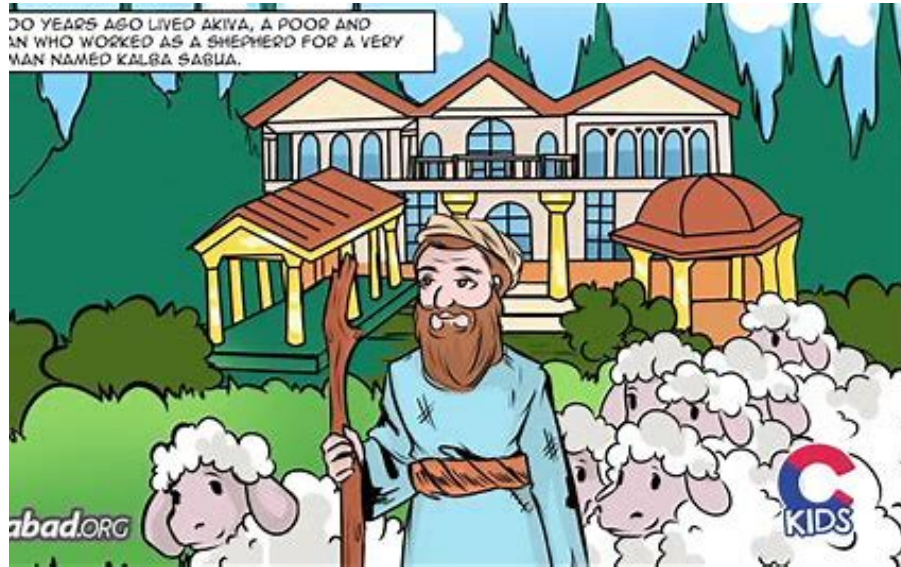


## Daf Ditty Ketubot 63: שלי ושלכם — נשלה הוא



המשלש לא במדרה יתקן זה ר' אושעיא בנו של רבי חמא בר כוסא ר"ע רעיא דבן כלבא שבוטע  
והוה חיתיה ברהיה ודעה צניע ומעלי אמרה ליה אי מקדשנא לך אולת לבי רב אמר לה אין איקדשא  
ליה בצניעה ושדחתיה \*שמע אבוה אפקה מביותיה אודרה הגאה מעכסיה אויל יהיב תרי סרי שנין  
בבי רב כי אחא אייתי בהדיה תרי סרי אלפי תלמידי שמעיה להתוא סבא דקאמר לה עד כמה

רבי עקיבא,

*returned from ישיבה the first time,  
after TWELVE years,  
heard his wife say;*

אי לדידי ציית יתיב תריסר שני אחריני

*Upon hearing that, he said;*

**ברשות קא עבידנא**

הדר אזיל ויתיב

תריסרי שני אחריני בבי רב

*After which, he returned with  
עשרין וארבעה אלפי תלמידי,  
and proclaimed;*

**שלי ושלכם שלה היא**

תורה שלמדתי אני ושלמדתם אתם  
על ידה הוא

The Gemara relates the well-known story of רבי עקיבא, who when he returned from Yeshiva the first time, after twelve years, heard his wife say: אי לדידי ציית יתיב תריסר שני אחריני If he would listen to me, he would stay in Yeshiva another twelve years. Upon hearing that, he said; ברשות קא עבידנא I am doing this - learning, away at Yeshiva - with her permission. הדר אזיל ויתיב תריסרי שני אחריני בבי רב He returned to Yeshiva for another twelve years. After which, he returned with עשרין וארבעה אלפי תלמידי Twenty four thousand Talmidim, and proclaimed; שלי ושלכם שלה היא As Rashi explains; תורה שלמדתי אני ושלמדתם אתם על ידי הווא All the Torah that you and I learned came about through her sacrifice.

רבי עקיבא רעיא דבן כלבא שבוע הוה, חזיתיה ברתיה דהוה צניע ומעלי, אמרה ליה: אי מקדשנא לך, אזלת לבי רב? אמר לה: אין, איקדשא ליה בצניעה ושרתיה. שמע אבוי, אפקה מביתיה אדרה הנאה מנכסיה. אזל יתיב תרי סרי שנין בבי רב. פי אתא, אייתי בהדיה תרי סרי אלפי תלמידי. שמעיה להווא סבא דקאמר לה: עד כמה

The Gemara further relates: **Rabbi Akiva was the shepherd of ben Kalba Savua**, one of the wealthy residents of Jerusalem. The **daughter** of Ben Kalba Savua **saw that he was humble and refined**. She said to him: **If I betroth myself to you, will you go to the study hall to learn Torah?** He said to her: **Yes. She became betrothed to him privately and sent him off to study. Her father heard this and became angry. He removed her from his house and took a vow prohibiting her from benefiting from his property.** Rabbi Akiva went and **sat for twelve years in the study hall. When he came back to his house he brought twelve thousand students with him, and as he approached he heard an old man saying to his wife: For how long**

קא מדברת אלמנות חיים?! אמרה ליה: אי לדידי ציית — יתיב תרי  
 סרי שני אחרוניי[תא]. אמר: ברשות קא עבידנא. הדר אזיל ויחיב  
 תרי סרי שני אחרוניי[תא] בבי רב. פי אתא אייתי בהדיה עשרין  
 וארבעה אלפי תלמידי, שמעה דביתהו, הות קא נפקא לאפיה. אמרו  
 לה שיקבתא: שאילי מאני לבוש ואיכסאי. אמרה להו: "יודע צדיק  
 נפש בהמתו". כי מטיא לגביה, נפלה על אפה, קא מנשקא ליה  
 לכרעיה. הו קא מדחפי לה שמעיה. אמר להו: שבקוה, שלי  
 ושלכם — שלה הוא.

**will you lead the life of a widow of a living man, living alone while your husband is in another place? She said to him: If he would listen to me, he would sit and study for another twelve years. When Rabbi Akiva heard this he said: I have permission to do this. He went back and sat for another twelve years in the study hall. When he came back he brought twenty-four thousand students with him. His wife heard and went out toward him to greet him. Her neighbors said: Borrow some clothes and wear them, as your current apparel is not appropriate to meet an important person. She said to them:**

10 A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast; but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. י יודע צדיק, נפש בהמתו; ורחמי רשעים, אכזרי.

Ps 12:10

*“A righteous man understands the life of his beast”* . When she came to him she fell on her face and kissed his feet. His attendants pushed her away as they did not know who she was, and he said to them: Leave her alone, as my Torah knowledge and yours is actually hers.

RASHI

שלי ושלכם שלה הוא - תורה שלמדתי אני  
 ושלמדתם אתם על ידה הוא:

שָׁמַע אָבוֹהָ דְאֵתָא גְבֵרָא רַבָּה לְמַתָּא, אָמַר: אֵיזִיל לְגַבִּיָּה, אֶפְשָׁר  
דְּמַפְר גְּדֵרָאִי. אֵתָא לְגַבִּיָּה, אָמַר לִיה: אֲדַעְתָּא דְגְבֵרָא רַבָּה מִי  
נִדְרָתָּ? אָמַר לוֹ: אֶפִּילוּ פָּרַק אֶחָד, וְאֶפִּילוּ הִלְכָה אַחַת. אָמַר לִיה:  
אָנָּא הוּא. נָפַל עַל אַפֵּיהּ וְנִשְׁקִיָּה עַל כַּרְעִיהּ וַיְהִיב לִיה פְּלָגָא  
מְמוֹנִיָּה. בְּרַתְיָה דְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא עֲבָדָא לִיה לְבֹן עֲזַאִי הָכִי. וְהֵינּוּ  
דְאָמְרֵי אִינְשֵׁי: רַחֲמֵי רַחֲמֵי רַחֲמֵי רַחֲמֵי אֲזַלְא, כְּעֹבְדֵי אִמָּא כְּד עֹבְדֵי  
בְּרַתָּא.

In the meantime **her father heard that a great man came to the town. He said: I will go to him. Maybe he will nullify my vow** and I will be able to support my daughter. **He came to him** to ask about nullifying his vow, and Rabbi Akiva **said to him: Did you vow thinking that this Akiva would become a great man? He said to him:** If I had believed he would know **even one chapter or even one halakha** I would not have been so harsh. **He said to him: I am he.** Ben Kalba Savua **fell on his face and kissed his feet and gave him half of his money.**

The Gemara relates: **Rabbi Akiva’s daughter did the same thing for ben Azzai**, who was also a simple person, and she caused him to learn Torah in a similar way, by betrothing herself to him and sending him off to study. **This explains the folk saying that people say: The ewe follows the ewe; the daughter’s actions are the same as her mother’s.**

מִתְנַיִ' הַמּוֹרְדָת עַל בַּעְלָהּ — פּוֹחֲתִין לָהּ מִכְּתוּבָתָהּ שִׁבְעָה דִינָרִין  
בְּשַׁבָּת. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: שִׁבְעָה טַרְפָּעִיקִין. עַד מָתִי הוּא פּוֹחֵת —  
עַד כְּנִגְדַּת כְּתוּבָתָהּ. רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אוֹמֵר: לְעוֹלָם הוּא פּוֹחֵת וְהוֹלֵךְ, עַד  
שָׂאֵם תַּפּוּל לָהּ יְרוּשָׁה מִמָּקוֹם אַחֵר, גּוֹבָה הַיְמָנָה. וְכֵן, הַמּוֹרְד עַל  
אִשְׁתּוֹ — מוֹסִיפִין עַל כְּתוּבָתָהּ שְׁלֹשָׁה דִינָרִין בְּשַׁבָּת. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה  
אוֹמֵר: שְׁלֹשָׁה טַרְפָּעִיקִין.

**MISHNA:** A woman who rebels against her husband is fined; her marriage contract is reduced by seven dinars each week. **Rabbi Yehuda says: Seven half-dinars [terapa'ikin] each week. Until when does he reduce her marriage contract? Until the reductions are equivalent to her marriage contract, i.e., until he no longer owes her any money, at which point he divorces her without any payment. Rabbi Yosei says: He can always continue to deduct from the sum, even beyond that which is owed to her due to her marriage contract, so that if she will receive an inheritance from another source, he can collect the extra amount from her. And similarly, if a man rebels against his wife, he is fined and an extra three dinars a week are added to her marriage contract. Rabbi Yehuda says: Three terapa'ikin.**

**Jastrow**

(m.) (טרעפ') טרפעיקא, טרפעיק

1. (corresp. to τροπαϊκος = Victoriatus) *Victoriatius* = Quinarius, half a denar (v. Zuck. Talm. Münz. p. 30). Yoma 35<sup>b</sup>. Gitt. 45<sup>b</sup>; Keth. 64<sup>a</sup> מאי ט' (not טרפעיקין) how much is a *T*? Sifré Deut. 294; Yalk. ib. 938.—Pl. טרפעיקין. Keth. V, 7; Tosef. ib. V, 7 (missing in ed. Zuck., Var. טרפעיקים; oth. ed. טרפעיקים).

גמ' מורדת ממאי? רב הונא אמר: מתשמיש המטה. רבי יוסי ברבי חנינא אמר: ממלאכה. תנו: וכן המורד על אשתו. בשלמא למאן דאמר מתשמיש, לחיי. אלא למאן דאמר ממלאכה, מי משועבד לה? אין, באומר "איני זן ואיני מפרנס".

**GEMARA:** The Gemara asks: **Against what** does **she rebel**; what is the nature of the rebellion discussed in the mishna? **Rav Huna said: Against** engaging in **marital relations**. **Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Hanina, said: Against** the **tasks** she is obligated to perform for her husband. The Gemara clarifies this dispute. **The mishna states: Similarly if** a man **rebels against his wife**. **Granted, according to the one who says** that the rebellion is **against marital relations, it is well**, as this type of rebellion can apply equally to a husband. **However, according to the one who says** that she rebels **against performing tasks, is he subjugated to her** to perform tasks?

The Gemara answers: **Yes**, he is, as the mishna is discussing **someone who says: I will not sustain, and I will not support** my wife.

גופא: המורדת על בעלה — פוחתין לה מכתובתה שבועה דינרים בשבת. רבי יהודה אומר: שבועה טרפעיקין. רבותינו חזרו ונמנו, שיהו מכריזין עליה ארבע שבתות זו אחר זו, ושולחין לה בית דין: הוי יודעת שאפילו כתובתיה מאה מנה הפסדת. אחת לי ארוסה ונשואה, אפילו נדה, אפילו חולה, ואפילו שומרת יבם.

§ With regard to **the matter itself**: A woman who **rebels against her husband** is fined; **we reduce her marriage contract by seven dinars each week**, and **Rabbi Yehuda says: Seven *terapa'ikin***. **Our Sages went back and were counted again**, meaning they voted and decided that instead of deducting a small amount from her marriage contract each week, **they would make public announcements about her for four consecutive *Shabbatot***. And they decided that the court

would send messengers to her to inform her: **Be aware that even if your marriage contract is worth ten thousand dinars, you will lose it all** if you continue your rebellion. If she does not retract her rebellion, she forfeits her entire marriage contract. With regard to this enactment, **it is the same to me**, meaning the *halakha* does not change, if she is **a betrothed woman or a married woman**, and even if she is **a menstruating woman**, and even if she is **ill**, and even if she is **a widow awaiting her yavam** to perform levirate marriage.

היכי דמאי מורדת? אמר אמיתר: דאמרה "בעינא ליה ומצענא ליה". אבל אמרה "מאיס עלי" — לא כייפינן לה. מר זוטרא אמר: כייפינן לה.

§ With regard to this *halakha*, the Gemara asks: **What are the circumstances** in which the *halakha* of a **rebellious** woman applies? **Ameimar said:** The case is where **she says: I want** to be married to **him**, but I am currently refusing him because **I want to cause him anguish** due to a dispute between us. **However**, if **she said: I am disgusted with him**, we do not compel her to remain with him, as one should not be compelled to live with someone who disgusts her. **Mar Zutra said:** We do **compel her** to stay with him.

## Summary

2) **MISHNAH:** The Mishnah teaches the consequences for a husband or wife who acts rebelliously against their spouse.

### 3) **A rebellious wife**

R' Huna and R' Yosi the son of R' Chanina offer different definitions of a rebellious wife.

R' Yosi the son of R' Chanina's explanation that a rebellious wife is one who refuses to work is unsuccessfully challenged.

R' Huna's explanation that a rebellious wife is one who refuses to have relations is unsuccessfully challenged.

According to an alternative version the second challenge was directed at R' Yosi the son of R' Chanina and proved successful.

The Gemara concedes that all opinions agree that refusing relations is rebellious and the dispute is whether refusing work is also rebellious.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.sefaria.org/Ketubot.63a.4?lang=bi&p2=Mishnah\\_Ketubot.5.7&lang2=bi&w2=English%20Explanation%20of%20Mishnah&lang3=en](https://www.sefaria.org/Ketubot.63a.4?lang=bi&p2=Mishnah_Ketubot.5.7&lang2=bi&w2=English%20Explanation%20of%20Mishnah&lang3=en)

This first part of the mishnah deals with a wife who refuses to provide for her husband one of the things that she is obligated to him. This could either refer to one of the labors listed in mishnah five, or it may refer to a wife who refuses to sleep with her husband. The second half refers to a husband who does not provide his wife with one of the things that he is obligated to give to her. I should note that this mishnah and other related sources has been an issue of much controversy throughout Jewish history and continues too extremely controversial today. It ties into the issue of a woman's ability to force her husband to divorce her. Briefly, the conclusion of the Talmud is that if after twelve months the woman continues to refuse to act as a wife to her husband, the court forces him to divorce her, but she loses her ketubah. The Geonim, the rabbis who came after the Talmud, made a famous enactment that the husband is forced to divorce her immediately. Some Geonim ruled that she receives part of her ketubah. Early post-Geonic scholars ruled similar to the Geonim, until Rabbenu Tam, a 12th century French talmudic commentator, ruled that the court can never force a husband to divorce his wife. Within a few centuries this became the unanimous opinion amongst halakhic experts. Today we are left with the serious problem of a husband who refuses to divorce his wife.

**If a wife rebels against her husband her ketubah is reduced by seven denarii a week. Rabbi Judah says: seven tropaics.**

If a husband claims that his wife is not fulfilling her duties he must bring her to court, and the court will impose upon her a reduction of seven denarii per week of her rebellion. Rabbi Judah says that it is reduced by seven tropaics, each tropaic being half of a denar.

**How long does he continue to reduce? Until the amount of her ketubah. Rabbi Yose says: he may continue to reduce, and if she receives an inheritance he may collect from it.**

According to the first opinion, the reduction of her ketubah continues until it reaches the total amount of her ketubah. At this point he must divorce her, and he does not pay anything to her. Note that he doesn't begin to reduce from the dowry which he must return to her upon the dissolution of the marriage. The reduction is only made in the amount that he is obligated to give her (200/100 minimum) from his own pocket. Rabbi Yose holds that he continues to take away her property. He would reduce from the amount of money she brought into the marriage and then continue to reduce against any potential future inheritance. In other words, according to Rabbi Yose he is never obligated to divorce his wife.

**Similarly, if a husband rebels against his wife, an addition of three denarii a week is made to her ketubah. Rabbi Judah said: three tropaics.**

This section teaches that a similar process occurs with a husband. If he rebels against her, the amount of her ketubah is increased. However, the increase is smaller than the corresponding decrease. According to the Talmud, the seven reduced from the ketubah corresponds to the seven labors that she is obligated to him and the three is added to his ketubah to correspond to the three things he owes her, food, clothing and conjugal rights.

**Rav Avrohom Adler** writes:<sup>2</sup>

### **The Story of Rabbi Akiva**

Rabbi Akiva was a shepherd of Ben Kalba Savua. His daughter, upon observing how modest and noble the shepherd was, said to him, “Were I to be betrothed to you, would you go away to study Torah?” “Yes,” he replied. She was then secretly betrothed to him and sent him away. When her father heard what she had done, he chased her from his house and forbade her by a vow to have any benefit from his estate. Rabbi Akiva spent twelve years studying Torah. When he returned home, he brought with him twelve thousand disciples. While in his home town, he heard an old man saying to his (*Rabbi Akiva’s*) wife, “How long will you be living as a widow?” She said to him: “If he would listen to me, he would sit and learn for another twelve years.” Rabbi Akiva (*overhearing this statement*) said: “I now have permission.” He therefore returned immediately to learn for another twelve years in the Beis Medrash.

When he returned (*after the second period of twelve years*), he returned together with twenty-four thousand of his students. His wife heard that he was returning, and came out to greet him. Her neighbors told her: “Borrow some clothing and cover yourself well.” She replied: “A righteous man knows the soul of his animal.”

When she reached him, she fell on her face and kissed his legs. Rabbi Akiva’s aide began to push her away. Rabbi Akiva said: “Leave her, as both mine and yours (*merit of Torah study*) is because of her.”

Her father heard that a great man was coming to town. He said: “I will go come before him; perhaps he will negate my vow.” He came before Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva said to him: “Did you make this vow with the intention that it should apply even if he becomes a great man?” He replied: “Even if he would learn one chapter or one law (*I did not intend it*.)” Rabbi Akiva told him: “I am he (*your son-in-law about whom you made the vow*.)” He fell to the ground, kissed his legs, and gave him one half of his assets.

The daughter of Rabbi Akiva made the same arrangement with Ben Azzai (*that he should go learn for many years*). This is like people say: “The sheep goes after another sheep, like the actions of a mother are the actions of a daughter.”

Rav Yosef the son of Rava was sent by his father to learn in the study house of (*an elder*) Rav Yosef for six years (*after his marriage*). After three years passed and it was the eve of Yom Kippur, he thought to return to visit his wife. His father, Rava, heard about his visit and took a weapon and went out to meet him. Rava confronted him: “You remembered your prostitute?” Some say he said: “You remembered your dove?” They were both involved in this confrontation, and neither remembered to eat the seudah ha’mafsekes (*the meal customarily eaten on the eve of Yom Kippur*). (62b3 – 63a1)

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<sup>2</sup> [http://dafnotes.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Kesuvos\\_63.pdf](http://dafnotes.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Kesuvos_63.pdf)



## Mishnah

If a woman rebels against her husband (by refusing to fulfill her obligations to her husband), we deduct from her kesuvah seven dinar per week. Rabbi Yehudah says: Seven *trapaics*. For how long can we deduct the value of her kesuvah? We can deduct the entire value of her kesuvah. Rabbi Yosi says: We can even deduct more, to the point where if she inherits assets from a relative, he can collect them (*based on this fine*). Similarly, someone who rebels against his wife must add three dinar a week to her kesuvah. Rabbi Yehudah says: Three *trapaics*. (63a1 – 63a2)

## Rebelling From What?

The Gemora asks: What is she rebelling from? Rav Huna says: She rebels from engaging in marital relations. Rabbi Yosi the son of Rabbi Chanina says: she rebels from performing work.

The Gemora asks: Our Mishnah continued: And so too someone who rebels against his wife. The Gemora asks: This is understandable according to the opinion that ‘rebelling’ refers to engaging in marital relations (*as both are obligated to do so*). However, according to the opinion that this refers to rebelling from work, is a husband obligated to do work for his wife?

The Gemora answers: Yes, it is deemed rebellion when he says, “I will not give her food and I will not support her.”

The Gemora asks: Didn’t Rav say that someone who tells his wife, “I will not give you food and I will not support you,” he must divorce her and pay her kesuvah?

The Gemora answers: Isn’t there time in the interim that we consult with him (and try to impress on him to change his mind)? [*The Mishnah therefore states that during that time, he must pay a fine.*]

The Gemora asks a question from the following Baraisa: Both a woman who is betrothed and married, even if she is a niddah, even if she is sick, and even if she is waiting to do “yibum” – “levirate marriage (*can be considered as rebelling*).” Now, the statement regarding a sick woman is understandable if we say that rebelling refers to refusing to engage in marital relations. However, if it refers to doing work, a sick person is not able to do work!?

The Gemora answers: It must be that everyone agrees that refraining from engaging in marital relations is considered rebelling. Their argument is merely regarding work. One opinion holds that refraining from work is not considered to be in this category, and one opinion says that it is.

The text itself (of the Baraisa cited above) stated (the Gemora is citing the Baraisa mentioned above in its entirety): If a woman rebels against her husband (by refusing to fulfill her obligations to her husband), we deduct from her kesuvah seven dinar per week. Rabbi Yehudah says: Seven *trapaics*. Our masters analyzed this issue and decided through an additional vote that (instead of deducting from her kesuvah) she should be publicly declared to be rebelling against her husband for four consecutive Sabbaths. The court sends her the following message (*during this time*): You should know that if you continue in this manner, you will forfeit your entire kesuvah - even if it is of a value of one hundred maneh. Both a woman who is betrothed and married, even if she is a niddah, even if she is sick, and even if she is waiting to do yibum (*can be considered as*

*rebellious*). Rabbi Chiya bar Yosef asked Shmuel: Is a niddah fit to engage in marital relations? He answered him: One who has bread in his basket is incomparable to someone who does not have bread in his basket. *[This means that even if someone cannot currently eat bread, he is happy knowing that he will soon be able to do so. Accordingly, the husband is not so burdened by the fact that his desire cannot be fulfilled at the present moment, for he knows she will be permitted soon afterwards; this is in contrast to one whose wife declared her refusal to engage in marital relations even after she becomes tahor.]* Rami bar Chama states: This public declaration takes place only in the synagogues and study houses. Rava says: This is evident from the fact that the sages publicly declared this four Sabbaths in a row. This shows it is only done in the synagogues and study houses (*where people congregate on Shabbos*).

Rami bar Chama says: She is sent the above message from Beis Din twice, once before the public declaration and once afterwards. Rav Nachman the son of Rav Chisda expounded: The law follows this declaration of our masters (unlike our Mishnah). Rava said: This is incorrect! Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said to Rava: What is incorrect about it? I said this ruling to him, and I said it in the name of a great man. Who is this great man? It is Rabbi Yosi the son of Rabbi Chanina.

The Gemora asks: Who did Rava hold like? He held like that which was stated: Rava said in the name of Rav Sheishes: We consult with her (and try to pressure her to change her mind, and the interim fine her for noncompliance). Rav Huna the son of Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav Sheishes: The halachah is: We do not consult with her.

