

NOTES

On Wednesday eves [revi'iyot] – בְּלַיְלֵי רִבְעֵי עֵוֹת – Most commentaries explain that this means the nights before the fourth [revi'] day of the week, i.e., Wednesday eves. However, some maintain that it is referring to the nights on which a downpour of rain [revi'a] is expected. This interpretation is supported by a version of the text found in some manuscripts and early sources: On the days of rev'i'iyot.

Like a member of Your household – כִּבְנֵי בֵּית לְפָנֶיךָ – Some commentaries maintain that this is as an expression of modesty: Honi HaMe'agel 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 Zakkai'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* 34b). Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai viewed himself as the king's officer, while he viewed Rabbi Hanina 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.

We have seen you but this is not enough that we will not die – רַבִּי אֵינְךָ וְלֹא נָמוּת – Many commentaries explain this sentence as follows: We have seen that God performs miracles on your behalf. Pray for us now so that we should not die, as we are still in a desperate situation. Others read it as a question: Just because we have seen you, shall we not die? The rain you have brought has not benefited us in any way (Rabbeinu Gershom).

BACKGROUND

As kidneys...as golden dinars – כִּבְלִיּוֹת...כִּדְנָרֵי זָהָב – 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.

LANGUAGE

Example [*dugma*] – דִּגְמָא – From the Greek δειγμα, *deigma*, an example or a model.

בְּעֵתָם בְּלַיְלֵי רִבְעֵי עֵוֹת וּבְלַיְלֵי שַׁבָּתוֹת.

שָׁכַן מִצֵּינוּ בְּיָמֵי שְׂמֵעוֹן בֶּן שֹׁטָן, שִׁירְדוּ לָהֶם גְּשָׁמִים בְּלַיְלֵי רִבְעֵי עֵוֹת וּבְלַיְלֵי שַׁבָּתוֹת, עַד שֶׁנִּשְׁעֶשׂוּ חֲטִימֵי כִבְלִיּוֹת וְשִׁעוּרִים כְּגֵרְעֵינֵי זֵיתִים וְעֵדָשִׁים כְּדִינָרֵי זָהָב. וְצָרְרוּ מֵהֶם דִּגְמָא לְדוֹרוֹת, לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה הַחֶטָּא גּוֹרֵם, שְׂנֵאמַר: "עוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם הֵטוּ אֵלַי, וְחֲטֵאתֵיכֶם מִנְעוּ הַטוֹב מִכֶּם".

וְכֵן מִצֵּינוּ בְּיָמֵי הוֹרְדוּס שְׁהָיו עוֹסְקִין בְּבִנְיַן בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, וְהָיו יוֹרְדִין גְּשָׁמִים בְּלַיְלָה. לְמַחֵר נִשְׁבְּחָה הַרוּחַ, וְנִתְפָּזְרוּ הָעֲבָיִם, וְזָרְחָה הַחֲמָה, וְיָצְאוּ הָעַם לְמַלְאכָתָן, וַיִּדְעוּ שֶׁמְלַאכַת שָׁמַיִם בְּיָדֵיהֶם.

"מִעֲשֵׂה שְׁלַחוּ לַחוּנִי הַמַּעֲגָל" וְכוּ. תִּנּוּ רַבְנֵי: פַּעַם אַחַת, יָצָא רוֹב אָדָר וְלֹא יָרְדוּ גְשָׁמִים. שְׁלַחוּ לַחוּנִי הַמַּעֲגָל: הַתְּפִלָּה וְיָרְדוּ גְשָׁמִים. הַתְּפִלָּה וְלֹא יָרְדוּ גְשָׁמִים. עַג עוֹנָה, וְעַמְד בְּתוֹכָהּ, כְּדָרֵךְ שֶׁעֲשֵׂה חֶבְקוֹק הַנְּבִיא. שְׂנֵאמַר: "עַל מִשְׁמַרְתִּי אֶעֱמְדָה, וְאֶתִּיצֵבָה עַל מְצוֹר" וְכוּ.

