its way.

They said to him: We know that the rain has come on the Master’s account. However, let the Master please say and explain to us these aspects of your behavior that are puzzling to us! What is the reason that when we greeted the Master, the Master did not return our greeting? He said to them: I am a day laborer, hired for the day, and I said to myself that I may not delay my work to answer you. They further inquired: And what is the reason that the Master carried the firewood on one shoulder and his cloak on the other shoulder? He said to them: It was a borrowed robe. I borrowed it for this purpose, to wear it, and I did not borrow it for that purpose, to place wood on it.

The Sages continued to ask Abba Hilkia about his unusual behavior. What is the reason that the entire way the Master did not wear his shoes, but when he reached water he put on his shoes? He said to them: The entire way I can see and take care where I walk, and therefore there is no need for me to wear my shoes, but in the water I cannot see. Therefore, I put on my shoes to avoid hurting myself. They asked: What is the reason that when the Master reached shrubs and thorns, he lifted up his clothes? He said to them: This flesh will heal if it is scratched by thorns, but this garment will not heal if it is torn.
My wife is frequently at home, etc. – Ḥagigah 13b. Rashi explains that Abba Hilkia provided two reasons here. First, she is always at home when the poor arrive, so she is constantly distributing to the needy. Furthermore, the items she gives provide immediate benefit.

And she prayed that they should repent – Ḥagigah 13b. Elsewhere, the Gemara relates a similar story involving Rabbi Meir and his wife, Berurya (Berakhot 10a). When certain hooligans persisted in antagonizing Rabbi Meir, he prayed to God that they should die. However, his wife Berurya chided him, citing the verse “Let sinners cease out of the earth” (Psalms 104:35). Berurya interpreted the word “sinners” to mean sins and argued that God does not desire the disappearance of the sinners themselves, but only of their sin. Rabbi Meir subsequently prayed that the hooligans should repent of their evil ways, and they indeed repented.

He would hide himself in the lavatory – Ḥagigah 13b:3. Rashi and others read: Because he used to hide himself, omitting the last two words found in the standard text of the Talmud. Several explanations of this passage have been suggested. To maintain that the Sages wanted to appoint Hanan to a position of communal leadership, but he refused to accept the appointment and hid himself thereafter from public view (Rabbeinu Hananel, citing γρὸνομ). Others explain that when Hanan entreated God for rain, he prayed in private for reasons of modesty, so that he would not be credited for causing an end to the drought (Rashi; Rabbeinu Gershon).

The standard reading: Because he used to hide himself in the lavatory, also lends itself to several explanations. Rashi suggests that if these two words are included it means that when Hanan entered the lavatory he would conduct himself extremely modestly, by keeping himself covered as much as possible. Alternatively, when the Sages came to ask him to pray for rain, he hid himself in the lavatory to avoid the honor that would be bestowed upon him were his prayers accepted (γρὸνομ). Yet others add that this is the reason why the Sages sent schoolchildren to him, as they would seek him out even in the lavatory ( Maharsha).

They further inquired: What is the reason that when the Master reached the city, the Master’s wife came out adorned in her finery? He said to them: She dresses that way so that when I walk through the city I will not set my eyes upon another woman. They asked: What is the reason that she entered first, and afterward the Master entered, and only afterward we entered? He said to them: Because you have not been checked by me. I cannot be sure how you will act, and therefore I did not want you to be alone with my wife.

The Sages were not done with their questions. What is the reason that when the Master ate bread, you did not say to us: Come and eat? He replied: Because there is not enough bread for guests, and I said to myself that I should not gain credit from the Sages for nothing, by offering you food I cannot serve you. They asked: What is the reason that the Master gave the older child one piece of bread and the younger child two? He said to them: This older child stays at home, and if he is hungry he can eat at any time, but this younger child sits and studies in the synagogue, and therefore he is hungrier.

The two Sages had one final set of queries for Abba Hilkia. And what is the reason that the clouds began to form on that side where the Master’s wife stood before your own side? He explained: Because my wife is frequently at home, and she gives bread to the poor, and therefore her provision of benefit to the needy is immediate, i.e., soon after the rains fall she is able to provide the needy with provisions. Accordingly, her prayers are answered without delay. In contrast, I give money to the poor, and consequently, the benefit of my gift is not immediate, i.e., it takes a lot of time before the rainfall results in my ability to give money to the poor. Alternatively, her prayers may have been answered first because when certain hooligans [biryonei] were living in our neighborhood, I prayed that they should die, but she prayed that they should repent. And indeed, they repented.