The Gemora asks: What is the description of a rebellious woman? Ameimar says: It is where she says, "I want him (to be my husband), but I want to pain him." However, if she says, "He is disgusting to me" (to the point that she doesn't even care if she loses her kesuvah), we do not force her (*and he can divorce her without giving her a kesuvah*). Mar Zutra says: We force her (*using the laws of noncompliance stated above*). There was an incident like this where Mar Zutra indeed forced the woman to comply, and (the great) Rabbi Chanina from Sura came out from it.

The Gemora states: This is not a proof that he was correct, as Heavenly assistance decided that it should be so (*based on the particular situation*).

The daughter-in-law of Rav Zevid rebelled (*and said she was disgusted by her husband*). She seized one silk coat (that she brought into the marriage). Ameimar, Mar Zutra, and Rav Ashi sat together, and Rav Gamda was sitting near them. They were sitting and stated: If she rebelled, she loses (even) her extant worn-out clothes (that she brought into the marriage). Rav Gamda interjected: Is the reason you are saying this because Rav Zevid is an important man and you are flattering him? Didn't Rav Kahana say that Rava asked about this law and did not resolve it (if she does indeed forfeit the rights to these clothing)?

The Gemora cites an alternative version of the above incident: They were sitting and stated: If she rebelled, she does not lose her extant worn-out clothes (that she brought into the marriage). Rav Gamda interjected: Because Rav Zevid is an important man, you are reversing the law against him (because you know he will not contest it)? Didn't Rav Kahana say that Rava asked about this law and did not resolve it (if she does indeed forfeit the rights to these clothing)?

The Gemora concludes: Now that the law has not been stated neither in this manner nor in that manner, the halachah is as follows: If she seizes the clothing, we do not take it away from her; if

she did not seize it, we do not give it to her. And we wait twelve months of the year before giving her divorce, and during those twelve months, she is not entitled to support. (63b1 – 64a1)

## Can't Say Hello?

Rabbi Akiva was a shepherd of Ben Kalba Savua. His daughter, upon observing how modest and noble the shepherd was, said to him, “Were I to be betrothed to you, would you go away to study Torah?” “Yes,” he replied. She was then secretly betrothed to him and sent him away. When her father heard what she had done, he chased her from his house and forbade her by a vow to have any benefit from his estate. Rabbi Akiva spent twelve years studying Torah. When he returned home, he brought with him twelve thousand disciples. While in his home town, he heard an old man saying to his (*Rabbi Akiva's*) wife, “How long will you be living as a widow?” She said to him: “If he would listen to me, he would sit and learn for another twelve years.” Rabbi Akiva (*overhearing this statement*) said: “I now have permission.” He therefore returned immediately to learn for another twelve years in the Beis Medrash.

When he returned (*after the second period of twelve years*), he returned together with twenty-four thousand of his students. His wife heard that he was returning, and came out to greet him. Her neighbors told her: “Borrow some clothing and cover yourself well.” She replied: “A righteous man knows the soul of his animal.”

When she reached him, she fell on her face and kissed his legs. Rabbi Akiva's aide began to push her away. Rabbi Akiva said: “Leave her, as both mine and yours (*merit of Torah study*) is because of her.”

Her father heard that a great man was coming to town. He said: “I will go come before him; perhaps he will negate my vow.” He came before Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva said to him: “Did you make this vow with the intention that it should apply even if he becomes a great man?” He replied: “Even if he would learn one chapter or one law (*I did not intend it*).” Rabbi Akiva told him: “I am he (*your son-in-law about whom you made the vow*).” He fell to the ground, kissed his legs, and gave him one half of his assets.

The question is asked: Why didn't Rabbi Akiva, at least, say hello to his wife, and then return to study for another twelve years? He was already home; wouldn't that have been the decent thing to do?

We always heard in Yeshiva from Rabbi Gifter zt”l that “two times twelve” is not comparable at all with “one times twenty-four.” Rabbi Akiva was returning home, for he thought that his wife wished for him to be home; once he had permission from her to study longer, it would have been an interruption in his learning.

This was always used as a lesson for us as to how vital it is for one studying Torah to utilize every second for learning, even during a lunch hour or by vacation. It is important to relax, but a true Torah scholar must always remain focused on his learning even when he is occupied with other mundane matters.

Rav Chatzkel Levinstein said that Rabbi Akiva was concerned that if he would enter his house, he would get involved in other matters, and he would not be able to return to the Beis Medrash.

### **Rebellious Women, Those Disgusted With Their Husbands<sup>3</sup>**

Because the past two dapim, Ketubot 61 and Ketubot 62 fell on the first two days of Pesach (2015), I have not blogged since daf 60. Dapim 61 and 62 are filled with fascinating ideas about conjugal relations: men with different professions are required to have intercourse with their wives a certain number of times each week or month. Physical labourers are required to do less than Torah scholars and much less than men of leisure. Friday evening is the preferred time for conjugal relations, as night is preferable to daytime for intercourse and Shabbat is preferable to any other day for such acts of holiness. Men are required to return to their wives after one or two months of working away; women are not to be denied their right of conjugal relations.

This view of sex is incredibly different from that of mainstream, modern, North American views. Conjugal relations are a woman's right. Not for women's pleasure, but for producing children. Thus children are a woman's right in marriage. Men are to provide women with the opportunity to have children.

*Our daf*, Ketubot 63, begins with examples of Torah scholars who leave their wives and families for extended periods of time, always with their wives' acquiescence (at least, we are told that these women are pious and thrilled to have their husbands leave them for twelve years to learn and teach Torah).

A new Mishna teaches us that each time that women rebels against their husbands, seven dinars are deducted from each ketubah. It can also be deducted from one's inheritance. Similarly, men who rebel against their wives are fined. Three dinars are added to their wives' ketubot each week.

The Gemara first considers rebellion as a refusal to participate in conjugal relations. For men who refuse their wives, that woman is permitted to divorce him, for he has not met the requirements of their marriage contract. When a woman refuses intercourse, she may lose her ketubah. The rabbis discuss the significance of conjugal relations compared with the ability to perform tasks. A woman might be ill or menstruating. When is she deemed a rebellious woman?

Some of our rabbis want to mitigate these consequences. We are told that women who rebel against their husbands are publicly shamed: their names are announced in synagogue over the course of four Shabbatot. However, some rabbis argue that women should be consulted with,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://dafyomibeginner.blogspot.com/2015/04/ketubot-63-rebellious-women-those.html>

twice, to ensure that she wishes to endure the consequences of her choices. Further, the rabbis have different opinions about how accommodating they should be to women who are deemed rebellious. Should they lose rights to some of their clothing, for example?

Beyond being called a rebellious woman, the rabbis recognize that there are a number of reasons that a woman might wish to divorce her husband. She might be upset with him, and though she does not truly wish to divorce him, she wishes to hurt him. Denying him conjugal rights would hurt him. In these cases, the Rabbis do not compel them to divorce.

Women must have claimed that they found their husbands "disgusting", for there is a fair degree of attention given to that particular complaint. All of the rabbis agree that women who say "I am disgusted by my husband" are not compelled to live with those husbands. However, the rabbis have different opinions on whether or not husband should be compelled to divorce those wives. While Rambam and Rashi hold that opinion, many others disagree with them. They claim that such a husband is not compelled to divorce his disgusted wife. She is not considered to be a rebellious woman, though, and she does not lose the rights that are lost by a rebellious woman.

Often the rabbis make decisions that radically affect women's lives without having truly examined the considerations of women. It is wonderful to appreciate today's Daf that demonstrates many rabbis advocating for women and their experiences. Even when the halacha does not rule in their favour, these rabbis seem to understand that women's lives might not be bearable in certain circumstances.

## **THE PENALTY FOR A REBELLIOUS SPOUSE**

**Rav Mordechai Kornfeld** writes:<sup>4</sup>

The Mishnah discusses the penalty for a man or woman who rebels against his or her spouse and refuses to fulfill his or her obligations. Rav Huna explains that the rebellion under discussion is refusal of marital relations. Rabbi Yosi b'Rebbi Chanina says that the rebellion is refusal to work; the woman refuses to work for her husband (or provide him with her Ma'aseh Yadayim), or the man refuses to give his wife Mezonos.

It is difficult to understand why the Chachamim instituted a penalty for a husband or wife who rebels with regard to work.

The Gemara earlier (58b) records a dispute about whether the main purpose of the enactment of Mezonos was for the benefit of the woman (so that she will be supported) or for the benefit of the man (so that he will receive her Ma'aseh Yadayim). Rav Huna in the name of Rav says that the enactment was made for the benefit of the woman, and therefore she is entitled to say "Eini Nizones v'Eini Osah" -- "I decline the right to receive the Mezonos [from my husband] in order not to have

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dafyomi.co.il/kesuvos/insites/ks-dt-063.htm>

to give him my Ma'aseh Yadayim." Reish Lakish disagrees and says that the enactment of Mezonos was not for her benefit but for the husband's benefit (so that he receives her Ma'aseh Yadayim), and therefore she is not entitled to say "Eini Nizones v'Eini Osah."

Whose opinion does Rabbi Yosi b'Rebbi Chanina follow? If he follows Rav's opinion, the wife should not be considered to be rebelling when she refuses to work for the husband, because she is *allowed* to refuse to give him her Ma'aseh Yadayim by saying "Eini Nizones v'Eini Osah." As soon as she stops working for him, the husband should just stop giving her Mezonos, and he has no claim against her. If, on the other hand, Rabbi Yosi b'Rebbi Chanina follows Reish Lakish's opinion that the enactment of Mezonos was made for the husband's benefit, how can the husband be considered rebellious when he does not give his wife Mezonos? He should be entitled to tell her to keep her Ma'aseh Yadayim and not receive from him Mezonos, since the enactment was for his benefit, and he may decline the benefit if he wants.

(b) If the rebellion is only a question of a monetary matter in which one of the parties of the marriage does not fulfill his or her monetary obligations, why should the Mishnah make an unlimited penalty (of adding to or taking away from the Kesuvah indefinitely)? The Chachamim should just enact that since she owes him money because she rebelled, he merely collects from the Kesuvah the value of whatever Ma'aseh Yadayim she did not give to him.

(a) **TOSFOS** (DH Rav Huna) indeed learns that Rabbi Yosi b'Rebbi Chanina follows the view of Reish Lakish that a woman is not entitled to say "Eini Nizones v'Eini Osah," and that is why she is considered rebellious when she refuses to give her Ma'aseh Yadayim to her husband. It is Rav Huna who argues with Reish Lakish earlier. In the Sugya here he follows his own view that a woman *may* say "Eini Nizones v'Eini Osah."

Why, then, is the husband considered rebellious when he does not give Mezonos to his wife? According to Rabbi Yosi b'Rebbi Chanina, the husband should be entitled to say that the enactment of Mezonos was for *his* benefit, and he is entitled to decline her Ma'aseh Yadayim and not to give her Mezonos!

Tosfos (47b, DH Tiknu) proves from numerous sources that although the enactment of Mezonos was made for the husband's benefit (according to Reish Lakish), the husband is not allowed to decline the Ma'aseh Yadayim and stop giving Mezonos to his wife (if she does not produce enough Ma'aseh Yadayim to support herself). Reish Lakish maintains *not* that the enactment was made solely for the husband's benefit, but that the enactment was made *also* for his benefit as well as for *her* benefit, and therefore neither one may decline to give what the other one is entitled to receive. Hence, the husband may not say that he does not want her Ma'aseh Yadayim and refuse to give her Mezonos.

The **RITVA** and other Rishonim do not accept the assertion of Tosfos that Rabbi Yosi b'Rebbi Chanina follows the view of Reish Lakish. Rather, they explain that Rabbi Yosi b'Rebbi Chanina agrees with Rav Huna in the name of Rav that a woman may say "Eini Nizones v'Eini Osah." Why, then, is she considered rebellious when she refuses to give her Ma'aseh Yadayim to her husband? Apparently, the case under discussion is where the wife already received the Mezonos for that day, and afterwards she refuses to give her husband the Ma'aseh Yadayim for that day in return. In

days that follow, however, the husband will just keep the Mezonos since she keeps her Ma'aseh Yadayim.

(b) According to the above approach, the rebellion of Melachah involves just one day's worth of Ma'aseh Yadayim which was not given to the husband when it was due (because after that day, the husband simply stops giving his wife Mezonos). That amount should simply be deducted from the total amount of the Kesuvah. Why does Beis Din deduct from the Kesuvah indefinitely?

Tosfos and other Rishonim explain that even if Beis Din has the ability to forcefully take the money owed from the rebellious wife or husband, Beis Din does not do so but rather fines them by lessening or increasing the Kesuvah until they agree to fulfill their obligations on their own. Beis Din does not forcefully take away their money because it is impossible for a person to live with a spouse who must continually be forced in order to fulfill his or her obligations ("Ein Adam Dar Im Nachash b'Kefifah Achas"). By altering the amount of the Kesuvah, the defiant party might be persuaded to agree to fulfill his or her obligations willingly.

## **A REBELLIOUS SPOUSE**

The Mishnah and Gemara mention a number of ways in which Beis Din forces a spouse to fulfill his or her obligations to the other. The Mishnah (63a) says that Beis Din forces a defiant woman by decreasing the amount of her Kesuvah and ultimately taking it away entirely. The Gemara cites the opinion of "Raboseinu" who later instituted that instead of gradually reducing her Kesuvah, Beis Din merely proclaims in the synagogues on four consecutive Shabbosim that this woman is rebelling against her husband and that she is going to lose her Kesuvah if she does not change her ways. If she has not capitulated after the fourth week, they take away her entire Kesuvah. The Amora'im here disagree about whether or not the Halachah follows the view of Raboseinu.

On the next Daf (64a), the Gemara says that Beis Din waits twelve months before permitting the husband to divorce her, during which time the husband is not obligated to support her.

In practice, what is the Gemara's conclusion with regard to the proper practice of penalizing a rebellious wife?

The Rishonim apparently disagree about how to understand the order and application of the different enactments mentioned by the Gemara.

(a) According to **RASHI**, the later Takanah of Raboseinu was not accepted by all of the Amora'im as the Halachah. Rather, the Gemara concludes that the Halachah is "Nimlachin Bah" -- Beis Din delays the divorce and the immediate revocation of her Kesuvah (and reduces the amount of the Kesuvah in the manner described in the Mishnah), and Beis Din attempts to persuade her to change her ways. When the Gemara (64a) says that she is given twelve months, it is in agreement with the penalty of the Mishnah here. However, the Gemara there imposes an upper limit to the penalty; after twelve months of rebelliousness, whatever is left of the Kesuvah is taken away and the husband may divorce her without giving her the Kesuvah or Tosefes.

(b) **TOSFOS** and other Rishonim maintain that the Halachah follows the view of Raboseinu. The only question among the Amora'im is whether Beis Din must inform her of the consequences of

her actions both before and after each public announcement, or only *after* each announcement. The Amora'im agree that she is fined the entire Kesuvah after four weeks.

The Rishonim disagree, however, about how to understand the enactment to wait twelve months. Does the enactment apply to a woman who wants her Kesuvah, or does it apply to a woman who is ready to be divorced and is willing to forgo her Kesuvah?

1. The **RASHBA** (cited by the Magid Mishneh, Hilchos Ishus 14:9) writes that the enactment applies to a woman who is ready to forgo the Kesuvah. Although a woman who wants her Kesuvah and maintains her recalcitrance is divorced after four weeks without her Kesuvah, if she says explicitly that she is ready to forgo the entire Kesuvah Beis Din delays the divorce for twelve months. This enactment to wait twelve months was instituted when the Chachamim saw that women were being divorced impulsively, and then they became regretful that they had lost both their husbands and Kesuvah. By giving them time before permitting them to divorce, the Chachamim hoped that the husband and wife would appease each other.

2. The **ROSH** (5:34) explains that the enactment was not instituted only in a situation where both are ready to get divorced and she does not want her Kesuvah, but also in a situation where she wants her Kesuvah. The husband still must wait twelve months before he divorces her.

3. The **RAMBAM** (Hilchos Ishus 14:9-10) writes the opposite of the Rashba. The enactment to wait twelve months was instituted only for a rebellious woman who *wants* her Kesuvah. The Magid Mishneh explains that it is shameful for Jewish women to be divorced out of quarreling ("Mipnei Ketatah"). Therefore, twelve months are given to enable the woman to become appeased. When, however, the woman wants to dissolve the marriage immediately because she is disgusted with her husband and she is willing to forgo her Kesuvah, the husband may divorce her immediately and there is no period of waiting at all (because she will not be persuaded to stay with him, due to her disgust with him).

The **RIF** writes that the enactments underwent further modification later. After the time of the Gemara, the Ge'onim instituted that if she does not want her Kesuvah and they both want to divorce, he may divorce her right away (and he does not have to wait twelve months).

The Gemara explains that the enactments of the Mishnah and of Raboseinu apply only when the woman says that she still wants her Kesuvah and is not willing to be divorced without it. If she is willing to be divorced without her Kesuvah, Ameimar says that "we do not force her" to remain married. The Rishonim disagree about what Ameimar means when he rules that "we do not force her" to remain married.

According to the **RASHBAM** (cited by the Rosh 5:34) and the **RAMBAM** (Hilchos Ishus 14:8), this means that if she wants to leave him without a Kesuvah, Beis Din makes the husband divorce her and he cannot force her to remain married to him.

However, according to **RABEINU TAM** (cited by Tosfos DH Aval, and other Rishonim), Ameimar does not mean that Beis Din forces him to divorce her, but rather that Beis Din does not influence him *not* to divorce her; if he wants to divorce her he may do so.



**HALACHAH:** The **SHULCHAN ARUCH** (EH 77:2) rules that if the woman who rebels is ready to get divorced and to forgo her Kesuvah, she cannot force the husband to divorce her (the opinion of Rabeinu Tam). If *he* wants to divorce her, he may divorce her right away.

If the woman who rebels demands her Kesuvah, she loses her Kesuvah after four weeks of defiance (like Raboseinu), but the husband must wait twelve months before he divorces her. This follows the view of the Rambam (opinion b:3 above) who rules that that twelve months are given only when she is angry with him, but not when she is disgusted by him and is ready to leave without a Kesuvah.

The **REMA** adds that some say that the enactment of waiting twelve months after she loses the Kesuvah applied only in the times of the Gemara when a man was permitted to marry a second wife. Nowadays, when a man may not marry a second wife, waiting twelve months would cause the husband to lose out as well (because he will not be able to marry another wife during that time), and thus he is permitted to divorce her immediately.

## **Annuling a vow**

**Steinsaltz (OBM)** writes:<sup>5</sup>

Our Gemara is the source for one of the greatest Talmudic love stories – Rabbi Akiva and Rachel.

Rachel was the daughter of Ben Kalba Savua, who came from one of the wealthiest and most politically powerful families in Israel during the time of the destruction of the Second Temple. Akiva, a 40-year-old shepherd who worked for Ben Kalba Savua, asked Rachel to marry him. She agreed to do so if he promised to devote himself to the study of Torah after their wedding. Akiva agreed to do so, and they secretly married.

Upon learning of this Ben Kalba Savua threw Rachel out of his house and disowned her, condemning her to a life of poverty while Akiva studied. The Talmud relates that after 12 years of study, Akiva returned with 12,000 students, but before entering his house he heard his wife say that she would be willing to have her husband continue to learn for another 12 years. Taking her on her word, he returned to the beit midrash for another 12 years, returning home this time with 24,000 students.

According to the Gemara, by this time Ben Kalba Savua had come to regret the decision to disown his daughter, and upon hearing that a great Rabbi had come to town he called on him to ask to annul his vow. Rabbi Akiva asked him whether he would have made the vow to disown his

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<sup>5</sup> <https://steinsaltz.org/daf/ketubot63/>

daughter had she married a Torah scholar. Upon informing him that he would not have done so even if his son-in-law knew a single chapter or verse, Akiva identified himself. Released from his vow, Ben Kalba Savua gave the couple half of his estate.

One question that is raised by the commentaries focuses on how Rabbi Akiva's newfound knowledge could be a reason to annul a vow. Ordinarily an argument that is nolad – a new situation – cannot be used as a reason to undo a vow; rather, it needs to be a mistake that existed at the time that the vow was made. The Ritva argues that since the marriage was predicated on Akiva's willingness to study, his success could not be considered nolad; furthermore it is likely that he did have some learning at the time the vow was made. The Meiri suggests that every person who is potentially a scholar – as Rabbi Akiva proved to be – cannot be considered without knowledge.

### *A wife who refuses to fulfill her responsibilities*

מיתבי ... "ואפילו חולה", בשלמא למאן דאמר ממלאכה, חולה בת  
מלאכה היא

The Mishnah taught that a woman who “rebels” and does not fulfill her responsibilities in the marriage can be penalized until she again begins to honor her obligations.<sup>6</sup>

This penalty is assessed in terms of the value of her kesubah being diminished weekly. The Gemara brings two opinions regarding which duties that the wife refuses to fulfill are included in this law. Rav Huna understands that it refers to her physical relationship with her husband, while Rebbe Yose b. Chanina understands that we are discussing the fact that the woman refuses to perform the daily tasks and household chores incumbent upon a wife (see Mishnah 59b). Tosafos understands that our Mishnah refers to the seven primary chores listed in the Mishnah, but if the woman prefers not to “pour wine, arrange the beds and pillows and provide water for washing his face, hands and legs,” she is not considered to be in defiance of her responsibilities.

A Baraisa is brought to resolve which is the correct understanding of the Mishnah. The Baraisa teaches that the case of “a rebellious wife” applies even to a woman who is ill. This seems to suggest that Rebbe Yose b. Chanina is incorrect, because a woman who is sick cannot be expected to maintain her regular routine of working around the house, and her refusal to do so would not result in a penalty against her. Accordingly, the Gemara concludes that all opinions are that the Mishnah refers to a woman who resists a physical relationship with her husband. The argument is whether refusal to do her household chores alone results in her being labeled as a “rebel.”

Here, only Rebbe Yose b. Chanina holds that this also is grounds for the woman to be penalized. Tosafos explains that the underlying issue about which the Amoraim argue is whether a woman can initiate a request to not work and, consequently, not to be supported by her husband. Rav Huna is of the opinion that a woman has the right to take this position, and her refusal to work would therefore not be an indication of being rebellious. This explanation, however, is only reasonable if a woman's being employed exempts her from all forms of household work.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://dafdigest.org/masechtos/Kesuvos%20063.pdf>

However, ר"ן learned that even an employed woman can only exempt herself from “working with wool,” which is done in exchange for the support she receives from her husband. Accordingly, the woman’s refusal to work in the house would be rebellious even according to Rav Huna, unlike Tosafos.

***Is seclusion prohibited for a woman who refuses to immerse in the mikvah?***

אינו דומה מי שיש לו פת בסלו למי שאין לו פת בסלו

***One cannot compare one who has bread in his basket with one who does not have bread in his basket***

There was once a woman who for a number of years refused to immerse in the mikvah and declared her intent never to immerse in the mikvah. Rav Sholom Mordechai Schwadron (1), the Maharsham, was asked whether this couple is permitted to be in seclusion with one another. The main issue of the inquiry was whether this case is similar to the case of a woman who becomes prohibited to her husband where seclusion is not permitted or perhaps the cases are not parallel. In the case of the woman who becomes prohibited to her husband the couple is going to be prohibited to one another for the rest of their lives but in this case there is the possibility that she may change her mind and decide to immerse in the mikvah.

Maharsham answered that it is certainly prohibited for this couple to be in seclusion and amongst his proofs, he cites our Gemara. The reason the value of the kesubah of a rebellious wife is diminished is because it is similar to a case of a person who “does not have bread in his basket.”

We see from the Gemara that even though there is a possibility that the rebellious wife may cease her rebelliousness, nonetheless, for the moment it is considered as if he “does not have bread in his basket,” so too in our case the possibility that they may reconcile does not take away from the fact that presently it is a circumstance where he “does not have bread in his basket,” consequently, seclusion is prohibited.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Braun (2), the Shearim Hamitzuyanim B’Halacha, limits the ruling of Maharsham to a case where the woman refuses to immerse in the mikvah but is still interested in being together with her husband. Under such circumstances seclusion is prohibited but if she refuses to immerse out of spite against her husband, seclusion is permitted.