אָמַר לְפָנָיו: רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם! בְּנִיךָ שָׁמוּ פְּנֵיהֶם עָלַי, שְׂאֵנִי כִּבְנֵי בֵּית לְפָנֶיךָ. נִשְׁבַּע אֲנִי בְּשֵׁם הַגְּדוֹל שְׂאֵינִי זֶה מִכָּאן עַד שְׁתַּרְחֹם עַל בְּנִיךָ. הַתְּחִילוּ גְשָׁמִים מִנְטָפִין. אָמְרוּ לוֹ תַלְמִידָיו: רַבִּי, רַאֲיֵנוּךָ, וְלֹא נָמוּת. כְּמִדּוּמִין אָנוּ שְׂאֵין גְּשָׁמִים יוֹרְדִין אֲלֵינוּ לְהַתִּיר שְׁבוּעֶתְךָ.

אָמַר: לֹא כִךְ שְׂאֵלְתִי, אֲלֵינוּ גְשָׁמֵי בּוֹרוֹת, שִׁיחִין, וּמַעְרוֹת. יָרְדוּ בְּזַעַף, עַד שֶׁכָּל טֶפֶף וְטֶפֶף כְּמִלָּא פִי חֲבִית. וְשִׁיעְרוּ חֲכָמִים שְׂאֵין טֶפֶף פְּחוּתָהּ מְלוּג. אָמְרוּ לוֹ תַלְמִידָיו: רַבִּי, רַאֲיֵנוּךָ, וְלֹא נָמוּת. כְּמִדּוּמִין אָנוּ שְׂאֵין גְּשָׁמִים יוֹרְדִין אֲלֵינוּ לְהַבִּיד הָעוֹלָם.

אָמַר לְפָנָיו: לֹא כִךְ שְׂאֵלְתִי, אֲלֵינוּ גְשָׁמֵי רִצּוֹן, בְּרָכָה, וְנִדְבָה. יָרְדוּ כְּתִיקָנוּ, עַד שֶׁעָלוּ כָּל הָעַם לְהַר הַבַּיִת מִפְּנֵי הַגְּשָׁמִים. אָמְרוּ לוֹ: רַבִּי, כִּשֶׁם שֶׁהַתְּפִלָּה שִׁירְדוּ, כִּךְ הַתְּפִלָּה וְיִלְכוּ לָהֶם. אָמַר לָהֶם: כִּךְ מְקוּבְּלֵנִי שְׂאֵין מִתְּפִלָּין עַל רוֹב הַטּוֹבָה.

"In their season" means on Wednesday eves,<sup>n</sup> i.e., Tuesday nights, and on Shabbat eves, i.e., Friday nights, because at these times people are not out in the streets, either due to fear of demonic forces that were thought to wander on Tuesday nights or due to the sanctity of Shabbat.

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.<sup>b</sup> And they tied up some of these crops as an example [*dugma*]<sup>1</sup> 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 their 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'agel. 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'agel: 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.<sup>n</sup> 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.<sup>n</sup> 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.

**Truffles – תְּרִיפִילִי:** Truffles belong to the genus *Tuber*, a special genus of fungi that grows entirely underground, including its fruit. The body of the fruit looks like a slightly rounded mass of various colors, black, brown, and whitish. Truffles generally grow up to 3–5 cm in height. They are up to 10 cm in diameter, and a large truffle can weigh as much as 1 kg. Truffles are harvested by removing the earth from above them, a task sometimes performed by specially trained animals. Most truffles are edible at early stages of their growth and are regarded as a delicacy.

## NOTES

**שְׂאִילֵי – שְׂאִילֵי עֵלְיָהוּ:** For were these years like the years of Elijah – שְׂאִילֵי עֵלְיָהוּ: Some commentaries explain that Shimon ben Shetaḥ argued that Ḥoni 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 Ari*). 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 as in the days of Elijah, as in that case everyone would have seen Ḥoni's prayers go unanswered. Some commentaries add that in that case the name of Heaven would have been desecrated because Ḥoni's oath would have been proven false (Maharsha). Rashi writes that in that case, one oath or the other, either Ḥoni'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 – כִּי הִשְׁפִּילוּ:** In the Jerusalem Talmud, the explanation of this verse is even more daring: When God said that His people would be cast down, you, Ḥoni, said that they would be lifted up, as God's decree was canceled while Ḥoni's oath was fulfilled.