The Gemara relates another story about a descendant of Honi HaMe’aggel. Hanan HaNehba was the son of Honi HaMe’aggel’s daughter. When the world was in need of rain, the Sages would send schoolchildren to him, and they would grab him by the hem of his cloak and say to him: Father, Father, give us rain. He said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, act on behalf of these children, who cannot distinguish between their Father in Heaven, Who can provide rain, and the father who cannot provide rain. The Gemara asks: And why was he called Hanan HaNehba? Because he would hide [mahbhi] himself in the lavatory so that people would not bestow honor upon him.

The Gemara relates another story about righteous individuals praying for rain. Rabbi Zerika said to Rav Safra: Come and see what the difference is between the powerful men of Eretz Yisrael and the pious men of Babylonia. This comparison serves to highlight the righteousness of the great men of Eretz Yisrael. By the pious men of Babylonia, I mean Rav Huna and Rav Hisda. When the world is in need of rain, these Sages say: Let us assemble together and pray for mercy, and perhaps the Holy One, Blessed be He, will be appeased and bring rain. In this manner, the pious men of Babylonia publicized their prayers for rain.
by contrast, the powerful men of Eretz Yisrael, such as Rabbi Yona, the father of Rabbi Mani, acted differently. When the world was in need of rain, he enters his house and say to his household: Give me my sack [gevalki] and I will go and buy myself a dinar of grain. When he went outside, he went and stood in a low place, as it is written: “Out of the depths I have called You, O Lord” (Psalms 130:1).

And he would stand in a secluded place, and cover himself with sackcloth, and pray for mercy, and rain would come. When he would come home, they would say to him: Did the Master bring grain? He said to them: I said to myself, since rain has now come, there will be relief in the world and prices will soon go down. In this manner, he hid his greatness even from his own household.

And furthermore, the Gemara relates that Rabbi Mani, Rabbi Yona’s son, was persecuted by members of the house of the Nasi. He prostrated himself upon his father’s grave and said to him: Father, Father, these men are persecuting me. One day, those men were passing there, by the grave, and the legs of their horses became stuck in the ground until they accepted upon themselves not to persecute Rabbi Mani anymore.

Rabbi Mani said to his teacher: The members of my household, i.e., my wife, are not acceptable to me, as she is not beautiful. Rabbi Yitzhak said: What is her name? Rabbi Mana replied: Hana. Rabbi Yitzhak declared: Let Hana grow beautiful, and indeed she grew beautiful. After a while, Rabbi Mani said to Rabbi Yitzhak: She acts haughtily toward me, due to her great beauty. He said to him: If so, let Hana return to her homely appearance, and she returned to her homely appearance.

The Gemara relates: These two students, who were sitting before Rabbi Yitzhak ben Elyashiv, said to him: Let the Master pray for mercy on our behalf, that we should become very wise. He said to them: This power was indeed with me at one stage, as I used to be able to pray for matters of this kind, but I sent it away.6 I took it upon myself never to pray for changes in the world order.

The Gemara cites another story involving a complaint. Rabbi Yosei bar Avin was frequently found before Rabbi Yosei from Yokrat. At some point he left him and came to study before Rav Ashi, who did not recognize him.

This power was with me and I sent it away. – הני יב רבי יונה מאן המלתני ראשו מיתוד קתני. According to Rashi, Rabbi Yitzchak ben Elyashiv explained to the two students that he had lost the power to have all his prayers answered. However, the expression: I sent it away, indicates that Rabbi Yitzhak preferred not to submit requests like those of the two students (see Maharsha).

Therefore, other commentators explain that Rabbi Yitzhak decided not to trouble God with petitions of that kind anymore (Rabbeinu Gershom). Yet others suggest that the only prayer Rabbi Yitzhak refused to submit was for someone to be endowed with special wisdom, as he recognized the potential danger of this request (Sefer Emet).