The rationale is that even regarding the rebellious wife mentioned in our Gemara there is no indication that she is prohibited from being in seclusion with her husband. Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner (3), the Shevet Halevi disagrees and maintains that Maharsham’s ruling applies in all cases that a woman refuses to immerse, regardless of what reason she offers for not immersing.

1. שו"ת מהרש"ם ח"ב ס"י קע"ח.
2. שערים המצוינים בהלכה ס"י קס"ב
3. שו"ת שבט הלוי ח"ח ס"י רע"א. I

### *The Scholarly Son-in-Law*

"הוא שמע אביו דאתא גברא רבה למתא  
אמר איזיל לגביה אפשר דמפר נדראי..."

In the "old country" it was the custom of fathers with eligible daughters who found a suitable prospect to test the young hopeful's Torah knowledge. If the father was learned, he would conduct the interview himself. If he was unlearned, the father would meet the boy to see if he was suitable, but he would send someone more erudite to test the boy.

One wealthy *talmid chochom* searched assiduously for an appropriate match for his accomplished daughter. He heard very good things about Rav Shmuel Abba of Zichlin, ז"ל, so he decided to test his mettle. When they met, the young man made a very good impression, so the father asked a difficult question: "In Kesuvos 63a there is a very difficult Tosafos. The Gemara on 62b states that Rabbi Akiva was a shepherd employed by Kalba Savua. The instant that the wealthy man heard that his daughter was engaged to an ignoramus, he immediately made a vow that his daughter and her husband could not have any benefit from his money.

Later, when Rabbi Akiva returned from his studies, Kalba Savua didn't know it was him and tried to nullify the vow he had made earlier. Rabbi Akiva asked him if he would have made the vow if he had known that his son-in-law would become a great man? Kalba Savua responded that he would not have made the vow even if the chosson had only known one chapter.

Rabbi Akiva then released the vow. The prospective father-in-law then asked Rav Shmuel Abba, "Tosafos asks how Rabbi Akiva could have nullified a vow on the basis of נולד, a consideration that was not likely to have been the case at the time the vow was made? The answer given is that once he went to learn, he would certainly become an אדם גדול.

But what does this mean? Many people go to learn and don't become sages?" Rav Shmuel Abba answered without hesitation, "In Shabbos 22b we find that one who respects the sages will have sons-in-law who are sages. Kalba Savua was in this category—he would have been happy even if Rabbi Akiva had learned even one chapter.

After the engagement, Rabbi Akiva went to learn. Since he was already in yeshiva and had such a father-in-law he was surely going to become a scholar. So we see that this was not נולד at all!"

**Sharon Weiss-Greenberg** writes:<sup>7</sup>

The story of Rabbi Rehumi and his wife that we encountered on yesterdays' daf received wide attention in 2013 when Ruth Calderon shared it in her first speech as a newly-elected member of the Knesset. In that story, Rabbi Rehumi spent 364 days a year in the yeshiva and came home to his wife only on Yom Kippur. One year, he failed to appear, and she shed a tear. At that same moment, he fell to his death. In her address, Calderon reminisced about how the study of Talmud had once been beyond her reach but had subsequently come to fill an intellectual and spiritual hole in her life. She drew motivation from this story — in which she saw two sides that were tragically unable to understand one another's perspectives — to call for a more cooperative and productive government.

Growing up, I was not familiar with the story of Rabbi Rehumi and his wife. I was, however, very familiar with the story of Rabbi Akiva that comes after it. Like Rabbi Rehumi, Rabbi Akiva also left his wife for long periods to study. But this story has a much happier ending. Since it is such a classic, I'm going to share it in full:

**Rabbi Akiva was the shepherd of Ben Kalba Savua (one of the wealthy residents of Jerusalem). The daughter of Ben Kalba Savua saw that he was humble and refined.**

**She said to him: "If I betroth myself to you, will you go to the study hall to learn Torah?"**

**He said to her: "Yes." She became betrothed to him privately and sent him off to study. Her father heard this and became angry. He removed her from his house and took a vow prohibiting her from benefiting from his property.**

**Rabbi Akiva went and sat for 12 years in the study hall. When he came back to his house he brought 12,000 students with him, and as he approached he heard an old man saying to his wife: "For how long will you lead the life of a widow of a living man?"**

**She said to him: "If he would listen to me, he would sit and study for another 12 years." When Rabbi Akiva heard this he said: "I have permission to do this." He went back and sat for another 12 years in the study hall.**

**When he came back he brought 24,000 students with him. His wife heard and went out toward him to greet him. Her neighbors said: "Borrow some clothes and wear them."**

**She said to them: "*A righteous man understands the life of his beast.*" (Proverbs 12:10) When she came to him she fell on her face and kissed his feet. His attendants pushed her away, but he said to them: "Leave her alone, as my Torah knowledge and yours is actually hers."**

**Her father heard that a great man came to the town. He said: "I will go to him. Maybe he will nullify my vow (and I will be able to support my daughter)."**

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<sup>7</sup> Mytalmudiclearning.com

**He came to him, and Rabbi Akiva said to him: “Did you vow thinking that this Akiva would become a great man?”**

**He said to him: “If I had believed he would know even one chapter or even one *halakhah* I would not have been so harsh.” He said to him: “I am he.” Ben Kalba Savua fell on his face and kissed his feet and gave him half of his money.**

Rabbi Akiva’s wife grows up rich, falls for the poor shepherd boy her father disapproves of, and gives up everything to enable his education. Decades later, Rabbi Akiva returns a towering triumph of Torah learning and credits her with all the learning he and his disciples have amassed. Her father humbly hands over half his riches.

In my childhood, Rabbi Akiva was always held up as a role model, a scholar with a deep sense of humility. He was a man who was willing to attend first grade as a grown adult. His wife was selfless, to be sure, but at least he appreciated her — and later unhesitatingly credited her with his success as a scholar.

It was not until I was an adult that I found something more deeply troubling in the story. When Rabbi Akiva returns home after his first 12 years away, he does not actually speak to his wife. Instead, he overhears her statement to someone else: **“If he would listen to me, he would sit and study for another twelve years.”** At this point, Rabbi Akiva understands that he has permission to return for another dozen years of study.

Rabbi Akiva’s wife is clearly trying to impress on her interlocutor that she and her husband have discussed his study schedule and that she is not only supportive, but wishes him to study more. But it is equally clear from Rabbi Akiva’s private response that the pair have not actually spoken about this. So we cannot take her words at face value. Was she just trying to put on a brave face? To be gracious? And what of Rabbi Akiva’s response? Was he really unable to spare a moment to thank his wife or ask how she is doing? Or, indeed, ask her how she truly feels about his long absences? Perhaps he was worried that she would, in a private exchange, ask him to choose her over the yeshiva.

The story of Rabbi Rehumi and his wife ends in tragedy. Derive this lesson from it: “I learn that righteousness is not adherence to the Torah at the expense of sensitivity to human beings.” I found today’s daf troubling because it seems that Rabbi Akiva has made that exact mistake with respect to his wife.

But reading further into *our daf*, I had another thought. Perhaps Rabbi Akiva’s wife actually *was* happy with their arrangement. As we also learn today, her own daughter chose a similar path:

**Rabbi Akiva’s daughter did the same thing for Ben Azzai. This explains what people say: The ewe follows the ewe; the daughter’s actions are the same as her mother’s.**

Did the women in Rabbi Akiva's life support their husbands grueling programs of study without regret? Or did they wish for a different arrangement? We'll never know — the Talmud makes room for both possibilities.

**Rabbi Johnny Solomon** writes:<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes a Talmud story can be read in two radically different ways.

Early on in *our daf* (Ketubot 63a) we are told a story involving a father and son, Rav Yosef and his father Rava, where Rava – who wanted his son to be fully immersed in Torah study for a 6-year stretch - disagreed with Rav Yosef returning home mid-way through his studies. According to most translations, upon seeing his son Rava approached him with some kind of utensil in hand (שקל מנא ונפק לאפיה), and he then scorned him saying זונתך נזכרת – ‘You’ve now remembered your harlot?!’ (which is understood to be a reference to Rav Yosef’s wife), while some claim that Rava said יונתך נזכרת – ‘You’ve now remembered your dove?!’.

According to this reading of the Gemara, many commentaries explain that Rava suspected that among the reasons of his son coming home was that he emotionally and physically missed his wife and he was interested in being sexually intimate with his wife. However, since sexual intimacy is forbidden on Yom Kippur, Rava felt it was entirely the wrong time for his son to return home at this time, and that notwithstanding the presumption that his son would observe this law during Yom Kippur, the idea that a husband and wife be under the same roof after 3 years of separation and remain unable to be together was a bad plan. According to this reading, this is why Rava refers to Rav Yosef’s wife as a harlot – because he believes that Rav Yosef is coming home with an agenda of sexual intimacy.

Moreover, even the alternative version of what was said by Rava, i.e. ‘You’ve now remembered your dove?!’, is also understood by various commentaries in this spirit because doves are faithful to their mates. The story then ends by us being told that this disagreement between father and son became so heated that neither then had the opportunity to eat the pre-fast meal before the onset of Yom Kippur. Still, notwithstanding this explanation being the approach of numerous commentaries, it is clear that this whole episode is both confusing and unsettling.

However, Rabbi Reuven Margaliot offers an altogether different approach to this story which complements its place in the overall discussion of Massechet Ketubot. He explains that the episode is all about the duties of a husband to provide sustenance for his wife, and that the word זונתך (zonat’cha) – which is translated by many as ‘harlot’ – has no such meaning in this context and, in fact, it refers to the commitment to provide sustenance (מזונות – mezontot). In fact, he then provides numerous references (see for example Yerushalmi Ketubot 5:4) where the word זונתו (zonato) refers to sustenance.

Given this explanation, Rava’s remarks to his son had nothing to do with sexual intimacy, and were not even necessarily critical of him. Instead, Rava sought to reassure his son - who had

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<sup>8</sup> www.rabbijohnnysolomon.com

interrupted his studies to come home and make sure that everything is OK - by saying 'there was no need for you to come back, because your commitment to sustain your wife (זונתך) is being fulfilled'. Infact, beyond this point made by Rav Margalio, there are lots of additional hints that this is the point of the story. For example, it occurs on Erev Yom Kippur which is a fast day, and the story ends by telling us that neither Rava nor Rav Yosef had the opportunity to eat before the onset of the fast. What we learn from all this is that paying attention to the original words and the context of a story matters, and that when a story is read in one way which is both confusing and unsettling, perhaps there are other ways to understand it that make more sense.



## **Why Rabbi Akiva is My Hero**

*10 life lessons from an accessible giant.*

**Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld** writes:<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://aish.com/why-rabbi-akiva-is-my-hero/>



The period of counting the Omer is also a time of national mourning. The Talmud (Yevamot 62b) recounts that Rabbi Akiva, one of the greatest scholars of the Mishna, lost 24,000 students to plague during this time of year. The world was “desolate” until he raised five new students – who were able to restore the Torah to its full glory in that dark period.

Rabbi Akiva’s life is a fascinating tale of inspiration, of a man of humble origins who overcame it all to achieve greatness. I would like to outline some of the highlights of his life story – and demonstrate why I feel he serves as a personal role model to us all.

## **1. He was of Humble Origins**

Rabbi Akiva began his life as a shepherd. He was entirely unlearned until his middle years. He likewise had no Jewish lineage to speak of (Talmud Brachot 27b). He descended from converts. And as he rose to greatness in his later years, he never forgot who he was or where he came from. His favorite principle was “Love your fellow as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). Rich or poor, simple or scholarly, tall or short, strong or weak: We are all God’s children. God and His Torah are not the monopoly of the wise or the well-pedigreed. We are all precious to God.

## **2. He Saw Inspiration and Acted on it**

The Midrash (Avot d’Rav Natan 6:2) records the turning point of Rabbi Akiva’s life. One day, at the age of 40, Akiva passed a well. He saw a rock with a hole carved into it. He inquired who shaped the rock and was told it was caused by the slow but constant dripping of water on top of it.

Akiva then reasoned: If a substance soft as water can penetrate a rock with slow, persistent motion, so too the Torah, which is hard as iron, can slowly but surely penetrate my heart. And this was Akiva’s turning point. He promptly set off to study Torah – for an uninterrupted 24 years.

So many times in our lives are we moved by inspiring words or events. We know they are speaking to us, that God has a message for us. Yet the inspiration fades before we do anything about it – and life moves on. Not R. Akiva. He saw his moment – and he changed his life right then and there.

## **3. He Patiently Started from the Bottom**

When Akiva went to study, he did not exactly hire a private tutor or join an adult study program. Nor did he sign up for an anonymous on-line course. The Midrash describes how he, together with his young son, went to *cheder* to learn the alef-bet together with the youngest children. And his past humility showed. He wasn’t fazed by the awkwardness; he didn’t care for his own dignity. He set right down to work.

## **4. He was No Super-Genius**

It is not as if Rabbi Akiva really had an IQ of 180 all along but was just withering on the vine during his years as a shepherd. He had to work – and work hard – to become who he was.

The Talmud (Yevamot 16a) records a meeting R. Akiva had with a monumental scholar, to discuss a debate they had about a touchy subject in Jewish law. The other scholar was the raving genius type. No one could keep up with him in an argument – not even R. Akiva, by then the acknowledged leader of his generation.

The other scholar, after R. Akiva failed to convince him, had nothing but snide remarks for the supposed leading scholar of the generation. But as the Talmud continues, it didn't faze Akiva in the slightest. He was still the shepherd-turned-scholar. He had no airs about him whatsoever.

## **5. He Asked All the Tough Questions**

Rabbi Akiva, in spite of his late start, had a distinct advantage over his colleagues. Unlike they who began their study as small children, he came to it as an adult. And as a result, he approached the Torah with mature eyes. Nothing was taken for granted or viewed as, “Well, that's just the way things are.” R. Akiva probed every aspect of Judaism – and discovered truths where others failed even to look.

### **R. Akiva discovered truths where others failed even to look.**

We thus find Rabbi Akiva posing some of the most profound questions of life. In Pirkei Avot (3:19) he grapples with the contradiction between man's free will and God's knowledge of the future. If God already knows what I will do tomorrow, do I really have the free will to decide? He likewise discusses (3:20) how God's governs and judges the world. The Midrash (Avot d'Rav Natan 6:2) describes R. Akiva as a persistent student, leaving no issue unexplored and unexplained. His colleague characterized him with the comment – “Matters hidden from people; R. Akiva has brought to light.”

## **6. It was All Because of His Wife – and He Knew it**

So much of R. Akiva's greatness was on account of his devoted wife Rachel. She “discovered” him. He served as shepherd for one of the wealthiest men of his time, Kalba Savua. Kalba's daughter took a liking to the humble shepherd, whom she saw as modest and refined. She proposed to him – on condition that he agree to study Torah. He agreed and they married secretly. Kalba promptly disowned his daughter and for years the young couple lived in abject poverty (Talmud Ketuvot 62b).

If not for Rachel, Akiva would have no doubt remained an anonymous shepherd with little future. But she believed in him. Rachel left a life of fabulous wealth to make home for Akiva – because she knew he could become great – and she had the faith and the patience to see it happen. And when he was ready, she encouraged him to leave home to study – which he did for an uninterrupted 12 years.

But that was only half of it. The Talmud (Ketuvot 62-3) records that on his return, already an accomplished scholar, R. Akiva was about to enter his home. Just then he overhears a conversation. An elderly man challenges Rachel: “How long will you live as a widow with your husband alive?”

She responds, “If [my husband] would listen to me, he would remain for *another* 12 years in yeshiva!” On that providential note, R. Akiva returns for another 12 years of study.

At last, after 24 years, R. Akiva returns to his hometown, now the leading scholar of the generation, escorted by an entourage of 24,000 students. His wife, still dressed in her simple house clothes, goes out to greet him. She falls before his feet. It creates a scene – an elderly woman thrusting herself before great rabbi surrounded by scores of devoted students. They move to push her away. But R. Akiva stops them, uttering a line which has since become famous: “Leave her. What is mine and what is yours is hers.”

## 7. He Never Forgot His Origins

R. Akiva “made it” in every sense of the word. By the end of his life he was the acknowledged spiritual leader of world Jewry. He became wealthy. He was revered and admired by all. His opinion was sought and regarded on all matters Jewish. Yet he never forgot where he came from. He was still one of the masses. He knew what it was like to be poor, to be unknown, and to be unlearned.

And his love for humanity showed. His favorite verse was Leviticus 19:18: “Love your fellow as yourself” (Sifra 4:12). In Pirkei Avot (3:18), he states, “Beloved is man for he was created in the image [of God],” as well as, “Beloved are the Children of Israel for they are called children of the Lord.” We are all precious to God. There is no favoritism in Heaven.

R. Akiva in fact well remembered his past *hatred* for Torah scholars (Talmud Pesachim 49b). He knew what it was like to be coarse and ignorant. And he remembered the resentment – and the *hatred* – felt by the underprivileged classes. He had love and patience for all – because he was one of them himself, and he realized how difficult it is to outgrow one’s past mindset.

## 8. He Lost All – and Kept Going

After achieving fame, R. Akiva became teacher and spiritual mentor to an astounding 24,000 students. As the Talmud (Yevamot 62b) recounts, every one of them died in an exceedingly brief period of time – during the several week period between Passover and Shavuot – due to epidemic. And as the Talmud puts it, the world was desolate. The human tragedy was devastating, the loss to the Torah world unimaginable.

But apart from all of that, R. Akiva personally witnessed his entire lifeworks go down the drain. Years of training the greatest minds of the next generation were lost to R. Akiva, with nothing remaining to show for himself.

If there were anyone in this world who could be forgiven for spending his remaining years wasting away feeling sorry for himself, it was R. Akiva. Could there have been a clearer sign from heaven that God was not interested in R. Akiva’s works, that his precious legacy was just not meant to be? How could a human being *not* become paralyzed from misery and indecision at that point?

But R. Akiva picked himself up and started again. As the Talmud continues, he found 5 new students – *five* to replace 24,000. Rather than attempting to amass students without number, he focused on 5 precious souls, who would between them restore the Torah to its past glory.

### **He didn't let his inability to explain stand in the way of achievement.**

No doubt R. Akiva never recovered from the pain of the loss. As we saw, his way was to ponder the most difficult questions of life. Yet he didn't let his inability to explain stand in the way of his life's mission. We all have questions in life we cannot answer. Even with his great intellect – or perhaps because of it – R. Akiva was no exception. But questions and doubts did not stop him. The rabbi's intellect was far from assuaged, but he kept on going – and ultimately persevered.

### **9. He Always Saw the Positive**

Looking back at his difficult life, Rabbi Akiva saw God's goodness in all that transpired – not only in his personal life but in all the events of the world. He became famous for the saying, "Whatever God does is for the good."

The Talmud (Brachot 60b) recounts how R. Akiva was once traveling. He had with him a lantern, a rooster, and a donkey. He came to a village seeking lodging. No one took him in. Undaunted, his trademark reaction went through his mind: "Whatever God does is for the good." He set up camp in the wilderness nearby. During the night a wind blew out his lamp, a cat ate his rooster, and a lion slew his donkey. R. Akiva took it all in stride.

He awoke the next morning to find that during the night soldiers had sacked the village which refused him lodging. Not only would the rabbi have been captured with the other residents had he been there, but had his light or animals betrayed his camp he would have equally been doomed.

### **His colleagues cried at the pathetic sight, but R. Akiva laughed.**

The Talmud (Makkos 24b) relates that once R. Akiva and a number of colleagues passed by the former location of the Temple in Jerusalem (they lived shortly after its destruction). They saw a fox run out of the place of the Holy of Holies. The colleagues began crying at the pathetic sight. R. Akiva, however, laughed. To his surprised colleagues he explained: "We have both the prophecy of Uriah and of Zechariah. Uriah foretold, 'Zion shall be plowed like a field' (Micha 3:12). Zechariah foretold, 'Again shall old men and old women sit in the streets of Jerusalem... and the streets of the city shall be filled with boys and girls playing' (Zechariah 8:4-5). Until the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled (fully and literally) I was fearful lest the prophecy of Zechariah not be fulfilled. Now that the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled, it is clear that Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled – to the final detail."

R. Akiva lived through it all, yet he never lost hope. The very sights that brought others to tears of despair filled him with undying hope. All that occurs in this world, both the good and the bad, emanate from an infinitely-good Creator. But life isn't always for us to understand. We must at times just be patient and wait.

## 10. He Died a Hero's Death

We might hope that after living so troubled yet heroic a life, R. Akiva and Rachel would at last settle down to live happily ever after. But that had denied them as well.

The Talmud (Brachot 61b) describes Rabbi Akiva's bitter end. He was incarcerated and tried by the Romans for his "crime" of publicly teaching Torah. He was found guilty as charged. They tortured him to death, flaying off his skin with iron combs.

R. Akiva spent his final moments on earth reciting the Shema, accepting upon himself the yoke of Heaven. His students asked him: "Our teacher, this far?!" He answered: The Shema teaches us to love God with all our souls (Deuteronomy 6:5), which I understood to mean "even if they are taking your soul." My entire life I agonized over this verse: Would I really love God even if my soul were being taken? I at last have the opportunity to demonstrate this. How could I not do so now? And as the rabbi recited "the Lord is one" his soul left him.

R. Akiva is counted as one of the "ten martyrs" slain by the Romans – the ten leading Torah giants killed during and shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple. Most of the other scholars, in spite of their greatness, you might not have even *heard of* if you are not a Talmudic scholar yourself. But not R. Akiva. He was one of *us*: His story is our story; his life is our life. He began his days simply and humbly as so many of us, yet he grew to become whom we all know we too could be. May his memory be for a blessing.



CARLO CADENAS

## Bringing Up Rachel

*How Rabbi Akiva's wife emerged as a role model to Orthodox women struggling to balance families and careers*

**ZEV ELEFF AND LESLIE GINSPARG KLEIN** write:<sup>10</sup>

In July 2020, Rabbi Menachem Karmel of Yeshiva Gedola Montreal replied to a query posed by a “Group of Girls.” The Dear Abby-style exchange appeared in a children’s magazine popular with the right-wing Orthodox community, which, loosely speaking, brings together everyone from the more stringently observant modern Orthodox to self-described Yeshivish Jews. The letter writers asked Karmel why pictures of girls did not appear in the pages of the periodical. “We feel misrepresented when we see pictures of boys our age, but not girls,” they wrote.

Karmel explained that the magazine’s rabbinical board had decided against publishing pictures of girls. In an answer that, knowingly or not, drew from the Victorian Era’s “Cult of Domesticity,” he stated that the reason girls were not pictured was because young female readers needed to understand that a “woman’s primary role is making sure that her Yiddishe home is a strong fortress of *kedushah* (holiness) for her family to grow in.” His response suggested a reality where right-wing Orthodox women do not work outside of the home, describing these women as “household CEOs” and “princesses of the home.”

The exchange highlighted an ideological contradiction that sits at the heart of right-wing Orthodox women’s religious experiences. Read it at face value, and you might imagine that Karmel’s answer reflects a community whose traditional values are irreconcilable with modern sensibilities. But the picture is much more complex, with many Orthodox women fully immersed in the work force and some serving as CEOs of companies as well as their homes. At the same time, these women cherish their roles as wives and mothers, and embrace another obligation that their secular or less stringently Orthodox sisters rarely share shouldering work and family responsibilities, including as primary breadwinners, so that their husbands can engage in full-time Torah study. To understand this complex model, one that enables so many Orthodox women to engage robustly with modern roles as doctors, lawyers, and executives while remaining true to their traditional way of life, we need to look to one of Judaism’s most unheralded heroes: the great and mysterious Rachel.

First mentioned in the Talmud’s Tractate Ketubot (62b), Rachel was the wife of the legendary Rabbi Akiva. She was the daughter of one Kalba Savua, a wealthy Jerusalemite who, at one point, hired a hardworking and uneducated shepherd named Akiva to tend to his flocks of sheep. To the affluent man’s chagrin, his daughter Rachel recognized Akiva’s potential and proposed to him on condition that he learn Torah. Akiva assented. Kalba Savua, unhappy with the match, disowned his daughter and son-in-law.