**All the days of that righteous man – כָּל יְמֵי שָׁל:** According to the Jerusalem Talmud, there were two different Honis, and the Ḥoni who slept for seventy years was an ancestor of the Ḥoni who petitioned God for rain. The first Ḥoni lived at the end of the First Temple period, and slept for the seventy years of the Babylonian captivity. The second Ḥoni 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*).

אף על פי כן, הביאו לי פר הודאה. הביאו לו פר הודאה. סמך שתי ידיו עליו, ואמר לפניו: רבוננו של עולם! עמך ישראל שהוצאת ממצרים איננו יכולין לא ברוב טובה ולא ברוב פורענות. כעסקת עליהם – איננו יכולין לעמוד. השפעת עליהם טובה – איננו יכולין לעמוד. יהי רצון מלפניך שיפסקו הגשמים ויהא ריוח בעולם. מיד נשבה הרוח, ונתפזרו העבים, וירחה החמה, ויצאו העם לשדה והביאו להם כמהין ופטריות.

Ḥoni 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<sup>b</sup> and mushrooms that had sprouted in the strong rain.

שִׁלַּח לוֹ שְׂמֵעוֹן בֶּן שֵׁטַח: אֲלֵמָּלָא חוֹנִי אַתָּה, גּוֹזְרִי עֲלֶיךָ נִדְוִי. שְׂאִילֵי שָׁנִים בְּשָׁנֵי אֱלֹהֵי שְׂמֵפְתַּחְתּוֹת גְּשָׁמִים בִּדְוֵי שָׁל אֱלֹהֵי, לֹא נִמְצָא שָׁם שְׂמֵים מִתְחַלֵּל עַל יָדְךָ?

Shimon ben Shetaḥ relayed to Ḥoni HaMe'aggel: If you were not Ḥoni, I would have decreed ostracism upon you. For were these years like the years of Elijah,<sup>n</sup> 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.

אֲבָל מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה לָךְ, שְׂאֵתָה מִתְחַטֵּא לְפָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וְעוֹשֶׂה לָךְ רְצוֹנְךָ. כָּבֹן שְׂמֵתְחַטֵּא עַל אֲבִיו וְעוֹשֶׂה לוֹ רְצוֹנוֹ. וְאוֹמֵר לוֹ: אָבִיא, הוֹלִיכֵנִי לְרַחֲצֵנִי בְּחַמּוֹן, שְׂטֵפְנֵי בָצוֹן, תֵּן לִי אֲגוּזִים, שְׂקָדִים, אֶפְרֹסְקִים, וְרִמּוֹנִים, וְנֹתֵן לוֹ. וְעַלְיָךְ הַכְּתוּב אוֹמֵר: "וַיִּשְׂמַח אֲבִיךָ וְאִמְךָ וְתִגַּל יוֹלְדֶיךָ".

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).

תִּגְנוּ רַבְנַן: מָה שְׁלַחוּ בְנֵי לְשִׁבַת הַגְּזִית לְחוֹנִי הַמְעַעֵל? "וְתִגְרוּ אִמְרָה, וַיִּקֶּם לָךְ, וְעַל דְּרָכֶיךָ נִגְהָ אור". "וְתִגְרוּ אִמְרָה" –

The Sages taught: What message did the members of the Chamber of the Hewn Stone, the Great Sanhedrin, send to Ḥoni 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 cleanness of your hands" (Job 22:28–30).

אַתָּה גּוֹרֵת מִלְמַטָּה, וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְקַיֵּים מֵאִמְרָתְךָ מִלְמַעְלָה. "וְעַל דְּרָכֶיךָ נִגְהָ אור" – דוֹר שְׂהִיָּה אֶפֶל הָאֵרֶת בְּתִפְלִתְךָ.