Rachel gave up material comfort and lived in poverty while Akiva learned abroad for 12 years. Upon his triumphant return home, Rabbi Akiva, escorted by 12,000 students, overheard his wife

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/bringing-up-rachel-akivas-wife>

report to a menacing neighbor that she would prefer her husband study uninterrupted for another dozen years. Rabbi Akiva immediately turned around and returned to the study hall.

Rabbi Akiva came back 12 years later, 24 in all. By then, he was a larger-than-life public figure. This time, Rachel was better apprised of her husband's travel plans. She ignored her neighbors' suggestions to borrow some finer clothes and rushed to greet her husband. An entourage of disciples—now doubled to 24,000—pushed her away, seemingly disgusted that someone in rags would approach their exalted teacher.

“Leave her!” thundered Rabbi Akiva. “Mine and yours,” continued the master to his misguided students, referring to their collective Torah accomplishments, “is hers!”

Since at least the mid-1960s, when she was resurrected by Vichna Kaplan, the founder of the prestigious Orthodox Bais Yaakov High School for girls in New York, Rachel has become a model for educators seeking to provide their young charges with an inspiring model of being in the world. Jewish women, Rebbetzin Kaplan told her pupils, should encourage their future husbands to remain steadfastly committed to Torah study, and not burden them with “additional responsibilities so that the wife can obtain those extras which she can really live without.” Kaplan understood the tensions with modern American life. She relayed that “before marriage some of our students aspire to wed a ‘Rebbe Akiva’ but afterwards they want their husbands to be a ‘Kalba Sovuah.’” Kaplan stressed to her students that Torah was a partnership: Men learned. Women, like Akiva's Rachel, empowered that learning through self-sacrifice. Both were essential, neither possible without the other, to the maintenance of an Orthodox family.

For a while, however, the enthusiasm for Rachel remained limited largely to Kaplan and her students. Before the 1970s, Rachel rarely appeared in popular literature produced by the yeshiva world. Many women in tradition-bound faiths had yet to consider personal and professional options which would make a Rachel-like lesson potent and financially viable.

And then came second-wave feminism.

The growing movement to encourage women to seek satisfying careers outside traditional family roles did not leave the Orthodox community untouched. Spokesmen of the Orthodox right spoke and wrote about the need to retain the “traditional” Jewish home and the “traditional” gender-distinct Torah curricula. Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, for example, the editor of *The Jewish Observer*, a leading Orthodox magazine, urged his female readers to keep to the status quo, to leave the “Bastille” alone, not to seek out new professional and intellectual pursuits.

But standing athwart history and yelling “halt” is a tricky proposition, and the Orthodox community needed a way to wrestle with new ideas while keeping the old ones safe and sound. Rachel emerged as a perfect platform: A daughter of an affluent family, her marriage to Akiva signaled a willingness to sacrifice for her husband's sake. She is nameless in the original text, known first as a daughter and then as a wife. Her virtue, the only distinguishable characteristic the Talmud offers her, is self-sacrifice.

And with that began a thrust of promoting Rachel as a model for Orthodox Jewish womanhood. In March 1981, Rabbi Elya Svei of the Philadelphia Yeshiva told a large audience at an Agudath Israel convention that the Akiva-Rachel dual dynamic was key to “raising a Torah family.” Dr. Yosef Rosenshein, a psychologist, proposed that Rachel was a “striking example” of how Orthodox couples might prevent divorce: “Clearly,” Rosenshein wrote, “she viewed this period crucial to make theirs more than just another successful marriage, because she obviously did not see her marriage as a union entered for the purpose of providing her with life’s earthly pleasures. To her, marriage was a means for her and her husband to realize lofty, transcendent goals unattainable to either of them alone.”

Women also embraced Rachel’s image. Some celebrated their role as a modern-day Rachel, taking pride in their contribution to their family and their husband’s learning. For instance, in 1985, a woman in Williamsville, New York, took issue with a writer who penned an article on “Torah Study and its Support.” This woman had hoped to read about her female co-religionists who busied themselves with housework, childcare, and work outside the home to enable their husbands to hone their Talmud acumen. This recognition—“shall we say Akiva-Rochel partnership”—was “long overdue.”

The emphasis on the Orthodox woman’s responsibility to sacrifice her material comfort for her learning-focused husband increased with the flowering of *kollels* (Torah centers) sometimes attached to yeshivas, meant for men to learn Talmud full time after marriage while their wives shoulder the dual burden of serving as the primary earner and taking care of the home and family. In the early 1980s, for example, a female writer, Nechama Bakst, offered this perspective in an Agudath Israel publication. She wrote that in Bais Yaakov schools, “girls are systematically exposed to a curriculum that indoctrinates them with the concept that there is no woman more commendable than one who goes to work so that her husband may be free to learn Torah. In fact, many hundreds of students emerge from Bais Yaakov each year, eager to embrace this concept of Kollel, American style.”

Bakst expressed the conflict she and other women felt between working and leaving children behind. Still, her satisfaction in supporting her husband’s learning and her belief that it positively impacted her children helped overcome these painful concerns. Another “*kollel* wife” in Monsey, New York, described her sisterhood as “latter-day Rachels,” earners, mothers, and “non-complainers.” The experience, these women believed, made for better spouses. A 19-year-old woman told the late sociologist William Helmreich about her family’s *kollel* experience, stating that the “first year or two sets the pattern for the rest of your life. Even if my husband goes to work later he’ll never change. He’ll be a person who has learning in his blood, not just for an education.”

The *kollel* life has become a rite of passage for young married couples among the Orthodox right, but American life, and Orthodox Jewish life with it, has changed, becoming more expensive. Many women pursue more lucrative and demanding careers to keep up with the rising costs of Orthodox life: tuition, fashion and the other trappings of the yeshiva world’s own brand of American consumer culture. They are Rachels without the expectations of a penurious home, living the *kollel* life without having to be, as Rebbetzin Kaplan described it, “satisfied with the least.”



And so, everywhere you look in the Orthodox world these last three decades, the Rachel model is there: in an Orthodox children's magazine, telling its readers that "few women in history have suffered more and been responsible for so much greatness as Rachel"; in a 1990 book for young adults, released by Feldheim and titled *And Rachel Was His Wife*, narrating the ancient heroine's life; in hagiographical stories like the one about Rebbetzin Sheina Chaya Elyashiv, who fell and hurt her head but lay bleeding silently on the floor for hours rather than wake up her husband, the eminent Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, and disturb his Torah learning for the following day.

Rachel is also present in traditionally all-male spaces. On the campus of Baltimore's Ner Israel Yeshiva, there exists an exquisite plaque in memory of Rebbetzin Golda Feiga Ruderman, the wife of the founding yeshiva heads. The glasswork memorial intends to remind the students in the Baltimore school that their studies and those of their forebears are a credit to Rebbetzin Ruderman's unflinching support of her husband's pioneering Torah efforts.

The focus on Rachel grows particularly strong every seven years or so, when Jews studying Daf Yomi, a page of Talmud a day, complete the cycle of reading the entire tome. Since 1990, speakers at the Agudath Israel's Daf Yomi celebration make sure to credit the wives who "single-parent" their homes while their husbands escape early in the morning or late at night to attend a lecture on the designated page of Talmud. Many women attend the Siyum HaShas as full-fledged celebrants, ennobled because of the "sacrifices they had made to enable their husbands to study." To repay the debt, an entrepreneurial jeweler advertised in 1997 that these Talmud learners could purchase a 14-karat gold necklace and charm, adorned with Rabbi Akiva's catchphrase: "My Torah and your Torah are hers." In fact, the Talmud (Shabbat 59a) records that Rabbi Akiva did just that for Rachel when he could afford it.

The jewelry was probably far too materialistic for Rebbetzin Vichna Kaplan's tastes. It certainly obscured her efforts to combat American consumerism within her Bais Yaakov school. The item bollixed Rachel the heiress with Rachel the wife. It reflected the vision of Orthodox female sacrifice, without eschewing materialism.

That is how Rachel persists, stronger than ever. At the January 2020 Siyum, no women sat on the dais, nor did they climb to the podium to address the 100,000 people seated in chilly New Jersey. However, they did attend in large numbers. Agudath Israel commissioned a glossy magazine for the women who descended on MetLife Stadium to cheer on their husbands and sons. While no pictures of women appeared, the publication, produced by women for women, reminded them that "by serving as that example in our households, by looking to grow a bit more each day, we as women, have done our 'daf.'"

Agudath Israel also produced a video montage in women's honor, where a host of Rabbi Akiva-like individuals paid tribute to their wives. "There is no way I could [learn Daf Yomi] without her," praised one recorded interviewee. "She's stuck with four kids in the morning. She is dealing with them all by herself. So all the credit," alluding to Rabbi Akiva's Rachel declaration, "goes to her."

Therein lies the partnership, a simultaneously religious and modern commitment to self-sacrifice for everyone's sake.



## Rachel, Wife of Rabbi Akiva

Tal Ilan writes:<sup>11</sup>

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### In Brief

Rachel is the name given to the wife of Rabbi Akiva in Avot de-Rabbi Natan, a medieval aggadic text. Though she is unnamed, she appears across rabbinic literature, including in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds. Though the story differs in each version, all agree that she played a key role in her husband's rise to prominence through great personal sacrifice. The Jerusalem Talmud depicts her as selling her hair to support her husband's studies. The most famous version, in the Babylonian Talmud, describes her as living alone and in poverty after being disowned by her father and while Akiva mastered Torah. All of the stories about Rachel end with Rabbi Akiva rewarding her with a lavish gift.

### Article

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<sup>11</sup> <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rachel-wife-of-rabbi-akiva>

Rachel is the medieval name given to the wife of Rabbi Akiva in the late Avot de-Rabbi Nathan version A (chapter 6). In none of the older sources is a name attached to this woman, although she was well known.

Rabbi Akiva's wife is mentioned in three separate sources. While these tell different stories about her, they agree on two details, which may represent the historical core behind the woman. All sources—The Babylonian Talmud (*Ketubbot* 62b; *Nedarim* 50a), The Jerusalem Talmud (*Shabbat* 6:1; *Sotah* 9:15) and Avot de-Rabbi Nathan (Version A, chapter 6; Version B chapter 12)—agree that Rabbi Akiva's wife was in some way instrumental in her husband's rise to prominence. He began his life as a pauper and through her agency became learned and rich. In addition, all the sources know that her husband rewarded her for her troubles with a glamorous headdress usually identified as a golden city, or a golden Jerusalem (see also BT *Shabbat* 59a–b).

Aside from these two details, the sources tell different stories about how Akiva's wife helped her husband, and in some details contradict one another. The Babylonian Talmud relates that Rabbi Akiva was a shepherd employed by the rich Jerusalem magnate Ben Kalba Savu'a. His daughter saw Akiva, recognized his hidden qualities and proposed to him on condition that he go and study. This resulted in her father's disowning her. Disowned by her father and deserted by her husband, Akiva's wife was left to fend for herself for twenty-four years, until finally her husband returned in glory and recognized his wife's role in his success, saying to his disciples: "Mine and yours are hers." This story, told twice in the BT, seems to contradict itself in some details. In one of the versions Akiva's studies are presented as a condition without the fulfillment of which no marriage will take place (BT *Ketubbot* 62b). Thus Akiva goes off to study after betrothal, but without consummation. In the other version (BT *Nedarim* 50a) Akiva sets out on his studies only after the couple has lived in poverty for some time.

In any case, both versions contradict the stories of Akiva's wife told in the JT and in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan and pose chronological complications. If Rabbi Akiva died a martyr's death in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba revolt (135 CE), it is not very likely that he was an employee of the Jerusalem millionaire of 66 CE, who, according to legend, could supply the city with food for twenty years but lost all his riches when armed bands burnt the food supplies in besieged Jerusalem (BT *Gittin* 56a). Thus one should conclude that the BT story is legendary and was composed for didactic purposes, primarily in order to justify husbands in Babylonia leaving their wives at home for protracted periods of time in order to study Torah. Perhaps the true father of Akiva's wife was a certain Joshua, whose son, Rabbi Yohanan, is described in one source as "Rabbi Johanan, son of Joshua, Rabbi Akiva's father-in-law" (Mishnah *Yadayim* 3:5). Rabbi Akiva's son was certainly called Joshua (Tosefta *Ketubbot* 4:7), probably after his grandfather.

In the Jerusalem Talmud, a completely different story is related about the help Akiva's wife rendered her husband. According to this version, she sold her hair and thus supplied him with the funds for his study. Apparently women's hair was a real commodity and could become a source of income for women at the time (e.g. Mishnah *Arakhin* 1:4) but women's selling their hair is a very common and also an ancient literary motif (see the apocryphal Testament of Job 23:7–10). Furthermore, the story of the sale of hair serves the literary strategy of measure for measure. Akiva's wife sold her hair in order to assist her husband, and he later rewarded her with a magnificent headdress.

The Jerusalem Talmud version, which tells of the economic assistance that Rabbi Akiva's wife rendered her husband, does not involve the husband's long absence from home. In this it disagrees with the Babylonian version. The third version of the story, found in the two editions of *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, seems to reject the stories of both the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. It relates how Rabbi Akiva started off as a pauper and an ignoramus, deciding on his own initiative to go and study. He already had an adult son when he began school. While he was learning he also supported himself economically. Yet the story ends with Rabbi Akiva buying his wife a golden crown; when questioned about the inappropriateness of his actions, he responds by claiming that his wife too had "suffered much with me in the Torah."

Only in *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* version A (the later version of this midrash), is the name Rachel found. It seems to be based on a misreading of the text in BT *Ketubbot* 62b, where we are informed that Rabbi Akiva's daughter had acted like her mother with regard to her husband—Simeon Ben Azzai—obviously allowing him to go away on his studies for a lengthy period. This statement is followed by a saying intended to describe the daughter's actions; the sheep went after the sheep. The word *rakhila* means sheep and the name Rachel is derived from the same root. *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* interpreted the saying as naming the woman.

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Boyarin, Daniel. *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*. Berkeley: 1993: 134–66.

Boyarin is interested in cultural critique. This chapter in his book is the most complete argument for the story of Rabbi Akiva's wife serving as a founding myth for the studying husband and working wife ethos in Jewish tradition.

Cohen, Aryeh. *Rereading Talmud: Gender, Law and Poetics of Sugyot*. Atlanta: 1998 97–130.

Cohen's study is devoted to reading talmudic discourses as whole literary units. In this chapter he suggests reading the BT *Ketubbot* 62b discourse as a rabbinic attempt to substitute the wife with the study-house. The story of Rabbi Akiva's wife serves, in his opinion as the apex of this approach in which, in the end she is left faceless, powerless and nameless.

Fraenkel, Yona. *Studies in the Spiritual World of the Aggadic Story* (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: 1981: 99–115.

Fraenkel's study is primarily interested in assessing the literary qualities of the rabbinic stories. In this chapter he compares some of the stories in BT *Ketubbot* 62a with their parallels elsewhere in BT and Palestinian sources, showing the literary distinctiveness of each story. His analysis draws attention to the fact that the BT *Ketubbot* story of Akiva's wife does not assume a marriage between the two, prior to his studies.

Ilan, Tal. *Mine and Yours are Hers: Retrieving Women's History from Rabbinic Literature*. Leiden: 1997.

Ilan is interested in rabbinic literature as a tool for women's history. She uses the stories of Rabbi Akiva's wife in order to demonstrate reading strategies in rabbinic literature designed to identify historical information embedded therein.

Kagan, Tsipora. "The Faithful Woman in Folklore," (Hebrew) *Mahanaim* 98 (1965): 144–149.

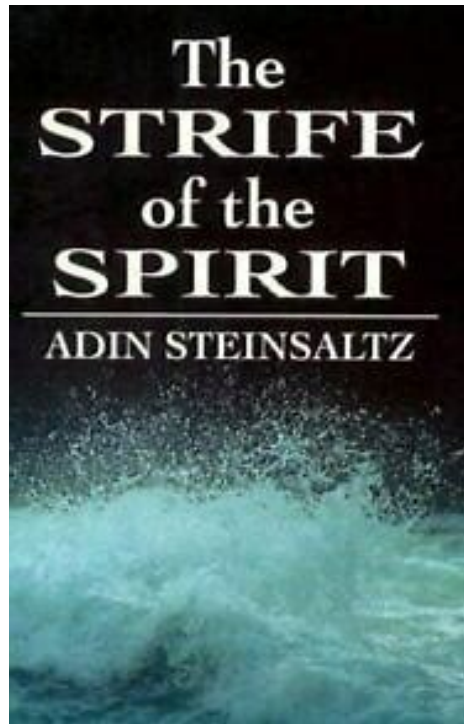
This is a folkloristic study. Kagan places the stories of Rabbi Akiva's wife within the context of repeated international folk motifs of wives sacrificing their limbs to help their men.

Sered, Susan Starr. "A Tale of Three Rachels, or the Cultural Herstory of a Symbol," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 1 (1998): 5–41.

Sered is an anthropologist. This study places Rabbi Akiva's wife as a figure for religious veneration and piety in the context of the name Rachel attached to it, and its subsequent relationship to other women named Rachel in Jewish tradition.

Valler, Shulamit, *Women and Womanhood in the Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*. Atlanta: 1999.

This study is interested in chains of stories on women in the Babylonian Talmud. Valler claims that these chains of stories are designed to counter restrictive halakhah on women. In her opinion, the stories in BT *Ketubbot* 62 are intended to instruct the reader that for the husband to follow alone the halakhic preference of Torah study, without consent of his wife is foolish and dangerous.



## **The Strife of The Spirit**

**Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz** writes:<sup>12</sup>

She [Rachel] was drawn, as by a magnet, to the sheep pen where Akiva was to be found. She found herself watching him, unable to throw off the superimposed image of the scholar. And he, taller and stronger than the others, and far more youthful and agile than most of those younger than he, seemed to be oblivious of her. In fact, he paid scant attention to anyone, men or women, though many of the latter—shepherdesses and wives of herdsmen—were clearly attracted to him. To be sure, it was not only a physical force that emanated from him, but it was also a kind of light, something to which everyone joyfully surrendered. She wondered whether anyone else was aware of it as she was.

Was she in the grip of a fascination, or a love, that was out of bounds? Or was her feeling of strong certainty something beyond what could be interpreted as womanly passion? It was not a desire to possess or to be possessed. It was rather a need to do something for him, an irrepressible urge to save him from the oblivion to which he was doomed by the circumstances of his life... And so the two were banished to years of poverty and destitution in another village far away [after they were married, and her father disowned her].

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sefaria.org/Ketubot.62b.15?lang=bi&p2=sheet&s2=86767&lang2=en>

But Rachel made Akiva abide by his promise. He studied. It is said that he learned to read with his sons. It is said that he made such phenomenal progress in all written and unwritten knowledge that few living men could be compared to him. Most wondrous of all, he became a great leader in Israel—the undisputed head of the Sanhedrin, where the law of the Jews and the vast body of postbiblical literature called the Talmud were formulated. And of all the great teachers of the centuries of the Talmud period, scholars and sages of profound wisdom and purity of life, the greatest of them all was Rabbi Akiva. But that is another, a much longer story.

Much of what happened to Rachel remains in obscurity, as she herself preferred. Her joy was in his triumph, which, in barely twenty years, exceeded all that she could ever have imagined. Moreover, since Rabbi Akiva lived to very ripe old age, he managed to impress on the law and wisdom of Israel the power of a unique and rich personality, more so perhaps than any other single individual since Moses, the lawgiver himself.

## Rachel, Rabbi Akiba's Wife

**Nissan Mandel** writes:<sup>13</sup>

I am sure, all of you know of Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph, about whom our Sages say that he was one of the greatest Scholars of all times. With his sharp mind the Sages said, he could "uproot mountains," and he explained every single letter of the Torah, even the little crowns that adorn many of the letters of the Torah. Rabbi Akiba- was one of four great Sages who tried to enter the deepest secrets of the Creation and of learning, and he was the only one .who came out sound of body and sane of mind.

But do you also know that all the extraordinary scholarship of this most famous of all Tanaim was due to the self-sacrificing love of Torah of his wife?

You see, Rabbi Akiba was not one of the fortunate ones who are born to riches, or into the house of a scholar. He had to get everything the hard way. He was born as the child of a very poor family and became an ignorant shepherd, one of the many who took care of the thousands of flocks of the wealthy Kalba Sabua, about whose riches the Talmud tells many stories. The daughter of this

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/111936/jewish/Rachel-Rabbi-Akibas-Wife.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/111936/jewish/Rachel-Rabbi-Akibas-Wife.htm)

fabulous man was a beautiful and G-d fearing girl. The richest and most learned young men of that time would have considered themselves fortunate to marry her. But Rachel, Kalba Sabua's only child, the heir to his riches, had observed the shepherd Akiba and some inner voice told her that this ignorant youth had the making of a great scholar. On the condition that he would leave her father's work to go and study Torah, she married him secretly.

As Rachel refused one young man after the other, Kalba Sabua found out about her secret marriage to his former shepherd. He was very angry, and he vowed that he would have nothing to do with her or her husband. Gladly, the only child of the richest man of those days left all the luxuries and comforts to which she had been used, and went to live with Akiba in a shack, sleeping on a bundle of straw, and working hard with her own, soft hands, so that her husband could devote himself to the study of Torah. Once when she could not find work, she even cut off her beautiful long hair to sell it, so that she would have some money with which to buy a dry crust of bread for both.

Yet even in their poverty, they were willing to share with others the little they possessed. Once a poor man passed the shack of Akiba and Rachel, and begged, "Pray, good people, let me have a handful of straw. My wife is sick, and I have nothing to bed her on." At once Akiba shared his own bundle of straw with the poor man, remarking thus to Rachel: "See, my child, there are those who fare worse than we." The poor beggar, say our sages, was none but the Prophet Elijah who had come to test Akiba's good heart.

After Akiba had mastered the basic knowledge of the Torah, his wife and he agreed that he was to go to the academy of the great scholars of those days, headed by Rabbi Eliezer, to devote twelve years to intensive study. Thus the two parted and for twelve long years Rachel slaved hard to support herself, while her husband grew to become one of the most learned of all men that ever lived. At the end of twelve years Rabbi Akiba returned to his wife, as he had promised. When he came before the shabby old shack he heard a conversation between his wife and a neighbor who was taunting Rachel for being foolish enough to wait and slave for her husband who had left her to study Torah. "You could live in riches and luxuries, if you were not so foolish," said the woman.



"For my part he could stay away another twelve years at the Yeshivah to acquire more knowledge," was Rachel's reply.

Full of pride and admiration for his great wife Rabbi Akiba turned around to do as Rachel wanted him to do.

At the conclusion of the twenty-four years Rabbi Akiba had become the most famous of all living scholars. From near and far came the youth of Israel to study under his direction.

Accompanied by twenty-four thousand students, Rabbi Akiba returned home in a triumphant journey from city to city, welcomed everywhere by the highest nobility. The masses, rich and poor, turned out when he came home to Jerusalem.

Kalba Sabua, too, was among those who tried to get close to the master. Suddenly Rabbi Akiba saw his disciples trying to hold back a woman dressed in ragged clothes. At once he made his way through the crowd to greet the woman and led her to the chair by his side. "If not for this woman I would be an ignorant shepherd, unable to read the Aleph Beth. Whatever I know, I owe to her," Rabbi Akiba declared.

The whole huge crowd bowed in respect before the woman to whom Rabbi Akiba owed his great scholarship. Kalba Sabua, too, suddenly discovered who his son-in-law was. Publicly he expressed his regret for having treated his daughter and her husband so badly. Now all his wealth would be theirs.

Thus ends our story of Rachel, Rabbi Akiba's wife, whose heroism and self-sacrifice gave us the great Rabbi Akiba.



*Kever of Rachel Rachel wife of Rabbi Akiva in Southern Tiberias*

## Rabbi Akiva and His Women

**Ben-Zion Fischler** writes:<sup>14</sup>

Many legends have been woven around the person of Rabbi Akiva and their inclusion in the life story of one of the most important Talmudic scholars only adds greater depth to this much-revered individual. This article deals with only three of these legends, but the links between them invite further study and teaches us something about the women in Rabbi Akiva's life.

The first of the three legends, which appears in "Sefer Avot de Rabbi Natan," describes Rabbi Akiva beside the well: "How did Rabbi Akiva's illustrious career begin? It is said: He was 40 years old, and he was an ignoramus." One day he was standing beside a well and he saw a stone there. The stone had tiny grooves in it. When he asked who had made the tiny grooves in this stone, he was told that it was the water that fell on it day after day. He thought for a while and asked himself: "Is my heart harder than a stone? If water can make tiny grooves in this stone, the words of the Torah can surely inscribe themselves on my heart." And there and then he began to learn. What did he do? He took his son and together they studied Torah with little children. And "he kept on learning until he knew the entire Torah."

This legend, presented here in concise form, has been used by many adult education institutions in Israel, especially ulpanim (Hebrew-language schools for new immigrants). In fact, one ulpan even went a step further and has called itself "Ulpan Akiva" - a name that had the built-in message: "No matter how old you are, success might just come your way."

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/2003-06-05/ty-article/rabbi-akiva-and-his-women/0000017f-e2d2-d804-ad7f-f3fa1dde0000?ts=1662043234200>

## Clandestine wedding

The second legend is about Rabbi Akiva and the daughter of Kalba Savua: "Rabbi Akiva was Kalba Savua's shepherd. Kalba Savua's daughter Rachel noticed how modest Rabbi Akiva was and how fine a person he was. She said to him: 'If I agree to be your wife, will you study Torah in the beit midrash [school for the study of Torah]?' He replied, 'Yes.' Their wedding ceremony was carried out clandestinely. Kalba Savua found out about the marriage and banished her from his house, cutting her off from all his assets" (from "The Book of Legends/Sefer Ha-Aggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash," Haim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, editors; the original text in the Babylonian Talmud's Ketubot Tractate is in Aramaic and the name of Kalba Savua's daughter does not appear there).

The legend goes on to tell us of the difficulties faced by the young couple. Kalba Savua is one of the most affluent individuals in the city; his name, it is commonly believed, is derived from the fact that a poor person would enter his home, as famished as a dog ("kalba" is Aramaic for dog) and would emerge after a hearty meal with a full belly ("savua" is linked to "save'a," which in Hebrew means sated). Kalba Savua throws his daughter and his son-in-law out of his house, and they must seek shelter in a barn. In the morning, when the daughter awakens, she finds that her hair is full of straw. Her new husband picks out the straw from her hair and promises her that, if he had enough money, he would give her a "Jerusalem of gold."

In order to persuade the bride that their situation is not so dire, Elijah the Prophet appears in the guise of a human being and asks them for a little straw for his wife who is about to give birth. "Rabbi Akiva says to his wife, 'You see this person? He does not even have a bit of straw.'"

Rachel says to her husband, "Go and study Torah in a beit midrash." Rabbi Akiva obeys her wishes and sets off on his journey to learn Torah. Twelve years pass and he returns home accompanied by 12,000 students. As he stands beneath the window, he overhears a conversation between his wife and a few of her neighbors (in another version of the legend, he overhears an old man saying to his wife: "How long will you remain a widow whose husband is alive but absent?"). Rabbi Akiva hears his wife's reply: "If he would listen to me, he would go back [to his place of sacred studies] for another 12 years."

Sure enough (according to another legend), he does go back to the house of sacred learning, studies there for another 24 years and returns to his city with 24,000 students. All of the townspeople come out to greet him. So does his wife, who appears in ragged clothes and who refuses to heed the advice of her neighbors who suggest that she borrow suitable attire. When his students catch sight of her, they try to prevent her from approaching Rabbi Akiva. However, he immediately calls a stop to their efforts (using one of the shortest and most beautiful statements to describe their mutual relationship): "What is mine and what is yours - belongs to her!"

As in most legends, this one as well has a happy ending. Kalba Savua, who had banished his daughter and his son-in-law because he considered the latter to be an ignoramus, "bowed to the ground, his face pressing the earth, and then kissed Rabbi Akiva's feet, giving him half of all his wealth."

The third legend (presented here in succinct form and in a Hebrew translation) concerns Rabbi Akiva and the wife of Turnus (Tineius) Rufus (or "Turnusrufus," in one version), the Roman governor of Judea. The Babylonian Talmud's Nedarim Tractate informs us that there were ultimately three sources to Rabbi Akiva's wealth: his father-in-law Kalba Savua, an affluent Roman matron and Turnus Rufus' wife. However, since the subject of this article is not Rabbi Akiva's financial situation but rather his wives, we shall present here the events that led up to Rabbi Akiva's meeting with Turnus Rufus' wife.

Turnus Rufus was a Roman governor whose posting in the first half of the second century C.E. (that is, at the time of the Jewish revolt led by Bar-Kochba) was in Judea. The discussions and bitter arguments between Turnus Rufus and Rabbi Akiva were widely known and focused on theological issues. The Talmud tells us what the three main topics of debate were: circumcision, God's love for Israel and His hatred of idol worshippers, and the sacredness of the Sabbath. Needless to say, Rabbi Akiva always emerged the victor in these debates. This fact hurt Turnus Rufus' pride, increased his hatred for Rabbi Akiva and kindled a lust for revenge in the Roman governor's heart.

Here is how Rabbi Nissim Gerondi (known by his acronym, the "Ran") interprets the chain of events described in the Talmud's Nedarim Tractate: "R.A. [Rabbi Akiva] would always triumph over him as he cited biblical verses before the emperor and would anger him with the words he uttered." No wonder Turnus Rufus would go home each day with sadness and rage written all over his face! His wife asked him: "Why do you have such an angry scowl on your face?" He replied: "Because of R.A., who angers me each and every day ..." She said to him: "The God of those people hates licentiousness. Just give me your permission and I will trip him up and cause him to sin." He gave his permission. She put on her makeup and, wearing most attractive attire, she went to see R.A."

Another slightly different version of the legend can be found in the Midrash Yelamdenu presented by Rabbi Shimon the Biblical Orator (Rabbi Shimon Hadarshan), at the end of the first volume of "Yalkut Torah," printed in Salonika in 1526. The version was copied from this source and then inserted in several works, including the one by A. Jellinek in his "Beit Hamidrash" (second edition, Jerusalem, 1937/8): "The story is told of Turnus Rufus who tried to impose his will on Rabbi Akiv(a) but was unable to find a way that would enable him to attain that goal. His wife said to him: 'I have a plan that will enable you to impose your will on him.' She dressed up in one her finest attires and stood beside the front entrance to his [Rabbi Akiva's] house (of sacred study) ..." The meeting between the two was short but fateful: She converted to Judaism and became his wife.

## Unanswered questions

Let us return to the first of the third legends, the one that tells that, before he studied Torah, Rabbi Akiva hated Talmudic scholars. He himself confessed this fact: "When I was an ignoramus, I used to say: 'If I could only get my hands on a Talmudic scholar; I would sink my teeth into his flesh just as a donkey would.'" (Pesakhim Tractate, Babylonian Talmud). However, another aspect of this legend is of particular interest to us: Rabbi Akiva's family status when he decides to study Torah. As noted above, he studies Torah together with his son. But where did this son come from? Another legend tells us that the name of this son was Joshua (his nickname was "Ben Karkha"). Who was his mother? Did Rabbi Akiva divorce her or is he a widower when we encounter him in

this legend? No answer is provided for any of these questions. We are therefore forced to assume that his first wife did not bask in his fame during Rabbi Akiva's later years (according to various sources, he lived to the age of 120!).

Rabbi Akiva's second wife sometimes appears in the Talmud as the "daughter of Kalba Savua" and sometimes as the "daughter of the son of Kalba Savua" (apparently, the latter is the correct version), but she is never referred to by her first name. Then how did the name Rachel become associated with her? In the Talmud's Ketubot Tractate, we learn of the (protracted) engagement of Rabbi Akiva's daughter to Ben Azai, and the Talmud explains: "This is what people would say: `A sheep ["rachel" in Hebrew] always follows another sheep.'" This text prompted commentators to conclude that the name of both mother and daughter was Rachel, although such an argument would not be acceptable in any court charged with the task of determining kinship. Incidentally, the Bible is much more economical: To express the idea that daughters behave like their mothers, the Bible simply states (Ezekiel 16:44): "Like mother, like daughter."

### **`Jerusalem of gold'**

As noted above, Rabbi Akiva promised his bride that, had he the means, he would give her a "Jerusalem of gold." Did he keep his promise? Apparently, he did. In the Jerusalem Talmud we read (the following is a free translation into Hebrew): "The story is told of Rabbi Akiva who made a city of gold for his wife. Rabban Gamliel's wife saw that gift and was filled with envy. She spoke with her husband. He said to her: `And would you have done what she did for him [Rabbi Akiva]: She would sell the braids of her head [that is, her hair - for use in wigs] and would give him [the money she received] while he engaged in the study of Torah?'" It should be mentioned that we encounter the subject of human hair in the Nedarim Tractate where Rabbi Akiva states: "Even if you have to sell the hair on your head, you must give [your wife] (the value of) her ketuba [marriage agreement]." The intention, according to the "Ikar Tosafot Yom Tov" commentary: "Even if you have nothing else with which to redeem the marriage contract except, for example, the hair on your head, which you must sell to secure food for your table, you must do so in order to give her [the value of] her marriage contract."

Elsewhere in the Talmud, we find Rabbi Akiva's statement that a reason that allows a man to divorce his wife is that "he has found another woman who is more beautiful" (the mishna at the end of the Gittin Tractate). It is difficult to learn to live with the speed with which Rabbi Akiva succumbs to the charms of Turnus Rufus' wife; however, the Tosafot commentary in the Talmud and Rabbi Nissim Gerondi (the Ran) rush to Rabbi Akiva's aid (in the commentaries to the Talmud's Nedarim Tractate).

Both Tosafot and the Ran tell us that, when Rabbi Akiva saw her magnificent beauty, he "spat on the floor, laughed and then began to cry." She was deeply offended by this behavior and demanded an explanation. "He told her: `Two actions I will explain, the third I will not.'" He spat because he remembered that she came into this world from a foul-smelling drop (she was born from semen, in the wake of a sexual act). He cried because he remembered that her beauty would eventually be buried in the ground and that worms would consume her lovely face. But why did he not explain his laughter? "Because he saw, by means of the holy spirit [here is the justification], that she would convert to Judaism and would become his wife."

The "fear" that Rabbi Akiva married the wife of Turnus Rufus while he was still married to his second wife (the daughter of Kalba Savua) was expressed many years before the present era. That argument was voiced 450 years ago by Rabbi Yitzhak Luria (also known as the Holy Ari), who lived in Safed. He raised that fear in a kabbalistic treatise that was published many years after his death: "Just as the Patriarch Jacob was the shepherd of his father-in-law's flocks, so was Rabbi Akiva the shepherd of his father-in-law's flocks. And, just as Jacob had two wives, similarly R.A. had two wives: He married the daughter of Kalba Savua and the wife of the evil Turnus Rufus. Kalba Savua's daughter can be compared to Jacob's wife Rachel, while the wife of Turnus Rufus can be compared to Leah" (Likutei Shas, 1983-84, commentary on the Talmud's Yebamot Tractate).

## Well-known motif

And what was the fate of Rabbi Akiva's beloved wife, the daughter of (the son of) Kalba Savua? Unfortunately, we do not know very much about her later years, just as what happened to his first and third wives in the final years of their life is a mystery to us. According to the Midrash Yelamdenu (mentioned above), Turnus Rufus' wife said to him, "I am not moving from here until you convert me to Judaism." Rabbi Akiva apparently fulfilled that wish, because the legend goes on to tell us: "She boarded a ship and headed for another destination."

The name of Turnus Rufus' wife, Rufina, is mentioned in only one legend, which relates that Turnus Rufus once asked Rabbi Akiva a certain question to which Rabbi Akiva replied: "I will answer you tomorrow." The next day Rabbi Akiva said to him, "I had a dream ... in which I saw two dogs. One was named Rufus and the other Rufina." Turnus Rufus retorted: "Do you mean to tell me that the only names you could find for your dogs were mine and my wife's? You deserve to die for high treason!" (Midrash Tanhuma on the weekly Torah portion Teruma).

Since we began this article with the disclosure of names, we will mention here that the first time we encounter Rachel as the name of Rabbi Akiva's wife is in "Avot de Rabbi Natan," Chapter 6: "Rabbi Akiva will one day pass sentence on all poor people ... Why? Because, if they are asked, 'Why did you not study Torah during your lifetime?' and they reply, 'Because we were poor,' they will be told, 'Yes, but Rabbi Akiva was the poorest person on earth.'" The debate ends with the statement: "Because Rachel his wife received her reward." It is thus no wonder that among the tombs of righteous Jewish men and women, another tomb has recently been added: that of Rachel of Galilee (that is, Rachel, Rabbi Akiva's wife) in the vicinity of Tiberias.

We have not mentioned many things associated directly or indirectly with Rabbi Akiva's wives, starting with the names of his four sons (in addition to Rabbi Joshua) - Simon, Hanania (Hanina), Rabbi Hama and Asa (Isi) - and ending with the well-known motif in the legends of other nations, about the beautiful princess who rejects all the princes who seek her hand in marriage. She falls in love with a young, poor shepherd and elopes with him. It ultimately emerges that he is a hero who saves the kingdom from its enemies who are poised to invade it. Obviously, this shepherd is rewarded with half of his father-in-law's assets.

This article must end with a textual delicacy, and here is a legend that is very far removed from the ones we have presented: "It is told of Rabbi Akiva that he was once in prison. A Gentile who

lived in the neighborhood of the prison would visit him every day in order to persuade him to abandon his Jewish faith and become a pagan." Despite the Gentile's entreaties, Rabbi Akiva refused to convert to paganism. One day, when the Gentile returned to his home, he refused to eat the meal his wife had prepared for him and "did not honor with his presence" the bed that had been laid out for him. When his wife asked him, "Why are you so angry?" he told her about Rabbi Akiva's steadfast refusal to convert to paganism, adding: "Life holds no meaning for me until he joins our faith."

Whereupon she answered, "Here, eat and drink and be content of heart ... I will take it upon myself to convert him to our faith." She dressed herself up in beautiful attire and she was in any case an exquisitely beautiful woman. She went to see Rabbi Akiva. As in the legend about Rufina mentioned above, Rabbi Akiva "spat to the left and to the right." She then implores him to convert her to Judaism. "He told her, `Madame, how can I convert you when I am being held here as an inmate of this prison? ... Go to the sacred study home of the wise scholars and ask them to convert you to Judaism.'" And that is precisely what she did. Since she failed to return home, her husband began to look for her and him himself converted to Judaism (from the "Book of Tales," compiled and edited by M. Gester, Lipsia and London, 1924).

In this tale, in which we also see religious tension between Rabbi Akiva and his neighbor (who apparently filled some sort of official capacity that enabled him to visit the prison whenever he wanted to), a woman plays the role of a temptress; however, in this story, Rabbi Akiva does not succumb to her charms. Quite the contrary, both she and her husband convert to Judaism. Was this tale introduced to counterbalance the tale about Turnus Rufus' wife?

As noted above, Rabbi Akiva is mentioned on many occasions in the Talmud and in midrashim. A large number of books have been written about him and about the era during which he lived. This is not the context to enumerate those passages. Suffice it to mention one book that has nearly been forgotten: "Toldot Yisrael" ("Jewish History") by Ze'ev Yavetz (1927/8), in the sixth volume, the chapter entitled "Rabbi Akiva and His Friends." If we encounter legends that do not cast Rabbi Akiva in the most respectful light, we should consider them not only as products of envy among scholars but also, and primarily, as an expression of a certain awkwardness in the face of his enthusiastic support for Bar-Koziva (Bar-Kochba).



## **BEN KALBA SABBUA'**

**Marcus Jastrow and Louis Ginzberg** write:<sup>15</sup>

A rich and prominent man of Jerusalem who flourished about the year 70. According to the Talmud (*Git. 56a*), he obtained his name from the fact that anyone that came to his house hungry as a dog (Kalba), went away satisfied (Sabbua'). He was one of the three rich men of Jerusalem (the other two being Naḳdimon ben Goryon and Ben Zizit ha-Keset), each of whom had in his storehouses enough to provide the besieged city with all the necessaries of life for ten years. But as these three favored peace with Rome, the Zealots burned their hordes of grain, oil, and wood, thus causing a dreadful famine in Jerusalem (*Git. ib.*; *Lam. R. i. 5*; *Eccl. R. vii. 11*; *Ab. R. N.*, ed. Schechter, vi. 31, 32, in which Ben Kalba Sabbua''s wealth is described as still greater).

Although the details of this account are hardly supported by historical evidence, there is no reason to doubt the existence of the three rich men. But the account in the Babylonian Talmud, according to which Akiba ben Joseph was the son-in-law of Ben Kalba Sabbu'a, is probably without any historical foundation; nor is there any reference to it in the Palestinian sources. It tells of the secret marriage of Ben Kalba's daughter; that she was turned away by her father; and that he finally became reconciled to her (*Ned. 50a*; *Ket. 62b et seq.*). Compare Akiba in Legend.

A grave, alleged to be that of Ben Kalba Sabbua', to which the Jews pay great respect, is pointed out about half a mile north of Jerusalem. It is mentioned by Benjamin b. Elijah, a Karaite who

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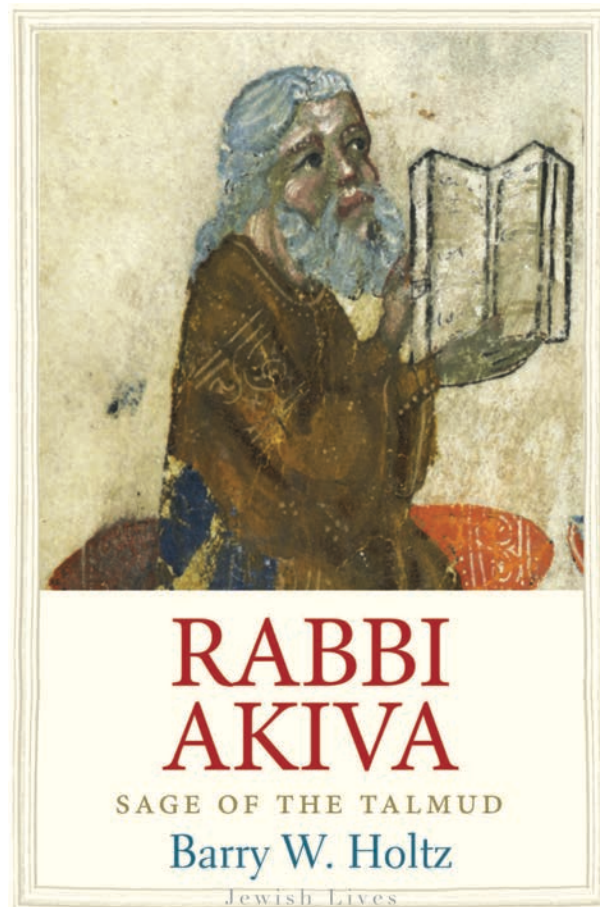
<sup>15</sup> <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/9145-kalba-sabua>



traveled in Palestine (compare T. Gurland, "Ginze Yisrael," i. 53). Recent excavations show that there actually are graves on this spot; but the statement that an inscription bearing Ben Kalba Sabbua's name was found there has not been proved (Gurland, *ib.* p. 68; "Ha-Maggid," viii. 28).

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## Rabbi Akiva's Youth

**AZZAN YADIN** writes:<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Fall 2010, Vol. 100, No. 4 (Fall 2010), pp. 573-597  
[https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25781005.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ac329d121abf069f0f6de1d39f876f039&ab\\_segments=0%2Fbasic\\_search\\_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&acceptTC=1](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25781005.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ac329d121abf069f0f6de1d39f876f039&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&acceptTC=1)

IN AN ESSAY on the impact of the stam on talmudic historiography, Adiel Schremer has pointed to the seemingly paradoxical conclusion of some scholars: an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the Talmud has increases the distance between the modern scholar and the talmudic rabbis, and this in two ways.<sup>1</sup> First, the stammaitic redaction of the Talmud makes it difficult to distinguish amoraic traditions from the later editorial additions and reworkings. Second, it places a wedge between the dominant voice of the Babylonian Talmud and the influence its account of historical events exerts on later generations, up to and including our own. Schremer's argument focuses on the challenges facing the study of the Amoraim, and certainly the redactional issues are less acute for tannaitic sources (though not wholly absent), which have been subject to a much lighter redactional hand than their amoraic counterparts. The second issue, the dominance of the Babylonian Talmud and perhaps a broader inability to fully disentangle earlier sources from later accretions, is very relevant to tannaitic sources, nowhere more clearly than in the study of tannaitic biography.

The problem of rabbinic biography is not new. Already in 1976, Judah Goldin asserted that "despite the impressive quantities of midrashic and talmudic material, there is not one sage . . . [of whom it is] possible to write a biography in the serious sense of the word,"<sup>2</sup> a view that would be repeated as a challenge to the discipline by William Scott Green a few years later.<sup>3</sup> Since then, scholarship has been quite skeptical of "rabbinic

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1. Adiel Schremer, "Stammaitic Historiography," in *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammait) to the Aggadah*, ed. J. L. Rubenstein (Tübingen, 2005), 219–36.

2. Judah Goldin, "Toward a Profile of the Tanna, Aqiba ben Josef," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 96 (1976): 38–56. The "profile" Goldin refers to is theological and halakhic, not biographical.

3. William Scott Green, "What's in a Name?—The Problematic of Rabbinic 'Biography,'" in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism I: Theory and Practice*, ed. W. S. Green, (Missoula, Mont., 1978), 77–96.

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biography,” distancing itself from earlier tendencies to approach rabbinic sources as archives from which historical data could be extracted, so that today it is generally acknowledged “that while we can use rabbinic literatures to reconstruct trends in rabbinic intellectual and cultural history, factual information about particular sages is probably out of our reach.” Perhaps no study has demonstrated this issue more clearly than *The Sinner and the Amnesiac*, Alon Goshen-Gottstein’s analysis of the biographical traditions surrounding Elisha ben Abuya.<sup>4</sup> According to Goshen-Gottstein, there is a radical break between tannaitic and post-tannaitic accounts of this figure; indeed, the paradigmatic apostate of rabbinic literature—the proverbial *aber*, “other”—is not characterized as such in tannaitic sources. The Mishnah preserves a dictum in Elisha ben Abuya’s name concerning the importance of Torah study at a young age (mAvot 4.20), while an early tradition preserved in the Talmud depicts him as an authoritative sage with nary a hint that he has left the rabbinic fold (bMK 20a).<sup>5</sup> Only in post-tannaitic sources is Elisha characterized as a heretic, and only there do we find discussions of the causes and precise nature of his heresy, of the response of his student, R. Meir, and more. Interestingly, the appellation *aber* is also geographically determined, attested only in Babylonian sources.<sup>6</sup>

Alerted by Goshen-Gottstein to this break, the reader is faced with two explanatory paradigms: that the post-tannaitic traditions surrounding Elisha ben Abuya’s apostasy are grounded in historical reality (sometimes referred to as the “historical kernel”), in which case some account must be given of why the tannaitic sources remain silent regarding such a cardinal issue and their ongoing willingness to cite, without qualification, the teachings of Elisha ben Abuya. Or, more radically, that the later sources have invented the apostate Elisha ben Abuya whole cloth.

The present study argues that there is a similar break in the tannaitic and post-tannaitic traditions surrounding the best-known rabbinic life, that of Rabbi Akiva. The basic contours of R. Akiva’s biography are well known: a young ignoramus—perhaps a shepherd—who, encouraged by his wife, Rachel, turns to Torah scholarship relatively late in life, emerges as the greatest scholar of his generation and perhaps of rabbinic Judaism as such. A brilliant interpreter of Scripture, R. Akiva may have been

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4. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac: The Rabbinic Invention of Elisha ben Abuya and Eleazar ben Arach* (Stanford, Calif., 2000).