They interpreted: "You shall also decree a matter"; you, Ḥoni, 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.

"כִּי הִשְׁפִּילוּ, וְתִאמַר: גְּוָה" – דוֹר שְׂהִיָּה שְׂפֵל, הַגְּבִהָתוֹ בְּתִפְלִתְךָ. "וְשָׁח עֵינַיִם יוֹשֵׁעַ" – דוֹר שְׂשָׁח בְּעוֹנוֹ, הוֹשֵׁעֵתוֹ בְּתִפְלִתְךָ. "יִמְלֹט אֵי נָקִי" – דוֹר שְׂלֹא הָיָה נָקִי, מִלְטָתוֹ בְּתִפְלִתְךָ. "וְנִמְלֹט בְּבֹר כְּפִיךָ" – מִלְטָתוֹ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ הַבְּרוּרִין.

"When they cast down,<sup>n</sup> 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 cleanness of your hands"; you have delivered an undeserving generation through the clean work of your hands.

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: כָּל יְמֵי שָׁל אוֹתוֹ צְדִיק, הָיָה מֵצִטֵּעַר עַל מְקָרָא זֶה: "שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת: בְּשׁוּב ה' אֶת שִׁבְתֵּי צִיּוֹן, הֵינּוּ בְּחֻלְמִים". אָמַר: מִי אֵיכָּא דִּנְיָים שְׂבָעִין שָׁנִין בְּחֻלְמָא?

The Gemara relates another story about Ḥoni HaMe'aggel. Rabbi Yohanan said: All the days of the life of that righteous man,<sup>n</sup> Ḥoni, 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?



יומא חד הוה אזל באורחא, חזייה להווא גברא דהוה נטע חרובא. אמר ליה: האי עד כמה שנין טעין? אמר ליה: עד שבעין שנין. אמר ליה: פשיטא לך דחייית שבעין שנין? אמר ליה: האי גברא עלמא בחרובא אשבחתיה. כי היכי דשתלי לי אבהתי, שתלי נמי לבראי.

One day, he was walking along the road when he saw a certain man planting a carob tree.<sup>8</sup> Honi said 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 too am planting for my descendants.

יתביב קא בריך ריפתא. אתא ליה שינתא נים. אהדרא ליה משונתא איבסי מעינא, ונים שבעין שנין. כי קם, חזייה להווא גברא דהווא קא מלקט מינייהו. אמר ליה: את הוא דשתלתיה? אמר ליה: בר בריה אנא. אמר ליה: שמע מינה דניימי שבעין שנין. חזא לחמריה דאתיילידא ליה רמכי רמכי.

Honi sat and ate bread. Sleep overcame him and he slept. A cliff formed around him, and he disappeared from sight and slept for seventy years. When he awoke, he saw a certain man gathering carobs from that tree. Honi said to him: Are you the one who planted this tree? The man said to him: I am his son's son. Honi said to him: I can learn from this that I have slept for seventy years, and indeed he saw that his donkey had sired several herds during those many years.

אזל לביתיה אמר להו: בריה דחוני המעגל מי קיים? אמרו ליה: בריה ליתא, בר בריה איתא. אמר להו: אנא חוני המעגל. לא הימנוהו. אזל לבית המדרש שמעינהו לרבנן דקאמרי: נהירן שמעתתין כבשני חוני המעגל, דכי הוי עייל לבית מדרשא כל קושיא דהוה להו לרבנן הוה מפרק להו. אמר להו: אנא ניהו, ולא הימנוהו, ולא עבדי ליה יקרא בדמבעי ליה. חלש דעתיה, בעי רחמי, ומית. אמר רבא, היינו דאמרי אינשי: או חברותא או מיתותא.

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.