5. Goshen-Gottstein discusses these sources in *The Sinner and the Amnesiac*, 40 and 43–44, respectively.

6. Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac*, 62–69.

involved in the Bar Kokhba revolt, and was ultimately martyred by the Romans. The story has been told countless times—there is a veritable cottage industry of Akiva biographies—usually in reverent, hagiographic accounts.<sup>7</sup> The best-known biography, Louis Finkelstein’s *Akiba: Scholar, Saint, and Martyr*<sup>8</sup> is hardly more critical, but even a historian like Shmuel Safrai, who is obviously aware of the challenges of rabbinic biography, tends to view later traditions as constructed around some historical reality.<sup>9</sup> After emphasizing the legendary character of the Akiva-as-shepherd narrative, Safrai states that “this legend contains many historical elements, e.g., that Rabbi Akiba did not study Torah in his youth, and that he came from the lower socio-economic stratum.”<sup>10</sup> Addressing the entire corpus of R. Akiva narratives, Safrai states: “The biographic legends and traditions, taken as a whole, tannaitic and amoraic, Palestinian and Babylonian, clearly indicate that not only did Rabbi Akiba not study in his youth, he was removed from the world of Torah.”<sup>11</sup> Safrai’s statement is important both because it epitomizes the logic of the “historical kernel” approach, and because it cogently and succinctly represents the view against which this essay will argue. In order to do so, I turn to the sources in question, beginning with the post-tannaitic and only then dealing with the earlier tannaitic sources.

#### POST-TANNAITIC SOURCES

Post-tannaitic sources are in broad agreement that, as a youth, R. Akiva was either poor, *‘am ha’arets*, or both.

i. *yShabat* 6.1, 7d (parallel at *ySotah* 9:15, 24c):

It happened that R. Akiba prepared a ‘city of gold’ for his wife. The wife of Rabban Gamliel saw her and was jealous. She recounted this

7. See, among others, J. S. Zuri, *Rabbi Akibab* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1924); Judah Nadich, *Rabbi Akiba and his Contemporaries* (Northvale, N.J., 1999); Meir (Marcus) Lehmann, *Akiba: The Story of Rabbi Akiba and his Times*, trans. P. Zucker (Jerusalem, 2003). It is also worth noting that Eliezer Ben Yehudah collected the sayings attributed to R. Akiva as part of his series on “the fathers of post-biblical Hebrew” (Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Rabbi Akiba ben Yosef* [Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1945]).

8. Louis Finkelstein, *Akiba: Scholar, Saint, and Martyr* (New York, 1936).

9. Shmuel Safrai, *Rabbi Akiba ben Yosef: Hayav u-mishnato* (Jerusalem, 1970).

10. *Ibid.*, 11.

11. *Ibid.*, 13. See also Devora Steinmetz’s recent assertion that all the rabbinic sources agree that R. Akiva “was ignorant until adulthood” in her “Agada Unbound: Inter-Agadic Characterization of Sages in the Bavli and Implications for Reading Agada,” in *Creation and Composition*, 293.

to her husband. He said to her: would you have done for me what she did for him? For she sold the braids of her hair.

The *yShabat* passage is brief and lacking in detail, but Rabban Gamliel's reference to the great sacrifice R. Akiva's wife made when they were younger, even to the point of selling her braids, indicates the couple was impoverished. In the parallel at *ySotab*, Rabban Gamliel's response to his wife's complaint links the couple's poverty to Akiva's devotion to Torah: "Would you have done for me what she did for him? For she sold the braids of her hair and gave it to him while he labored in Torah."

ii. *yPesahim* 6.3, 33b:

R. Akiba spent (*'asab*) thirteen years. He entered into the presence of R. Eliezer but the latter did not recognize him. Thus was his first response to R. Eliezer, that R. Yehoshua said to [R. Eliezer] "Is this not the people (*zeb ba-'am*) you despised? Go out and fight him" (Jgs 9.38)

This story does not easily fit into the dominant post-tannaitic traditions concerning R. Akiva's life. There is no indication of poverty, nor of a late entry into the rabbinic sphere, only a prolonged period of apparently undistinguished study, since R. Eliezer does not recognize him even after thirteen years as his master. Perhaps the verse R. Yehoshua cites—"Is this not the people (*zeb ba-'am*) you despised?" (Jgs 9.38)—suggests R. Akiva is or was a commoner. Since nothing in the story indicates R. Akiva represents a collective, the verse—particularly the phrase *zeb ba-'am*—may be an allusion to Akiva's original status as *'am ba-'arets*.<sup>12</sup>

iii. *yNazir* 7.1, 56a:<sup>13</sup>

R. Akiba said: The beginning of my attendance upon the sages was this. I was once on a journey when I came across a cadaver that I carried about four *mil* until I brought it to a cemetery and buried it there. When I appeared before R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua and told

12. The Hebrew states that R. Akiva *'asab* thirteen years. Though the formulation is a bit curious, as one would expect *'asab* to be followed by an indication of the place he resided (*'asab be-*) or the person with whom he spent this time (*'asab 'im*). I will return to this formula below.

13. This tradition also appears in the minor tractates *Derekb erets zuta* chapter 9 and *Semaḥot* chapter 4.

them what had happened, they said to me, “Every step you took is reckoned against you as if you had shed blood.” I said to them, “If, in a case where I intended to perform a meritorious act I have made myself liable like a wicked person, how much more will I deserve punishment when I have no meritorious intent.” From that moment on I did not let an opportunity pass to attend upon the sages. He said: Whoever does not attend upon the sages merits death.

This passage portrays R. Akiva as ignorant of rabbinic teachings but does not suggest that he was impoverished or began to attend upon the sages at a late age, and his wife is not mentioned. The consultation with rabbis Eliezer and Yehoshua suggests R. Akiva undertakes the arduous physical task of carrying a cadaver for four *mil* (over three miles), believing it to be a meritorious act. However, he is unfamiliar with *rabbinic* teachings (though he evidently accepts their authority), and so, despite his best intentions, errs.<sup>14</sup>

Before proceeding to the Babylonian sources it is worth noting how little, if anything, the Palestinian sources say about R. Akiva’s youth as an *‘am ba-‘arets*. The tradition regarding his wife selling her hair suggests that, at least at some point in the course of their marriage, the couple were poor, but that does not mean Akiva was an ignoramus. Indeed, the *ySotah* parallel (“Would you have done for me what she did for him? For she sold the braids of her hair and gave it to him while he labored in Torah”) indicates their poverty was the *result* of his Torah study, not its precursor. *yPesahim* 6,3 describes R. Akiva’s undistinguished early years as a disciple of R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua, but there is no reason to think his studies started late, and *yNazir* 7.1 similarly describes the “beginning of [R. Akiva’s] attendance upon the sages,” but gives no indication of his age at the time or whether his ignorance extended beyond questions of corpse impurity. Aside from the possible but ultimately speculative interpretation of *zeb ba-‘am* offered above, nothing suggests the Palestinian sources are aware that R. Akiva was an *‘am ba-‘arets* in his youth, even though two of these passages, *yPesahim* 6.3 and *yNazir* 7.1, thematize his beginnings as a rabbinic scholar.

iv. *bPesahim* 49b:

[R. Elazar said: “It is permitted to perforate an *‘am ba-‘arets* even on a Yom Kippur that falls on the Sabbath.” His students said: “Rabbi, say

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14. See the discussion of *bPes* 49b, below.

‘to slaughter’!” He answered: “One requires a benediction, the other does not” . . . R. Shemuel ben Nahmani said in the name of R. Yohanan: “It is permitted to tear an ‘*am ba-’arets* apart like a fish”] . . .

R. Akiba said: “When I was an ‘*am ba-’arets* I said, Would that a sage would pass by so that I can bite him like a donkey.”

Unlike the Palestinian sources, the Babylonian Talmud here provides a clear assertion that Akiva was ‘*am ba-’arets* as a youth, apparently self-evident background information introduced in order to explain the animosity he harbored toward the sages during that period. Wald, in his commentary to the Babylonian Talmud’s tractate *Pesabim*,<sup>15</sup> argues that this passage is an interpretation of *yNazir* 7.1, on the basis of the shared element found in both, the saying that ‘*am ba-’arets* merits death. According to Wald, in the *Yerushalmi* this notion is implicit in R. Akiva’s statement that whoever does not attend upon the sages—i.e., remains an ‘*am ba-’arets*—deserves death.<sup>16</sup>

v. *bBerakhot* 27b:

Another reference to R. Akiva’s humble beginnings is found in the Babylonian Talmud’s account of the aftermath of Rabban Gamliel’s deposition, and the search for a new *nasi*. R. Akiva’s name is proposed but rejected since “He may be punished [by the emperor] for he has no pedigree (*zekhut avot*).” The Talmud does not discuss what precisely constitutes *zekhut avot*, but R. Elazar ben Azariah is appointed to the office because he is “rich and ten generations from Ezra,” so both wealth and social standing are involved.<sup>17</sup>

vi. *bKetubot* 62b and *bNedarim* 50a:

The best-known of the young R. Akiva texts is the story of Akiva and his wife in *bKetubot* and *bNedarim*:

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15. Stephen G. Wald, *B. Pesabim III: Critical Edition with Comprehensive Commentary* (Hebrew; New York, 2000), and see also the discussion in Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore, Md., 2003), 134.

16. It is not clear that the relationship between the Babylonian and Palestinian passages sheds any light on the interpretation of “this is the nation” offered—tentatively—above, since the former could be either a more explicit version or a midrashic elaboration of the latter.

17. On the difference between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds regarding ancestral merit, see Devora Steinmetz, “Does the Patriarch Know ‘Uqztzin—The Nasi as Scholar in Babylonian Aggada,” *AJS Review* 23 (1998): 163–90; Rubenstein, *Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, 80–101.

R. Akiba was Kalba Savua's shepherd. His daughter saw he was modest and fine. She said to him if I become betrothed to you, will you go to the house of the Master? He said to her yes. She was betrothed to him in secret and she sent him. Her father heard and removed her from his house and vowed she could not benefit from his properties. He went and sat twelve years in the house of study. When he returned he brought with him twelve thousand pairs of disciples. He heard an old man who said to [his wife] "How long will he make you 'a living widow'?" (2 Sam 20.3). She said to him, "If he listened to me he would sit (in the house of study) another twelve years." He said: "I am acting with permission," so he sat another twelve years in the house of study. When he returned he brought with him twenty-four thousand pairs of disciples. His wife heard, she went out, and her neighbors said: "Borrow fine garments to dress yourself." She said, "The righteous man cares for his beast" (Prov 12.10). When she came before him she prostrated herself and kissed his feet. His servants pushed her away, but he said to them, "Leave her! Mine and yours are hers." Her father heard a great man came to the city. He said I will go to him, perhaps he will annul my vow. He came before [R. Akiva] and the latter said, "Would you have vowed thus had you known he was a great man?" He replied, "[Had he known] even one chapter, even one law [I would not have vowed thus]." He said to him, "I am he." He prostrated himself and kissed [R. Akiva's] feet and gave him half his possessions. (bKet 62b-63a)<sup>18</sup>

This story has been discussed at length by earlier scholars,<sup>19</sup> and for the present we need only note the robust treatment of the two main motifs involving R. Akiva's youth: his poverty and his ignorance, motifs also attested in other sources, outside the Talmud.

vii. *Avot de Rabbi Nathan A Chapter 6, B Chapter 12*

Another biographic tradition concerning R. Akiva is found in *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*:

18. On the priority of the *Ketubot* version, see Shamma Friedman, "A Good Story Deserves Retelling—the Unfolding of the Akiba Legend," *JSIJ* 2 (2004): 65–66; Tal Ilan, *Mine and Yours Are Hers: Retrieving Women's History from Rabbinic Literature* (Leiden, 1997), 41.

19. For recent discussions see Friedman, "A Good Story," 55–93; Avigdor Shinan, "The Three Wives of Rabbi Akiba" (Hebrew), *Masekhet* 2 (2004): 11–25 (and the extensive bibliography cited in n. 1); Tal Ilan's (problematic) rebuttal of Shinan in "The Wife of Tinaeus Rufus and Rabbi Akiba" (Hebrew), *Masekhet* 3 (2005): 103–12; Tal Ilan, *Mine and Yours Are Hers*, passim; Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993), 136–56.



What were the beginnings of R. Akiba? It is said: When he was forty years of age he had not yet studied a thing. One time he stood at the mouth of a well. "Who hollowed out this stone?" he wondered. He was told: "It is the water which falls upon it every day, continually." It was said to him: "Akiba, have you not heard, 'water wears away stone' (Job 14.19)?" Thereupon R. Akiba drew the inference (*kal va-ḥomer*) with regard to himself: if what is soft wears down the hard, all the more shall the words of the Torah, which are as hard as iron, hollow out my heart, which is flesh and blood! Immediately he turned to the study of Torah.

He went together with his son and they appeared before an elementary teacher.<sup>20</sup> Said R. Akiba to him: "Master, teach me Torah." R. Akiba took one end of the tablet and his son the other end of the tablet. The teacher wrote down *aleph bet* and he learned it; *aleph tav*, and he learned it; the book of Leviticus, and he learned it. He went on studying until he learned the whole Torah, Scripture and targum, midrash, and halakhot.<sup>21</sup>

Until recently *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* was viewed as a tannaitic text, and there is little question that some parts of it are indeed quite early.<sup>22</sup> But while *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* contains dicta attributed to tannaitic masters, it also contains aggadic tales that serve as exempla to the cited dicta, some of which have been "appended to the text . . . from the Mishna and Talmud,"<sup>23</sup> with some passages reflecting a Babylonian, that is, a rela-

20. *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*, version A (ARNA): *melamde ba-tinokot*; ARNB states that they went to *bet ha-sefer*.

21. *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*, version A, chapter 6; *Avot de Rabbi Nathan: A Synoptic Edition of Both Versions*, ed. H. Becker (Tübingen, 2006), 80–81; the English translation is based on Judah Goldin, *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven, Conn., 1955), 40–41.

22. The most striking passage in this regard involves the *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* parallel to mAvot 1.16–2.7. The Mishnah interpolates that household of the patriarch into the earlier scholarly genealogy that began with Moses at Sinai (see the discussion in Amram Tropper, *Wisdom, Politics, and Historiography: Tractate Avot in the Context of the Graeco-Roman Near East* [Oxford, 2004], 21–28). *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*, however, replicates the genealogical list *without* including the interpolated patriarchs, suggesting that *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* had as its *Vorlage* an early version of mAvot that predated the patriarchal interpolation. See Menahem Kister, *Studies in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan: Text, Redaction and Interpretation* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1998), 117–18.

23. M. B. Lerner, "The External Tractates," in *The Literature of the Sages* ed. S. Safrai (Assen, 1987), 1:367–403, here 377.

tively late, reworking.<sup>24</sup> As a result, scholars are understandably reluctant to make strong claims regarding the dating of the work as a whole, as when Jonathan Schofer emphasizes the broad chronological range covered by this text, which “began to be compiled in the second century C.E. or earlier, grew by accretion, and attained its full form sometime between the sixth and ninth centuries, perhaps even going through further changes afterwards.”<sup>25</sup> Fortunately, we need only address this passage, which is evidently post-tannaic.

First, Yaakov Elbaum has demonstrated that *Avot de Rabbi Nathan's* biographical account of R. Akiva is a mosaic of elements drawn from earlier rabbinic sources:<sup>26</sup> the poor worker who shares his wages with his household was originally told of Hillel the Elder (bYoma 35b); R. Akiva's distillation of the Torah into the manifesto that “what is hateful to you do not unto others” was also told of Hillel the Elder (bShab 31a),<sup>27</sup> and so on. In addition, *Avot de Rabbi Nathan's* assumption that there were schools during R. Akiva's lifetime that instructed the general public in everything from the *aleph bet* to the interpretation of Leviticus and beyond is anachronistic,<sup>28</sup> as is the terminology it employs: ARNA's *melamde ha-tinokot* appears once in tannaic literature, in the Tosefta (t*Kelim* [Batra], 1.11),<sup>29</sup> where it is not clear that these are rabbinic or even Jewish instructors.<sup>30</sup> And the terminology of ARNB is similarly anachronistic: R. Akiva and his son go to a *bet sefer*, a phrase both of whose attestations in rabbinic sources (m*Ketubot* 2.10 and t*Sukab* 2.6) suggest is a scribal academy rather than a rabbinic—or public—elementary school.

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24. See Kister, *Studies in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, 193–217, and especially 206–12. See also Ilan, *Mine and Yours are Hers*, 79, n. 47, and the literature cited therein.

25. Jonathan Schofer, *The Making of a Sage: A Study in Rabbinic Ethics* (Madison, Wis., 2005), 29.

26. Yaakov Elbaum, “Linguistic and Conceptual Patterns” (Hebrew), *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1981), 3:71–77.

27. Though here the attribution to R. Akiva may be early and not a secondary development of the motif. See Elbaum, “Linguistic and Conceptual Patterns,” 73–74.

28. The following discussion is indebted to Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen, 2001), especially 40–67. Note her statement that it “is striking . . . that the Mishnah, Tosefta, and tannaic Midrashim—just like Josephus and other Jewish writings from Second Temple times—never explicitly mention schools,” 48.

29. More accurately: in one of the Tosefta manuscripts. The entire passage, along with the preceding mishnah, is extant in MS Erfurt but absent in MS Vienna.

30. See the discussion of sending a *tinok* to a Samaritan or pagan teacher in tAZ 3.1–2.

Surveying the post-tannaitic sources—*Bavli*, *Yerushalmi*, and *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*—it is evident they represent different and often incompatible traditions. R. Akiva either was a shepherd who left his wife to study Torah in Jerusalem; or a young father who first went to study with his son at the local school at the age of forty; or perhaps he decided to dedicate himself to the service of the sages after he carried a corpse four *mil*, unaware of the ritual impurity he was thereby contracting. There are other discrepancies as well: in the Babylonian Talmud, Kalba Savua is R. Akiva's father-in-law, but *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* mentions him immediately after the Akiva traditions apparently unaware of any connection between the two;<sup>31</sup> R. Akiva's wife plays an important role in some of the traditions (she supports him financially or encourages him to set off on the path of scholarship), but is absent from others; some traditions contrast his early poverty and later wealth, in others the financial issues are passed over in silence. The cacophony of competing accounts grows louder once we introduce the traditions about R. Akiva's marriage to the wife of Tineus Rufus,<sup>32</sup> or the assertion that R. Akiva studied for twenty-two years under Nahum of Gamzu,<sup>33</sup> or thirteen under R. Eiezer—neither of which suggests he came to study late in life.

#### TANNAITIC SOURCES

With one important exception (discussed below), none of the motifs concerning R. Akiva's youth—the shepherd, the late-blooming ignoramus who attends school with his son, the student whose brilliance is not recognized by his teachers, the cadaver-carrying disciple—is attested in tannaitic sources. In and of itself, this silence does not refute the “historical kernel” approach. Tannaitic literature is, on the whole, disinterested in biography, so the R. Akiva traditions may have been known (and perhaps even true) but not recorded in these collections. Only later, after the stature of Akiva grew and rabbinic authors gained a new appreciation of biography, were the facts of his life first recorded and then embellished. However, two tannaitic passages call the “historical kernel” account into question.

31. As Shamma Friedman writes, “The Akiba complex in ARNA . . . does not exhibit any indication of borrowing major themes from the Bavli account in Ketubot or Nedarim” (“A Good Story,” 71). See also Tal Ilan, *Mine and Yours Are Hers*, 44.

32. bAZ 20a.

33. GenR 1.14, (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 12). For an apologetic attempt at harmonizing these traditions, see, e.g., B. Z. Fischler, “Rabbi Akiba and his Women,” in *Ha'arets*, June 5, 2003.

i. Tosefta *Ketubot* 4.7

Chapter four of tKet contains a cluster of mishnayot that deal with the financial obligations of husbands and wives to each other: when the husband must redeem his captured wife, what medical costs count as marital support, and, in mishnah 5, the assertion that “if there are years of famine” the husband may say to his wife “take your marriage contract and go support yourself,” an issue picked up again in 4.7:

A man may marry a woman on the condition that he not be responsible for her sustenance and financial support. Moreover, he may mandate that she be responsible for his sustenance and financial support and Torah study. An exemplary tale [*ma'aseb*]: Yehoshua the son of R. Akiba married a woman and agreed with her that she be responsible to support him and his Torah study. There were years of drought, and they began to dispute. She began to complain about him to the sages, but when he came to the courthouse he said to them, “she is more trustworthy in my eyes than anyone.” She said to them, “Indeed, he did posit that condition.” The sages said to her: “There can be no changes after the ratification.”

This passage has recently been the subject of detailed discussion by Shamma Friedman, who points out that “most of the major themes of the Akiba exemplum [i.e., from the *Bavli* stories about his youth, A.Y.] are already here in the Yehoshua case. The study of Torah is a condition of the betrothal agreement. The bride was afflicted by poverty and hardship. The tender appreciation for the wife is explicitly voiced by the husband.”<sup>34</sup> Friedman is undoubtedly right to draw attention to these points of similarity, since there is something surprising about these motifs being associated with Yehoshua, and the concomitant assumption that the marriage of Yehoshua and his wife serves as precedent for the right of the husband to be supported by his wife. The Tosefta provides a biographic narrative concerning wifely devotion to Torah study—a narrative that refers to R. Akiva by name since he is the protagonist’s father!—yet does not mention R. Akiva’s devoted wife having sold her hair and accepted living “widowhood” for the sake of her husband’s Torah scholarship. Friedman concludes that the Yehoshua story was somehow the basis for the Akiva legend: “the stature and fame of R. Akiba are an overwhelming force which attracts this inspiring account and draws it from son to

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34. Friedman, “A Good Story,” 85.

father.”<sup>35</sup> Surely the Tosefta would not invoke the minor figure of Yehoshua if the R. Akiva traditions so richly presented in the Talmud and *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* were available to serve as an anchor for this ruling. Friedman, however, is concerned specifically with the tradition that assigns R. Akiva’s wife a key role in his entrance into the world of rabbinic scholarship, not with the notion that R. Akiva was ignorant as a youth and only entered the world of Torah scholarship late in life. Friedman cannot suggest that the entire biographical complex is post-tannaitic since there is one tannaitic source that appears to prove that R. Akiva was, indeed, an ignoramus in his youth—Sifre Deuteronomy §357.

ii. Sifre Deuteronomy §357

“And Moses was one hundred and twenty years old” (Dt 34.7): He was one of four who died at the age of one hundred and twenty, and these were Moses, Hillel the Elder, Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai, and R. Akiba. Moses was in Egypt for forty years and in Midian for forty years, and led Israel (*pirnes et isra’el*) for forty years. Hillel the Elder came up from Babylonia forty years old, attended upon the sages (*shimesh hakhamim*) for forty years, and led Israel for forty years. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai was a merchant (*‘asak be-pragmatia*) for forty years, attended upon the sages for forty years, and led Israel for forty years. R. Akiba began to study when he was forty,<sup>36</sup> attended upon the sages for forty years, and led Israel for forty years. (SifreDt §357)

This passage, in Reuven Hammer’s translation which follows the Finkelstein edition,<sup>37</sup> lacks many of the post-tannaitic traditions discussed above—shepherd, poverty, wife’s support—but it does state that R.

35. *Ibid.*, 86.

36. The Hebrew *lamaḏ torah ben ‘arba’im shanah* literally means that R. Akiva “studied Torah forty years old.” I will return to this point below.

37. Finkelstein’s edition—*Sifre on Deuteronomy* (Berlin, 1939)—is based on MS Vatican 32, but that manuscript ends at page 339 of the critical edition. Most of the remainder is based on MS Berlin, but that manuscript too ends prematurely, at page 423; the remaining pages are based on MS London but, as we will see, not identical with it. See the discussion of the manuscript history in M. Kahana, “The Halakhic Midrashim,” in *The Literature of the Sages*, ed. S. Safrai, Z. Safrai, J. Schwartz, and P. Tomson (Assen, 2006), 2:95–100, and especially 97, n. 501; *idem.*, *Manuscripts of the Halakhic Midrashim: An Annotated Catalogue* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1995), 97–107. The translation is from Reuven Hammer, trans., *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven, Conn., 1986).

Akiva came to the study of Torah late in life (he “began to study Torah when he was forty”), apparently vindicating the historical kernel approach: the various accounts of R. Akiva’s youth are, despite their different trajectories, anchored in an early, perhaps historically accurate, biographic tradition. The only fly in the ointment is the apparently minor difficulty in SifreDt’s account—the chronological division of R. Akiva’s life does not conform to the pattern established by his predecessors. The lives of Moses, Hillel, and Rabbi Yohannan ben Zakkai consist of three discrete forty year periods.

- Moses: First forty years—in Egypt; second forty years—Midian; third forty years—led Israel.
- Hillel the Elder: First forty years—in Babylon; second forty years—attended upon the sages; third forty years—led Israel.
- Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai: First forty years—a merchant; second forty years—attended upon the sages; third forty years—led Israel.

R. Akiva’s life is also divided into three, but problematically so, since he “began to study Torah when he was forty” (*lamaḏ torah ben ’arba’im shanah*), but the Sifre says nothing regarding Akiva’s first forty years.

A corollary difficulty is the overdetermination of the second forty-year period of his life, during which the Sifre states that R. Akiva studied Torah *and* attended upon the sages. This is almost certainly not a redundancy—attendance upon the sages likely refers to the study of extra-scriptural *halakhot*, possibly without reference to Scripture, so Torah study can exist without attendance upon the sages<sup>38</sup> and perhaps vice versa. The problem is literary: the Sifre assigns each of the other forty-year periods a single characteristic (an activity or a geographic location), but with R. Akiva there is nothing in the first forty-year period, then two distinct activities in the second. The issue may appear trifling at first glance, but other textual witnesses do not offer a plausible reading. To the contrary, as the survey that follows makes clear, each contains its own difficulties when it comes to R. Akiva’s youth.<sup>39</sup>

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38. The paramount importance of specifically rabbinic (as opposed to biblical) instruction may be the issue thematized in *yNazir* 7.1 (“Whoever does not attend upon the sages merits death”).

39. As noted, the manuscript evidence is less robust for this passage than for the rest of the SifreDt, since MS Vatican 32, and MS Berlin do not include the end of the SifreDt.

a. The *editio princeps*<sup>40</sup> is obviously corrupt:

R. Akiva studied (*lmd*) Torah forty years and led Israel (*pirnes et isra'el*) forty years.

This reading is evidently impossible as it accounts for only two forty-year periods in R. Akiva's life, rather the three periods (120 years) the *derashah* requires.

b. Another witness is found in a fragment preserved in the Cairo Geniza:<sup>41</sup>

R. Akiva had dealings with the world (*'asak ba-'olam*) forty years, he studied (*lamad*) Torah [forty years]<sup>42</sup> and he taught (*limed*) the students forty years.

The Geniza reading is more coherent than the *editio princeps*' as it contains a tripartite division of R. Akiva's life, and assigns a single activity to each period. Nonetheless, it is problematic in other ways. First, R. Akiva spends the final forty-year period teaching, while the *curricula vitae* of Moses, Hillel, and Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai established a pattern in which the final forty-year period is spent in a position of national leadership. Moreover, it is not clear what R. Akiva did in his early years. The phrase "had dealings with the world" (*'asak ba-'olam*), is, to my knowledge, not attested elsewhere in rabbinic literature, and is in any case terribly vague.<sup>43</sup> The verb *'asak* may be patterned after R. Yohanan ben Zakkai who "was a merchant" (*'asak be-pragmatia*), though having "deal-

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40. Venice, 1546, photocopied edition by Makor Publishing (Jerusalem, 1971) that includes both the Sifre Numbers and the Sifre Deuteronomy. Our *derashah* appears in column 251.

41. The manuscript is from the Yehudah Nahum collection (MS Holon 242), reproduced in Menahem Kahana, *The Genizah Fragments of the Halakic Midrashim* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 2005), 1:377.

42. There is a lacuna here and the bracketed words are the editor's reconstruction.

43. The closest parallel I could find comes from 1 Corinthians when Paul speaks of "those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it" (1 Cor 7.30–31). The utility of this parallel is dubious, however, and further weakened by the interpretive difficulties that attend the phrase within the Pauline corpus. For a survey of the grammatical issues involved and some of the solutions presented by New Testament scholars, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2000), 580–86.

ings with the world” is not a profession. Moreover, the assertion that R. Akiva “taught *the students* for forty years” is curious. The students in question are not identified, so the definite article seems out of place—who exactly are *the students*? And why mention them in the first place? If R. Akiva is teaching Torah, it goes without saying the people he is teaching are students. I will return to these difficulties below.

c. Finally, though not a witness of SifreDt, there is a passage in *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*—more accurately, in some of the *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* manuscripts—that contains the same tripartite forty-year division of R. Akiva’s life.<sup>44</sup> Some *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* manuscripts do not refer to R. Akiva’s biography,<sup>45</sup> while others differ substantively from SifreDt §357.<sup>46</sup> The two manuscripts closest to the SifreDt describe R. Akiva’s life as follows:

MS Vatican 303	MS Munich 222
Forty years old ( <i>ben ’arba’im shanab</i> ) he went to <i>bet ha-sefer</i> , forty years old ( <i>ben ’arba’im shanab</i> ) he learned everything and forty years he taught Israel	Forty years old ( <i>ben ’arba’im shanab</i> ) he went to <i>bet ha-sefer</i> and in forty years ( <i>u-ve-’arba’im shanab</i> ) learned everything and forty years he taught Israel

I have argued above that the assumption that *bet ha-sefer* is a public or specifically rabbinic educational institution reflects a late post-tannaitic reality, so it is not historical fidelity that is at stake here, rather textual history and narrative coherence. The first manuscript, MS Vatican 303, is clearly wanting in this regard, as it states that R. Akiva went to *bet ha-sefer* when he was forty years old, and learned everything at forty years old. MS Munich 222 is chronologically possible but problematic since it, like the Geniza passage of the SifreDt, has R. Akiva instructing Israel in his last forty years, rather than leading Israel.

Only in a number of aggadic sources does R. Akiva’s tripartite biography include explicit references to his early ignorance, i.e., in the versions of SifreDt §357 preserved in Genesis Rabbah and Midrash ha-Gadol.

44. The *Avot de Rabbi Natan* passage refers only to R. Akiva’s biography, not those of Moses, Hillel, and Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai.

45. For example, *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* Geniza text and MS Vatican 44. See Becker, *Avot de Rabbi Natan*, 146.

46. MS New York 10484, MS New York Rab 50, and MS New York Rab 1305 state that R. Akiva began to study Torah at the age of forty, studied *thirteen* years, then taught Torah to the public. MS New York Rab 25 states that he studies *sixteen* years, but this is probably a scribal error rather than an independent tradition.



iii. Genesis Rabbah:

R. Akiba was an ignoramus (*'asab bur*; literally: "did ignoramus") forty years, he studied forty years, and he attended upon Israel forty years.<sup>47</sup>

iv. And Midrash ha-Gadol:

R. Akiba was without Torah forty years and studied Torah forty years and taught Torah forty years.

But even these readings are not free of difficulties. The GenR statement that R. Akiva *'asab bur*, is very odd. Though I translated it "was an ignoramus," a more faithful rendering, in terms of lexical correspondence and overall infelicity, would be "did ignoramus." Also in GenR, during his last forty years, R. Akiva "attended upon Israel" (*shimesh et isra'el*) rather than "led Israel" (*pirnes et isra'el*), as with the preceding three figures—an unsuccessful attempt to detach *shimesh* ("attended upon") from the phrase *shimesh et ba-ḥakhamim* ("attended upon the sages"), forcibly yoking it to Israel. The first and third forty-year periods are also problematic in Midrash ha-Gadol. In the former, R. Akiva *'asab be-lo' torah*—"was without Torah"—but literally "did [or: acted] without Torah." The syntax is much smoother here since *'asab* can be used in this sense, but *haya* would be the more natural formulation. And, as in the Geniza version, the R. Akiva of Midrash ha-Gadol does not lead Israel, rather spends the last third of his life teaching.

Stepping back to survey the sources discussed thus far, we find the following:

Source	First 40 Years	Second 40 Years	Third 40 Years	Difficulties
Finkelstein Edition		Attended upon the sages <i>and</i> Learned Torah at forty [ <i>lamaḏ torah ben 'arba'im shanab</i> ]	Led Israel	a. Torah study and attendance upon sages overlap b. No activity first 40 years

47. GenR §100 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 1295).

Geniza (MS Holon 242)	Had dealings with the world [‘ <i>asak ba-’olam</i> ]	Studied Torah	Taught the students	a. Phrase “dealings with the world” unclear b. Does not lead Israel c. Who are “the students”?
<i>Editio Princeps</i>	<b>Either:</b> Studied Torah [if <i>lamad</i> ; then second forty-year period empty]	<b>Or:</b> Taught Torah [if <i>lamed</i> ; then first forty-year period empty]	Led Israel	a. Only two forty-year periods accounted for b. Unclear pre-leadership activity
Genesis Rabbah	“was an [literally: did] ignoramus” [‘ <i>asab bur</i> ]	Studied [Torah]	Attended upon Israel	a. Phrase ‘ <i>asab bur</i> ’ awkward b. Does not lead Israel
Midrash ha-Gadol	“was [literally: did] without Torah” [‘ <i>asab be-lo’ torab</i> ]	Studied Torah	Taught Torah	a. Phrase ‘ <i>asab be-lo’ torab</i> ’ awkward b. Does not lead Israel

The relevant *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* witnesses provide the following:

Source	First 40 Years	Second 40 Years	Third 40 Years	Difficulties
MS Vatican 303	Forty years old ( <i>ben arba'im shanab</i> ) he learned everything [Appears second on the list]	Went to <i>bet ha-sefer</i> [Appears first on the list]	Taught Israel	a. Went to <i>bet ha-sefer</i> at forty but learned everything at forty as well b. No activity first forty years c. Anachronistic <i>bet ha-sefer</i>
MS Munich 222		Went to <i>bet ha-sefer</i> and learned everything	Taught Israel	a. No activity first forty years b. Anachronistic <i>bet ha-sefer</i>

As these charts indicate, the direct and indirect witnesses to the SifreDt §357 tradition contain a series of textual and thematic incongruities con-

cerning R. Akiva's *curriculum vitae*, with not a single unproblematic attestation of his youthful ignorance. The absence of such a statement is marked, for several reasons. First, the derashah in SifreDt §357 begins by stating that Moses “was one of four who died at the age of one hundred and twenty” and goes on to list four figures whose 120-year lives are divided into three forty-year periods. By the time we come to R. Akiva the paradigm is clear: forty years of X, forty years of Y, and forty years leading Israel—a pattern that determines the biographic elements of R. Akiva's life so thoroughly as to make some of the textual corruptions *prima facie* unlikely. Second, the manuscripts exhibit no textual or thematic difficulties involving Moses, Hillel the Elder, or Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai—only with R. Akiva do we run into trouble; the textual difficulties are particular to R. Akiva's biography and not the result of general corruptions in the transmission history. Finally, we are dealing with a derashah that thematizes dramatic shifts that occurred in the lives of its biblical and rabbinic protagonists. For Moses and Hillel the shift is geographic—Moses moving from Egypt to Midian, Hillel from Babylonia to Palestine—while Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai grows up in a non-Torah environment and, at the relatively late age, commits to Torah study. The stage, then, is set for the account of R. Akiva's transformation from *'am ba-'arets* to sage, and then to national leader, yet *none of the textual witnesses examined thus far does so in an unproblematic way.*

At this point we need to consider the reading of an additional witness of SifreDt, MS London, which may contain the reading that served as the basis for some of these later emendations.<sup>48</sup>

“And Moses was one hundred and twenty years old” (Dt 34.7): He was one of four who died at the age of one hundred and twenty, and these were Moses, Hillel the Elder, Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai, and R. Akiba. Moses was in Egypt for forty years and in Midian for forty years, and led Israel (*pirnes et isra'el*) for forty years. Hillel the Elder came up from Babylonia forty years old, attended upon the Sages (*sbimesh hakhamim*) for forty years, and led Israel for forty years. Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai was a merchant (*'asak be-pragmatia*) for forty years, attended upon the sages for forty years, and led Israel for forty years. R. Akiba studied Torah forty years and attended upon the sages forty years and led Israel for forty years.

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48. My thanks to the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary for permission to use their microfiche copy of MS London.

MS London's account of the tripartite *curricula vitae* of the first three figures is identical to that of the other witnesses, but it paints a very different picture of R. Akiva, who "studied Torah forty years and attended upon the sages forty years and led Israel for forty years" (*lamaḏ torah arb'aim shanah ve-shimesh ḥakhamim arb'aim shanah u-firnes et isra'el arb'aim shanah*). The reading is remarkable first and foremost for its smoothness—R. Akiva's life conforms perfectly to the pattern established by the other three figures: three forty-year periods, each involving a discrete activity, culminating in a position of national leadership.<sup>49</sup> However, the smoothness of MS London is highly suspect philologically and, under most circumstances, would be understood as an attempt to smooth over the incongruous *cum* untenable readings of the other witnesses. In the case before us, however, there is reason to believe that, narrative coherence notwithstanding, MS London is the *lectio difficilior* and to be preferred, but the *difficultas* in question is not textual but cultural, driven by the growing authority of the traditions that characterize the young R. Akiva as an *'am ba-'arets*. Once these traditions—now backed by the authority of *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* and especially the Babylonian Talmud—became widely disseminated, it was inevitable that scribes would "emend" MS London. It should be emphasized that the dynamic I am suggesting does not attribute anything untoward to the later hands: scribes familiar with the post-tannaitic Akiva traditions would have naturally assumed that earlier copyists erred in stating that he studied Torah in his youth and responded by correcting the text, the resulting readings representing bona fide attempts to emend an untenable text. These emendations would presumably be minimally invasive, hewing as closely as possible to the received reading, *even if this results in textual difficulties*.

Note that the interpretation I am proposing maintains the internal logic of *lectio difficilior* but admits a broader range of forces into consideration. Rather than posit textual smoothness as the sole factor—suggesting that the smoother readings are later and thus suspect—broader cultural coherence, integrity in the way Dworkin uses the term, is recognized as a factor.<sup>50</sup> Rather than reject the smoother textual reading as the result of a later harmonization of an earlier crux, here we reject the smoother "biographical" reading as the result of a later harmonization with the now

49. A similar reading is attested in Yalkut Shimoni §965: "R. Akiba attended upon the sages forty years and taught (or studied) Torah forty years and led Israel forty years." The similarity is not surprising since Yalkut Shimoni tends to follow MS London, as Finkelstein noted in his "Prolegomena to an Edition of the Sifre Deuteronomy," *PAJR* 3 (1931/32): 3–42, especially 7–12.

50. Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), 225–75.

authoritative traditions preserved in *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* and the *Bavli*;<sup>51</sup> in diachronic terms, as the biographic traditions concerning Rabbi Akiva's youth emerged and became authoritative, the reading preserved in SifreDt §357 was altered in an attempt to accommodate their accounts.<sup>52</sup>

Many of the corruptions in the extant manuscripts can be economically explained as emendations to the MS London version, intended to counter the view that R. Akiva's first forty years were spent in study. The two clearest (though, of course, speculative) examples are Finkelstein's reading and the *editio princeps*. The former overcomes this difficulty quite elegantly, adding the word *ben* to the first forty-year period, so that *rabbi 'Akiva lamaḏ torah arba'im shanab* (Rabbi Akiva studied Torah forty years) becomes *rabbi 'Akiva lamaḏ torah ben 'arba'im shanab* (Rabbi Akiva studied Torah forty years *old*).<sup>53</sup> The resulting reading effectively distances the young Akiva from Torah study, though, as noted above, it leaves his first forty years blank and overdetermines the second forty as a time of both Torah study and attendance upon the sages. The *editio princeps*, which is related to MS London and contains numerous reworkings that reflect the influence of the Babylonian Talmud,<sup>54</sup> simply omits R. Akiva's attendance

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51. For another example of the significance of broader historical and cultural considerations in philological analysis, see Azzan Yadin, "Qol as Hypostasis in the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 122 (2003): 621.

52. It should not be assumed that this was a smooth or linear process; it was undoubtedly affected by geographic and historical factors, though most of these can no longer be recovered. Indeed, there is a passage *within Avot de Rabbi Nathan* that may not know the "Avot de Rabbi Natan traditions." Namely, R. Akiva's statement in ARNA §3 / ARNB §4 (ed. Schechter, pp. 15–16), extolling the study of Torah as a youth (in A) or the instruction of students in your youth (in B). I am aware that such a statement need not be read biographically, but it is odd that the one sage who is elsewhere described as having been an ignoramus in his youth here extols the virtues of youthful study (or instruction). See the discussion of this passage in Aaron Amit, "The Death of Rabbi Akiba's Disciples: A Literary History," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 56 (2005): 265–84, here 273–74.

53. A similar dynamic may be at play in MS Vatican 303 of *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*: "At forty years old (*ben arba'im shanab*) he went to school, at forty years old (*ben arba'im shanab*) he learned everything, and forty years he taught Israel." This reading is "undoubtedly a scribal error," as Elbaum notes ("Linguistic and Conceptual Patterns," 72, n. 6), but it is possible that the error lies not—as we might otherwise assume—in the insertion of the second *ben*, but of the first, thus transforming R. Akiva's schooling from something that occurred over the course of his first forty years ("Rabbi Akiba went to school for forty years"), to an event that took place when he was forty years old.

54. See Kahana, *Manuscripts of the Halakic Midrashim*, 65.

upon the sages, leaving only two forty-year periods (“R. Akiva studied [*lmḏ*] Torah forty years and led Israel forty years”).

The Genizah reading (“R. Akiva had dealings with the world forty years, studied Torah [forty years] and he taught the students forty years”) is further removed from the other witnesses and its genesis more obscure. The second and third forty-year periods may be a response to the ambiguity inherent in the assertion that R. Akiva *lmḏ torah*, which can be read either as *lamaḏ torah* (studied Torah) or *limeḏ torah* (taught Torah), and the unwieldy *limeḏ et ha-talmiḏim* (taught the students) is an attempt to disambiguate the root *lmḏ* by providing an indirect object (the students) and so mark the second period as a time of instruction.<sup>55</sup> The result provides for eighty of the one hundred and twenty years, and since the study of Torah must begin when R. Akiva is forty years old, the Genizah has R. Akiva “dealing with the world” during his first forty years. R. Akiva’s biography is thus harmonized with the traditions of the *Bavli* and *Avot de Rabbi Natan*, but at a price: unlike Moses, Hillel, and Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, R. Akiva does not attain a position of leadership, and *‘asak ba-‘olam* is unclear.

A clue to the meaning of this phrase may be discerned if we juxtapose it with the readings of *Genesis Rabbah* and *Midrash ha-Gadol*. The three sources characterize R. Akiva’s first forty years as, respectively: *‘asak ba-‘olam* (had dealings with the world), *‘asab bur* (*ḏiḏ* ignoramus), and *‘asab be-lo’ torah* (*ḏiḏ* without Torah). Having already pointed out the difficulties that attend each of these phrases, I now note the phonetic similarity of *‘asak* and *‘asab*.<sup>56</sup> These readings may stem from the (universally attested) assertion of *SifreDt* §357 that Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai *‘asak be-pragmatia*, “was a merchant” (more literally: “dealt in trade”) or from the language of *yPes* 6.3, which states that R. Akiva *‘asab 13 shanab*, “spent (literally: did) thirteen years” in the bet midrash of R. Eliezer. In either

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55. Elitzur Bar-Asher (personal communication) notes that the *plene* orthography of rabbinic Hebrew would usually clarify whether the text speaks of study or instruction. However, a reading such as that of the *editio princeps* (*lmḏ* and led Israel) is open to readings that would put it at odds with the Talmud, i.e., having the *lmḏ* activity (be it study or instruction) take place in the first forty-year period. The desire to exclude such a reading might be the motivation for the (orthographically unwarranted) disambiguation of the Geniza text.

56. The graphic similarity increases if we assume the lexeme *‘asab* was written with a *samekh* rather than a *sin*, as is regular with rabbinic orthography, in which case the difference between *סעב* and *סעב* would be almost imperceptible. See M. H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford, 1927), 32, §50.

case, the tortured and/or obscure *'asab/'asak* phrases may reflect the later editors' pressure to replace the "biographically" problematic statement that R. Akiva was a young Torah student.<sup>57</sup>

Philologically, the present study argues, *e silentio*, that there is no indication that tannaitic sources knew of R. Akiva's ignorant youth: neither tKetubot 4.7 nor SifreDt §357—two sources that practically invite mention of such a tradition—suggest that R. Akiva was an *'am ba-'arets*. The stronger, positive claim is that the best reading of the SifreDt (preserved in MS London) locates the young Akiva squarely and unapologetically in the house of study: "R. Akiva studied Torah forty years and attended upon the sages forty years and led Israel for forty years." Looking to the question of rabbinic biography, we find that the account of R. Akiva's life follows the pattern Alon Goshen-Gottstein uncovered in the representation of Elisha ben Abuya—the post-tannaitic sources effect a sharp break with the tannaitic, presenting a rich and fully-wrought portrait of a sage that has little or no basis in the earlier strata or rabbinic literature.<sup>58</sup> More broadly, the findings presented here are of a piece with the increasingly skeptical assessments of the historical value of the Babylonian Talmud offered, *inter alia*, by Isaiah Gafni and Adiel Schremer.<sup>59</sup> As for the dynamics outlined here, it may be that part of the shift is related to the blurring of "studied Torah" and "attended upon the sages" in post-tannaitic, particularly Babylonian literature. As noted above, the two activities were distinct in tannaitic sources. Indeed, it is possible that SifreDt §357 understand R. Akiva as the apex of the four figures because, unlike his three predecessors, he integrates Torah study with attendance upon the

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57. The tendency to emend the tannaitic text so as to suit the account of the Babylonian Talmud culminates in R. Eliyahu ben Shelomo (the GR"A's) version of SifreDt §357: "R. Akiba was a shepherd for forty years and studied for forty years and led Israel for forty years."

58. It is worth noting Aaron Amit's analysis of the traditions surrounding the death of R. Akiva's disciples (Amit, "The Death of Rabbi Akiba's Disciples"). Amit traces this tradition, which is attested in both Babylonian and Palestinian sources, to an interpretive dispute recorded in *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*. He concludes that "there is no evidence for the death of Rabbi Akiba's disciples in the tannaitic corpus" (p. 281), and that this tradition emerged from an accretion of later interpretations. Needless to say, the existence of one invented tradition does not prove that others are similarly invented. It does, however, suggest that the interpretation offered here is not unique and may not be atypical.

59. See Isaiah Gafni, "Erets Israel in the Period of the Mishnah and the Talmud: Achievements and Question Marks following a Generation of Scholarship" (Hebrew), *Cathedra* 100 (2001): 199–226, and Adiel Schremer, "Stammaitic Historiography," *Creation and Composition*, 219–36.

sages, likely a metonymic reference to the written and oral law, respectively. In other words, the passage presents a progression from Moses (written law) through Hillel the Elder and R. Yohanan ben Zakkai (oral traditions) and culminates with R. Akiva, who incorporates both. But as Torah study emerges as the paramount value among Babylonian rabbis, the independence of “attending upon the sages” from scriptural study is gradually eroded and the former is eventually subsumed under the latter. To a reader approaching SifreDt §357 after this process has occurred, the statement that “R. Akiba studied Torah forty years and attended upon the sages forty years” might well seem redundant, paving the way for speculation about what occupied R. Akiva in the “missing” forty-year period. As for the specifics of the R. Akiva biography, it is no surprise that it is in the Babylonian Talmud that we find the term *‘am ba-‘arets* and the attendant ideology, since the division between the sages and the *‘am ba-‘arets* is radicalized in that corpus, a point discussed at length by Wald and Rubenstein from a Babylonian perspective, as opposed to the far more genial portrayal of *‘am ba-‘arets* and commoners in general documented in Stuart Miller’s recent work.<sup>60</sup>

The main thrust of this paper has been to recover a tannaitic tradition that characterizes R. Akiva as a student of Torah even in his youth, pointing to a diachronic break in R. Akiva’s rabbinic biography. The now-familiar cluster of youthful ignorance and/or poverty motifs appear only in post-tannaitic sources, and, no less significant, are discontinuous with these earlier traditions. The question that now presents itself, is why post-tannaitic sources would choose to portray the man generally viewed as the rabbinic midrashist par excellence as having been a young ignoramus. And while a detailed discussion lies beyond the scope of this essay, I would like to briefly outline one possible factor. Alongside the biographical shift, R. Akiva undergoes a radical transformation in his representation as an interpreter. In tannaitic sources, particularly the Mishnah and the Sifra, R. Akiva’s engagement of Scripture is viewed as a means by which to support extra-scriptural halakhot.<sup>61</sup> Among the key texts in this

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60. See Wald, *B. Pesabim III*, 211–51; Rubenstein, *Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, 123–42; Stuart S. Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique Erez Israel* (Tübingen, 2006), especially 301–38.