BACKGROUND

**Carob tree – חרובא:** 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.



Male carob flowers



Carob fruit and seeds



Female carob flowers



Carob tree

אבא חלקיה בר בריה דחוני המעגל הוה, וכי מצטרין עלמא למיטרא הוה משדרי רבנן לגביה, ובעי רחמי ואחי מיטרא. וימנא חדא איצטרין עלמא למיטרא, שדור רבנן וזנא דרבנן לגביה למבעי רחמי דמתי מיטרא. אוול לביתה ולא אשכחיה. אוול בדברא ואשכחיה דהוה קא רפיק. יתבו ליה שלמא.

**S** The Gemara relates another story, this time about Honi HaMe'aggel's descendants, who were also renowned for their righteous deeds. Abba Hilkiyya was the son of Honi HaMe'aggel's son. And when the world was in need of rain they would send Sages to him, and he would pray for mercy, and rain would fall. Once the world was in need of rain, and 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,

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ולא אסבר להו אפיה. בפניא, כי הוה מנקט ציבי, דרא ציבי ומרא בחד בתפא, וגלימא בחד בתפא. כולה אורחא לא סיים מסאני. כי מטי למיא, סיים מסאניה. כי מטא להיזמי והיגי, דלינהו למניה. כי מטא למתא, נפקה דביתהו לאפיה כי מיקשטא. כי מטא לביתהו, עלת דביתהו ברישא, והדר עייל איהו, והדר עיילי רבנן. יתיב וכריך ריפתא, ולא אמר להו דרבנן, תו ברוכו. פלג ריפתא לינקי; לקשישא חדא, ולוטרא תרי.

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<sup>b</sup> and thorns<sup>b</sup> 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.

אמר לה דביתהו: ידענא דרבנן משום מיטרא קא אתו. נסק לאיגרא, ונבעי רחמי. אפשר דמרצי הקדוש ברוך הוא וייתי מיטרא, ולא נחזיק טיבותא לנפשו. סקו לאיגרא: קם איהו בתדא וזיתא, ואיהי בתדא וזיתא. קדים סלוק ענני מהך וזיתא דדביתהו. כי נחית, אמר להו: אמאי אתו רבנן? אמרו ליה: שדרי לן רבנן לגבי דמר למבעי רחמי אמיתרא. אמר להו: ברוך המקום שלא הצריך אתכם לאבא חלקיה.

Abba Hilkiyya 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 Hilkiyya, as the sky has filled with clouds and rain is certainly on its way.

אמרו ליה: ידענא דמיטרא מחמת מר הוא דאתא. אלא לימא לן מר הנן מיילי דתמיהא לן: מאי טעמא כי יהיבנא למר שלמא לא אסבר לן מר אפיה? אמר להו: שכיר יום הוא, ואמינא לא איפגור. ומאי טעמא דרא מר ציבי אחד כתפיה וגלימא אחד כתפיה? אמר להו: טלית שאולה הייתה. להכי שאלי, ולהכי לא שאלי.

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:<sup>n</sup> 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.

מאי טעמא כולה אורחא לא סיים מר מסאניה, וכי מטי למיא סיים מסאניה? אמר להו: כולה אורחא חוינא; במיא לא קא חוינא. מאי טעמא כי מטא מר להיזמי והיגי, דלינהו למניה? אמר להו: זה מעלה ארוכה, וזה אינה מעלה ארוכה.

The Sages continued to ask Abba Hilkiyya 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 out 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.

BACKGROUND

Shrubs [*hizmei*] – היזמי: *Hizmei* probably refers to the thorny restharrow, *Ononis antiquorum* L., from the Papilionaceae family. It is a thorny bush that grows to a height of 20 cm and is common in fields and near streams. Its leaves are mainly trifoliate, while its lateral branches tend to be thorny and brachiated.

Thorns [*higei*] – היגי: *Higei* refers to what is probably the thorny restharrow, *Ononis spinosa* L., from the Papilionaceae family. It is a thorny shrub that grows to a height of up to 75 cm, with trifoliate leaves and thorny side branches. It grows in fields and wadis.



Thorny restharrow

NOTES

מילי דתמיהא לן – Aspects that are puzzling to us – Not only are the actions of Abba Hilkiyya baffling in their own right, but apparently they also conflict with the proper norms of behavior required of a Sage. The Sages taught that one must be careful to extend greetings to all men, avoid all physical harm, and not walk after a woman. Therefore, the visiting Sages sought explanations for his actions.



My wife is frequently at home, etc. – אֵיתָא וְכוּ: Rashi explains that Abba Hilkiyya 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 – וְהִיא: 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 – שָׁהָה: Rashi and others read: מְחַבֵּי עֵצְמוּ בְּבֵית הַכֶּסֶּא: 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. Some 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 *ge'onim*). 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 Gershom).

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 (*ge'onim*). 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).

מֵאֵי טַעְמָא כִּי מֵטָא מֵר לְמֵתָא. נִפְקָא דְבֵיתָהּ דְּמֵר כִּי מִיקְשָׁטָא? אָמַר לְהוּ: כְּדִי שְׁלָא אֶתָּן עֵינֵי בְּאִשָּׁה אַחֲרָת. מֵאֵי טַעְמָא עֵיילָא הִיא בְּרִישָׁא, וְהָדָר עֵייל מֵר אַבְתָּרָה, וְהָדָר עֵיילִין אָנָּן? אָמַר לְהוּ: מִשּׁוּם דְּלָא בְּדַקִּיתוּ לִי.

מֵאֵי טַעְמָא כִּי כְּרִיד מֵר רִיפְתָּא. לָא אָמַר לָן: אֵיתוּ כְּרוּכּוּ? מִשּׁוּם דְּלָא נִפְשָׁא רִיפְתָּא, וְאִמְנָא לָא אֲחִיזִיק בְּהוּ בְּרַבְנָן טִיבִיתָא בְּחֻנָּם. מֵאֵי טַעְמָא יְהִיב מֵר לִינוּקָא קְשִׁישָׁא חֲדָא רִיפְתָּא וְלוּוֹטְרָא תְּרִי? אָמַר לְהוּ: הָאֵי קָאֵי בְּבֵיתָא, וְהָאֵי יִתִּיב בְּבֵי כְּנִישָׁתָא.

וּמֵאֵי טַעְמָא קְדִים סְלוּק עֲנָנּוּ מִהֶדֶן זִוּיָא דְהוּוּת קְיִימָא דְבֵיתָהּ דְּמֵר לְעֲנָנָא דִּידִיהָ? מִשּׁוּם דְּאֵיתָא שְׂכִיחָא בְּבֵיתָא, וְיִהְבָּא רִיפְתָּא לְעֵינֵי, וּמִקְרָבָא הִנְיִיתָהּ, וְאִנָּא יְהִיבָנָא וּזְוָא, וְלָא מִקְרָבָא הִנְיִיתָהּ. אֵי נָמִי, הִנְהוּ בִּירְוִינֵי דְהוּוּ בְּשִׁיבִיבִיתָן, אָנָּא בְּעֵי רַחֲמֵי דְלִימוּתָא, וְהִיא בְּעֵי רַחֲמֵי דְלִיהָדְרוּ בְּתִיבִיתָא, וְאִהָדְרוּ.

חֲנָן הִנְחַבָּא בַר בְּרַתִּיהָ דְּחֻוּנֵי הַמַּעֲגָל הָוָה. כִּי מַצְטְרִיד עֲלֵמָא לְמִיטְרָא. הוּוּ מִשְׁדְּרֵי רַבְנָן יְנוּקֵי דְבִי רַב לְגִבְיָהּ, וְנִקְטִי לִיהָ בְּשִׁיפּוּלֵי גְלִימָה וְאִמְרוּ לִיהָ: אָבָא, אָבָא, הֵב לָן מִיטְרָא! אָמַר לְפָנֵי הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, עֲשֵׂה בְּשִׁבִיל אֱלֹהֵי שְׂאֵין מְכִירִין בֵּין אָבָא דִּיהֵיב מִיטְרָא לְאָבָא דְלָא יְהִיב מִיטְרָא. וְאִמְרֵי קְרִי לִיהָ חֲנָן הִנְחַבָּא? מִפְּנֵי שָׁהָה מְחַבֵּי עֵצְמוּ בְּבֵית הַכֶּסֶּא.

אָמַר לִיהָ רַבִּי זְרִיקָא לְרַב סַפְרָא: תָּא חֻוּי מַה בֵּין תְּקִיפֵי דְאַרְעָא דִּישְׂרָאֵל לְחַסִּידֵי דְבָבֶל. חַסִּידֵי דְבָבֶל רַב הוּנָא וְרַב חֲסָדָא. כִּי הָוָה מַצְטְרִיד עֲלֵמָא לְמִיטְרָא, אָמְרֵי: נִיכְנֹף הַדְּדִי וְנִבְעֵי רַחֲמֵי. אֶפְשָׁר דְּמִירְצֵי הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא דִּיִּתֵּי מִיטְרָא.

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 Hilkiyya. 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,<sup>N</sup> 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*]<sup>L</sup> were living in our neighborhood, I prayed that they should die, but she prayed that they should repent.<sup>N</sup> And indeed, they repented.

**S** The Gemara relates another story about a descendant of Honi HaMe'agel. Hanan HaNehba was the son of Honi HaMe'agel'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 [*mahbi*] himself in the lavatory<sup>N</sup> 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.

## LANGUAGE

Hooligans [*biryonei*] – בִּירְוִינֵי: Of unclear origin. Some say it is from the root *b-r*, outside, i.e., savage men outside the boundaries of civilization. However, the word form indicates a non-Hebrew source.

Some maintain it is derived from the Latin praetoriani, a member of the imperial guard. Over the years, these men became very powerful and would behave in a coarse and unrestrained manner.

**Rabbi Yona – רבי יונה** – Rabbi Yona was one of the greatest Sages of the third to fourth generations of *amora'im* in Eretz Yisrael. The youthful Rabbi Yona had the opportunity to study from Rabbi Yohanan in his old age. However, he was principally the student of Rabbi Yohanan's young disciples, Rabbi Ila and Rabbi Zeira, or Zeira. He even studied Torah from Rabbi Yirmeya. A large number of *halakhot* in the Jerusalem Talmud are attributed to Rabbi Yona, while he himself transmits many statements in the name of various Sages. He apparently lived in Tiberias, where he founded an academy along with his colleague Rabbi Yosei. Although he is cited infrequently in the Babylonian Talmud, he was well known in Babylonia as well.

Rabbi Yona was apparently a wealthy man, as we find several stories that depict his practice of charity. His son Rabbi Mana, or Mani, was one of the greatest *amora'im* of Eretz Yisrael in the following generation.

## LANGUAGE

**My sack [gevalki] – גואלקי** – Apparently from the Middle Iranian *juwālak*, meaning sack or knapsack. The word *guharka*, found previously in the chapter, is also derived from this Middle Iranian term.

תְּקִיפֵי דְאַרְעָא דִּישְׂרָאֵל, כְּגוֹן רַבִּי יוֹנָה אָבוּה דְרַבִּי מַנִּי, כִּי הָוּה מְצַטְרִיךְ עֲלֵמָא לְמִיטְרָא, הָוּה עָיִל לְבֵיתֵיהּ, וְאָמַר לְהוֹ: הָבוּ לִי גְוָאֲלָקִי, וְאִזְוִיל וְאִיִּתֵּי לִי בְּוִוּוּא עֵיבּוּרָא. כִּי הָוּה נָפִיק לְבְּרָא, אִזְוִיל וְקָאֵי בְּדוּכְתָא עֲמִיקָתָא, דְּכַתִּיב: "מִמַּעַמְקִים קָרָאתִיךָ, ה'." וְקָאֵי בְּדוּכְתָא צְנִיעָא וּמְכַסֵּי בְּשָׂקָא, וּבִיעֵי רַחֲמֵי, וְאִתֵּי מִיטְרָא. כִּי הָוּה אֵתִי לְבֵיתֵיהּ, אָמַר לֵיהּ: אִיִּתֵּי מִר עֵיבּוּרָא? אָמַר לְהוֹ: אֲמִינָא, הוּאִיל וְאִתָּא מִיטְרָא הֲשֵׁתָא, רוּוח עֲלֵמָא.

וְתוּ, רַבִּי מַנִּי בְּרִיהּ הָוּוּ קָא מְצַעְרֵי לֵיהּ דְּבִי נְשִׂיאָהּ. יִשְׁתַּטַּח עַל קְבֵרָא דְאַבוּהּ, אָמַר לֵיהּ: אָבָא, אָבָא, הֲנִי מְצַעְרֵי לִי, יוֹמָא חַד הָוּוּ קָא חֲלַפֵי הַתָּם, אִינְקוּט כְּרַעַא דְכּוּסְוֹתֵיהוּ, עַד דְּקִבְּלוּ עֲלֵיהוּ דְלָא קָא מְצַעְרֵי לֵיהּ.

וְתוּ, רַבִּי מַנִּי הָוּה שְׂכִיחַ קַמֵּיהּ דְּרַבִּי יִצְחָק בֶּן אֶלְיָשִׁיב. אָמַר לֵיהּ: עֲתִירִי דְבִי חֲמֵי קָא מְצַעְרֵי לִי, אָמַר: לֵיעֲנֹ, וְאִיעֲנֹ. אָמַר: קָא דַּחְקוּ לִי, אָמַר: לֵיעֲתֵרוּ, וְאִיעֲתֵרוּ.

אָמַר: לָא מִיקְבְּלֵי עָלֵי אִינְשֵׁי בֵּיתִי. אָמַר לֵיהּ: מַה שְּׂמָה? חָנָה. תְּתִיפֵי חָנָה, וְנִתְיִיפַת. אָמַר לֵיהּ: קָא מְגַנְדְרָא עָלֵי. אָמַר לֵיהּ: אִי חָבִי, תַּחְזוּר חָנָה לְשַׁחְרוּרִיתָהּ, וְחִירָה חָנָה לְשַׁחְרוּרִיתָהּ.

הֵנְהוּ תְּרֵי תַלְמִידֵי דְהָוּוּ קַמֵּיהּ דְּרַבִּי יִצְחָק בֶּן אֶלְיָשִׁיב אָמְרוּ לֵיהּ: נִבְעֵי מִר רַחֲמֵי עָלֵי דְנִיחָכִים טוּבָא! אָמַר לְהוֹ: עָמִי הִיתָה, וְשַׁלְחִתִּיהָ.

רַבִּי יוֹסֵי בַר אֲבִין הָוּה שְׂכִיחַ קַמֵּיהּ דְּרַבִּי יוֹסֵי דְמִן יוֹקְרַת. שְׂבָקִיהּ וְאִתָּא לְקַמֵּיהּ דְּרַב אֲשִׁי.

By contrast, the powerful men of Eretz Yisrael, such as Rabbi Yona,<sup>p</sup> 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]<sup>l</sup> 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.

And furthermore, the Gemara relates that Rabbi Mani was frequently found before Rabbi Yitzhak ben Elyashiv, a well-known miracle worker. Once, Rabbi Mani said to him: The wealthy members of my father-in-law's house are persecuting me. Rabbi Yitzhak said: May they become poor, so they will no longer lord over you. And indeed, they became poor. Some time later, Rabbi Mani said to his teacher: Now that they are poor they are pressuring me for financial support. Rabbi Yitzhak said: May they become rich again. And indeed, they became rich.

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.<sup>n</sup> 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.

## NOTES

**עמי היתה – This power was with me but I sent it away** – According to Rashi, Rabbi Yitzhak 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 commentaries explain that Rabbi Yitzhak decided not to trouble God with petitions of that kind anymore (Rabbeinu Gershom). Yet others suggests 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 (*Sefat Emet*).