61. On R. Akiva in the Mishnah, see Yishai Rosen-Zvi, “Who Will Uncover the Dust from Your Eyes: Mishnah Sotah 5 and Rabbi Akiba’s Midrash,” *Tarbiz* 75 (2005/2006): 95–128; I provided a brief sketch of R. Akiva in the Sifra in Azzan Yadin, “Resistance to Midrash? Midrash and *Halakhab* in the Halakhic Midrashim,” in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*, ed. C. Bakhos (Leiden, 2006), 35–58, and see my earlier discussion in Azzan Yadin, *Scripture as Logos: Rabbi Ishmael and the Origins of Midrash* (Philadelphia, 2004), 150–54. For a fuller



regard are mSot 5.2 (the impurity of the third loaf); Sifra *Vayikra*, pars-hata 4.5 (R. Tarfon exclaims of R. Akiva: “you explicate [*doresh*] and agree with the oral tradition”); and Sifra *Tsav* pereg 11.4 (whether half a *log* of oil requires scriptural support.). In later sources, most famously in bMen 29b (Moses’ visit to R. Akiva’s bet midrash), midrash enjoys the pride of place and R. Akiva is a creative, at times almost prophetic interpreter. The transformation of R. Akiva the midrashist reflects a broader shift away from extra-scriptural halakhot and toward a firm commitment to biblical justification.<sup>62</sup> This shift, however, is fraught, first and foremost because it threatens to blur the boundaries between the rabbinic stream that is heir to the Mishnah and the Sifra and other groups that privilege Scripture over halakhot. It does not matter if the groups in question represent the Scripture-centered voice within rabbinic Judaism (i.e., the midrashic practices and assumptions preserved in the R. Ishmael midrashim)<sup>63</sup> or without (the Scripture centered, anti-*halakhot* views expressed in the Dead Sea Scrolls).<sup>64</sup> What matters is that the shift toward scriptural authority entails a new rabbinic ideal type: while extra-scriptural halakhah is authorized by the sages’ scholarly genealogy, midrash is ineluctably textual and requires the ability to read, to study Torah, to learn interpretive techniques—all activities traditionally associated with the priestly elite. In other words, a rabbinic shift to Scripture entails a concomitant shift toward an ideal type who would be

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discussion see my forthcoming essay in a collection edited by P. Townsend and M. Vidas.

62. Consider along the same lines the Babylonian Talmud’s frequent response to a tannaitic tradition: *mena hane mile* (“whence do we learn these matters?”), generally answered with a biblical verse. That such a question can be posed is far from self-evident; the tannaitic sages whose views make up the core of the Mishnah and the Sifra would have seen it as superfluous, at best. In the world of the Mishnah (and the Sifra), the *Bavli*’s question is almost nonsensical. How can you cite the legal teaching of, say, R. Eliezer, and then ask “whence do we know this”? The answer is already contained in the question—it is a legal teaching transmitted by R. Eliezer! But the *Bavli* clearly does not see this as dispositive: the saying requires further legitimation, which it (the *Bavli*) provides in the form of a biblical verse.

63. On which see Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*.

64. See Steven Fraade, “Interpretive Authority in the Studying Community at Qumran,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 44 (1993): 46–69; Adiel Schremer, “[T]he[y] Did Not Read in the Sealed Book’: Qumran Halakhic Revolution and the Emergence of Torah Study in Second Temple Judaism,” in *Historical Perspectives: From the Hasmonians to Bar Kokhba in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. D. Goodblatt, A. Pinnick, and D. R. Schwartz (Leiden, 2001), 105–26.

a gifted midrashist, but clearly not part of the (priestly?) elite. This is precisely the function of R. Akiva's aggadic biography, as the two most prominent elements in it, his poverty and his ignorance early on in life, mark him as a new kind of interpreter: a master of midrash who does not—could not—emerge from the elite circles.



## **A GOOD STORY DESERVES RETELLING**

### *THE UNFOLDING OF THE AKIVA LEGEND*

**SHAMMA FRIEDMAN** writes:<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *JSLJ* 3 (2004) 55-93:

[https://www.academia.edu/38101640/Shamma\\_Friedman\\_A\\_Good\\_Story\\_Deserves\\_Retelling\\_The\\_Unfolding\\_of\\_the\\_Akiva\\_Legend\\_Jewish\\_Studies\\_Internet\\_Journal\\_vol\\_4\\_2004\\_55\\_93](https://www.academia.edu/38101640/Shamma_Friedman_A_Good_Story_Deserves_Retelling_The_Unfolding_of_the_Akiva_Legend_Jewish_Studies_Internet_Journal_vol_4_2004_55_93)

One of the conceptualizations of talmudic literature to which mid-twentieth century scholarship was heir may appear fundamentalistic and simplistic today. The talmudic *sugya* was viewed as a protocol recording debate in the academy.<sup>1</sup> Statements attributed to ancient sages were accepted at face value as the utterances of these sages, with a tendency to accept the interpretation provided in context, unless demonstrated otherwise. Events described were largely accepted as historic fact. Similar tales told about different protagonists were taken as reports of different events whose similarity derived from coincidence or divine providence, or, at most, variant traditions of equal historical value. Identical diction in the mouth of different persons in separate episodes was understood as due to the fact that one hero's statement was known and repeated by another.<sup>2</sup> The common

<sup>1</sup> See S. Friedman, "A Critical Study of Yevamot X with a Methodological Introduction" (Hebrew), *Texts and Studies, Analecta Judaica I*, ed. H. Z. Dimitrovsky, New York, 1977, p. 314, n. 112.

<sup>2</sup> See Sh. Abramson, "מפה למה", "Some Aspects of Talmudic Hebrew", ed. M. Bar-Asher, *Language Studies II-III* (1987), pp. 23-50 [Hebrew], xi.

explanations for divergent attestations were faulty reports of a single original, or a primeval duality of traditions.<sup>3</sup>

These judgements reflected an attempt to view redactional activity as minimal or non-existent. They hold in common a denial of developmental categories in general and creativity in composition and transmission in particular. The traditional meritorious qualities of לא הוסיפו ולא הפליגו מדעתן כלום or אמר דבר שלא שמע מפי רבו מעולם are allowed to eclipse many or most aspects of original literary composition and artistic creativity.<sup>4</sup> New details, which suddenly appear in later accounts, are taken as preservation of early traditions, thus neutralizing developmental phenomena.

During the second half of the 20th century, attention was directed to the literary<sup>5</sup> and redactional nature of the anonymous voice in the *sugyot* of the Bavli: not as the voice of a participant but as that of a commentator, with its own set of terminology and abstract halakhic and theological<sup>6</sup> conceptualization.<sup>7</sup> These commentators perfected a specialized form of redaction of the *sugya*,<sup>8</sup> original and creative rather than simply preserving or transmitting.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See S. Friedman, "Uncovering Literary Dependencies in the Talmudic Corpus", in ed. S. J. D. Cohen, *The Synoptic Problem in Rabbinic Literature*, Providence 2002.

<sup>4</sup> See S. Friedman, *Tosefta Atiqta*, Ramat Gan 2002, pp. 94-95 and n. 334.

<sup>5</sup> See L. Jacobs, *Studies in Talmudic Logic and Methodology*, London 1961, Chapter Seven, "The Literary Analysis of the Talmudic *Sugya*", and his regular reference to "contrived composition" (p. 84); "contrivance" (p. 91); "our thesis that there is a strong element of artificiality and contrivance about the Babylonian Talmud, introduced for literary effect" (p. 99, n.); p. 164.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Y. Elman, "Righteousness as its own Reward: An Inquiry into the Theologies of the Stam", *PAAJR*, 59 (1991), pp. 35-67.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Leib Moscovitz, *Talmudic Reasoning*, Tübingen 2002, p. 18, and in general.

<sup>8</sup> See literature cited in R. Kalmin, "The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud", ed. S. Katz, *Cambridge History of Judaism*, volume 4 (forthcoming), n. 49. Clarification of the role of this voice in *aggada* is a leitmotif of this paper, in line with the subject of the conference. Furthermore, since the title assigned to the conference clearly makes reference to the seminal work of David Halivni, I have carefully considered his positions in the framework of these clarifications.

<sup>9</sup> Contrast Halivni, who wishes to place great emphasis upon the commentators as preservers of specific dialectic which he believes already existed alongside the *memrot* of the *amoraim*, but was simply not recorded by them (see *Sources*

We have become familiar with the methods, mentality and style of this component, and can recognize its typical intervention in *aggada* as well as *halakha*,<sup>10</sup> in anonymous discourse as well as within the bounds of attributed statements, or even in the formulation of new *memrot* as part and parcel of the dialectic being created, when context and style may require, or benefit from, the statement of a named *amora* at that point.<sup>11</sup>

These anonymous authors may have lent their hands to other types of literary creativity as well, such as composition and arrangement.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, dialectic commentary was their forté, and they may well have left the other functions to specialists in those fields.<sup>13</sup> Various types of creative literary intervention already marked earlier stages of talmudic literature, and the results of these efforts are also included in the Bavli.<sup>14</sup> There are consequently more options for

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*and Traditions*, Baba Metzia, Jerusalem 2003, pp. 18, 20). This position brings to mind Sherira's apologetic claim that the earlier authorities were aware of certain explanations and clarifications, but refrained from formulating them in order to leave something for the later generations to contribute and gain a sense of creativity (*Iggeret*, ed. B. M. Lewin, Haifa 1920/1, p. 67).

<sup>10</sup> See S. Friedman, "A Critical Study" (above, n. 1), p. 313 and M. Friedmann (Ish Shalom) cited there; D. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, Berkeley 1993, p. 203, etc.; J. L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, Baltimore 1999, pp. 212-3, 380, n. 2; idem, "The Thematization of Dialectics in Bavli Aggada", *JJS*, 54 (2003), p. 73; idem, "Criteria of Stammaitic Intervention in Aggada", *NYU Conference Volume* (forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup> See S. Friedman, *Talmud Arukh, BT Bava Metzi'a VI: Critical Edition with Comprehensive Commentary*, Commentary Volume (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1990, pp. 383, 387; idem, *Five Sugyot*, Jerusalem 2002, pp. 163-64; J. Rovner, "Pseudepigraphic Invention and Diachronic Stratification in the Stammaitic Components of the Bavli: the Case of Sukka 28", *HUCA*, 68 (1997), pp. 11-19.

<sup>12</sup> See Rubenstein, *Stories*, pp. 18-21; "Thematization", pp. 72, 80.

<sup>13</sup> "[I]f the anonymous editors authored the Talmud's greatest stories, why do the overwhelmingly prosaic, legal preoccupations of these commentators throughout the Talmud reveal them to be the very antithesis of deft storytellers and imaginative artists? The anonymous editors of the Talmud are very unlikely candidates for authorship of the Talmud's brilliantly artistic, dramatically gripping, and ethically and theologically ambiguous narratives" (Kalmin, "The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud", note 8 above).

<sup>14</sup> Halivni still has recourse to error or transmissional mishap (one heard in the morning and one heard in the evening) in explaining variant forms (רוב השינויים)

identifying the source of creative composition or transmission than ascribing it to the latest anonymous redactors.<sup>15</sup>

Traditional terminology refers to redactive tasks as divided among different experts: המסדר והמפרש. The arranger fixes the component traditions in their place in the Talmud before the dialectic commentators address them.<sup>16</sup> Sherira Gaon's תוסף תלמודא דארא בתר is receptive to this model.<sup>17</sup> After the components are composed and positioned, the dialectic framework can be added. In contrast, Rashi's model<sup>18</sup> places both functions in the final stage, and in the hands of the same sages:

רב אשי ורבינא סידרו שמועות אמוראין שלפניהם, וקבעו על סדר המסכתות כל אחד ואחד אצל המשנה הראויה והשנויה לה, והקשו קושיות שיש להשיב ופירוקים שראוים לתרין, הם והאמוראים שעמהם, וקבעו הכל בגמרא.

The creative rewording of tannaitic material in the Bavli, whether *baraitot* paralleling the Tosefta, Sifra, or other collections, may certainly have taken place long before the discursive anonymous commentary was composed, and is not of one cloth with its style and

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see Baba Metzia (above, n. 9), p. 23. Regarding the active or creative model, see Friedman, "Uncovering Literary Dependencies" (above, n. 4).

<sup>15</sup> Halivni's terminology may have been a factor in creating the impression that all these functions were carried out by the same individuals. Dubbing the period itself "the period of the Stammaim" may lead one to think that the same "Stammaim" perform all literary functions assignable to that period; associating literary creativity of all types to "Stammaim" may lead one to think that the discursive commentators are the only creative forces operating in the Talmud. Halivni himself attempted to deflect some of these conclusions by having various types of "Stammaim", some of whom already operated during the Amoraic period (cf: התמאים התנאים שלא כמו הסתמאים העורכים פעלו אפוא עוד בתקופת האמוראים... הסתמאים התנאים לא היו מודעים לפעולתם. הם לא הרגישו שהם מרחיבים, Baba Kama, pp. 9-11, and: השינוי שבין הסתמאים עצמם על סוגיהם השונים (my emphasis). However, the mixture of the term "Stammaim" for both periodization and function may be destined to impede clarity.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. A Weiss, *Mehqarim BaTalmud*, Jerusalem 1975, pp. 24-26.

<sup>17</sup> באילין מילי איתוסף תלמודא דארא בתר דארא, דכל דארא קבעין ביה מילי מן ספיקי *Iggeret*, p. 66; cf. p. 68.

<sup>18</sup> Baba Metzia 86a.

thrust.<sup>19</sup> The same observation could apply to recasting of *memrot*, and, as we shall suggest below, aggadic narrative.

Original composition and creative transmission are native to the talmudic corpus from earliest times. One of the pervasive literary devices which we find is transfer of motifs from one context to another,<sup>20</sup> and in its extreme form duplication and reapplication of a story from one hero to another, producing two similar stories in sequence.<sup>21</sup>

In bYevamot 121a we find two seafaring tales in which a sage witnesses a disciple's escape from drowning.

#### יבמות קכא ע"א

תניא א"ר עקיבא  
 פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בספינה וראיתי ספינה  
 אחת שמטרפת בים והייתי מצטער על תלמיד חכם  
 שבה ומנו רבי מאיר  
 כשעליתי למדינת קפוטקיא בא וישב ודן לפני  
 בהלכה אמרתי לו בני מי העלך  
 אמר לי גל טרדני לחברו וחברו לחברו עד  
 שהקיאני ליבשה

אמרתי באותה שעה כמה גדולים דברי חכמים  
 שאמרו מים שיש להם סוף אשתו מותרת מים  
 שאין להם סוף אשתו אסורה

#### יבמות קכא ע"א

תניא אמר רבן גמליאל  
 פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בספינה וראיתי ספינה  
 אחת שנשברה והייתי מצטער על תלמיד חכם  
 שבה ומנו רבי עקיבא  
 וכשעליתי ביבשה בא וישב ודן לפני בהלכה  
 אמרתי לו בני מי העלך  
 אמר לי דף של ספינה נזדמן לי וכל גל וגל שבא  
 עלי נענעתי לו ראשי  
 מכאן אמרו חכמים אם יבואו רשעים על אדם  
 ינענע לו ראשו

אמרתי באותה שעה כמה גדולים דברי חכמים  
 שאמרו מים שיש להם סוף מותרת מים שאין להם  
 סוף אסורה

The assumption that the identical event that transpired between

<sup>19</sup> S. Friedman, "The Baraitot in the Babylonian Talmud and their Parallels in the Tosefta" (Hebrew), *Atara L'Haim*, Studies in the Talmud and Medieval Rabbinic Literature in honor of Professor Haim Zalman Dimitrovsky, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 163-201.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. J. Elbaum, "Models of Storytelling and Speech in Stories About the Sages" (Hebrew), *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 3, 1981, pp. 71-77; M. Kister, *Studies in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1998, p. 143, and Geiger quoted there, n. 134.

<sup>21</sup> See S. Friedman, "Historical Aggadah in the Babylonian Talmud" (Hebrew), *Saul Lieberman Memorial Volume* (offprint 1988), Jerusalem and New York, 1993, p. 128 and n. 38, and literature cited there, p. 143; idem, *Commentary to Gittin*, The Society for the Interpretation of the Talmud (forthcoming), Sugya 23, n. 93.

Rabban Gamliel and R. Akiva repeated itself between R. Akiva and R. Meir challenges our credulity. At least that is how the problem was put by Shelomo Yehudah Rapoport (Shir):<sup>22</sup>

כל מבין ישר לא יחשוב הדברים כפשוטם, שממש מה שאירע לר"ג עם ר"ע ומה שדברו זה לזה אירע אח"כ לר"ע עם ר"מ ודברו שניהם ג"כ בלשון ההיא, אין זאת רק מעשה אחד ולשון אחת על אנשים שונים.

But when it comes to explaining how the identical narrative is told about two different events, Shir can fall back only to error, confusion, or the infamous nebulosity that is supposed to set in when separate tradents operate.

כל מעיין ואוהב אמת יוכרח להודות כי הן ממספרים שונים, אשר שמעו מעשה אחד בעצמו או הדומה לו על אנשים שונים בשמותם.

Postulating separate tradents for texts that are identical except for the names mentioned may create more problems than it solves. Did not the two tradents have a common source? Shir does not consider the possibility that one of the two texts presents creative alterations. Neither does he attempt to determine which of the two accounts is more original, as should be clear from the source of this passage in the Tosefta,<sup>23</sup> in which R. Akiva alone figures as the sea traveler who sees a disciple, an unnamed disciple, shipwrecked.

אמ' ר' עקיבא כשהייתי בא בים ראיתי ספינה שטבעה בים והייתי מצטער על תלמידי חכמים שבתוכה וכשבאתי למזגת קפוטקיא ראיתו יושב ושואל לפני בהלכה נמתי לו בני היאך עלית מן הים גם לי טרדני גל לחבירו וחבירו לחבירו עד שהגעתי ליבשה אמרתי כמה גדולים דברי חכמים שהיו אומ' מים שיש להן סוף אשתו מותרת מים שאין להן סוף אשתו אסורה.

The Bavli's treatment of this *baraita* is marked by two outstanding features: identifying the anonymous disciple, and duplicating the entire episode and applying it to another sage, namely, from R. Akiva backwards to R. Gamliel. Both features are quite common in the Bavli. The added identification of the disciple is marked as an

<sup>22</sup> Erekh Millin, I, Warsaw 1913/4, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Yevamot 14, 5 (p. 52).



Aramaic insert by the word ומנו.<sup>24</sup> The original *baraita* is slightly rephrased in the Bavli, as it is also in the Yerushalmi and Kohelet Rabba. There is no need to assign this rephrasing to a late redactor. Who is behind the doubling of the whole story may still be an open question, as we shall see presently. This doubling applies an original story to a personality of an earlier generation. Thus the story flows backwards in time, from R. Akiva to Rabban Gamliel.<sup>25</sup>

The net effect of both procedures is a thematic intertwining that challenges our credulity: Rabban Gamliel witnesses an extraordinary episode in which R. Akiva's scholarly merit brings miraculous salvation, and the same R. Akiva witnesses R. Meir in an identical situation. The chain of scholarly hegemony is thus delineated by the repetition.

#### ברכות סב ע"א

תניא בן עזאי אומר פעם אחת נכנסתי אחר רבי עקיבא לבית הכסא ולמדתי ממנו שלשה דברים למדתי שאין נפנין מזרח ומערב אלא צפון ודרום ולמדתי שאין נפרעין מעומד אלא מיושב ולמדתי שאין מקנחין בימין אלא בשמאל אמר לו רבי יהודה עד כאן העזת פניך ברבך אמר לו תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך.

#### ברכות סב ע"א

תניא אמר רבי עקיבא פעם אחת נכנסתי אחר רבי יהושע לבית הכסא ולמדתי ממנו שלשה דברים למדתי שאין נפנין מזרח ומערב אלא צפון ודרום ולמדתי שאין נפרעין מעומד אלא מיושב ולמדתי שאין מקנחין בימין אלא בשמאל אמר ליה בן עזאי עד כאן העזת פניך ברבך אמר ליה תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך.

An additional twin account (Berakhot 62a) refers to R. Akiva and ben Azzai,<sup>26</sup> each of whom follows a sage entering the privy to learn

<sup>24</sup> On ומנו see N. Brüll, "Mischnalehrer von heidnischer Abkunft" [about Rabbi Akiva], *Jahrbücher für jüdische Geschichte und Literature*, 2 (1876), pp. 154-6; H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden IV*, Leipzig 1908, pp. 456-7 (#32); E. S. Rosenthal, ed. S. Lieberman et al, *Henoch Yalon Jubilee Volume*, Jerusalem 1963, pp. 308-9, n. 58; idem, "For the Talmudic Dictionary – Talmudica Iranica", *Irano-Judaica*, Jerusalem, 1982, p. 117, n. 9; D. Rosenthal, "לא איתפרש" *Bar Ilan*, 18-19 (1981), pp. 156-7; Sh. Abramson, ed. S. Friedman, *Saul Lieberman Memorial Volume*, New York and Jerusalem, 1993, pp. 235-5 [on R. Akiva, etc.] = idem, *Rabbi Shmuel b. Chofni, Liber Prooemium Talmudis*, Jerusalem 1990, pp. 109-10.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Elbaum, p. 73, n. 13 (there from R. Eliezer to Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai). Regarding the Kohelet Rabba parallel and the editor's agenda there, see S. Wald, "Hate and Peace in Rabbinic Consciousness: On Bavli Bava Batra 8a" (Hebrew, forthcoming).

<sup>26</sup> See R. Rabinovicz, *Variae Lectiones*, I, Munich 1867, p. 358.

from his behavior even in this situation. Here again we find the doubling of an event, and intertwining of personalities. However, we cannot entertain the possibility that the repetition is the work of the late Babylonian redactor, since the two accounts already exist at the same location in the Yerushalmi Berakhot 9,5; 14c. Thus this editorial intervention precedes the anonymous stratum of the Bavli.

אמר רבי עקיבה נכנסתי אחרי רבי יהושע לראות אף שמעון בן עזאי היה או' כן נכנסתי אחר רבי המעשה אמ' לו מה ראיתא אמר להן ראיתו יושב עקיבה לראות את המעשה אמרו לו מה ראיתא וצידו כלפי מערב ולא פירע עד שישב ולא ישב כו'. עד ששיפשוף ולא קינח בימין אלא בשמאל.

In the Bavli the language was restyled, and an embellishment was added in the form of a challenge by a younger sage. Neither of these operations requires the unique talents of the discursive commentators, and can be attributed to earlier Babylonian recasters of Palestinian material. The doubling itself, as we have seen, was already part of the early Palestinian tradition.

The above clearly demonstrates that creative editorial reworking is part and parcel of talmudic literature throughout most of its stages. Rather than viewing the earlier stages as verbatim reports and assigning all intervention to the anonymous stratum of the Bavli, one can discern the marks of literary creativity throughout the corpus.

In the following pages, we shall attempt to apply this theory to the aggadic narrative of the Bavli. Its shape and form betray the creative and artistic hand of an active redactor and formulator. His literary artistry need not be assigned to the authors of the late discursive commentary, and indeed the appreciation of its literary quality may be heightened by separating its composer from *that* genre, and concentrating our investigative spotlight upon his own.

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The body of this paper is devoted to the famous accounts of Rabbi Akiva's scholarly beginnings as recorded in the Bavli, Ketubbot 62b and Nedarim 50a.

**נדריים נ ע"א**

**כתובות סב ע"ב**

ר' עקיבא איתקדשת ליה ברתיא (דבר) דכלבא שבוע שמע (בר) כלבא שבוע אדרה הנאה מכל נכסיה.	ר"ע רעיא דבן כלבא שבוע הוה חזיתיה ברתיא דהוה צניע ומעלי אמרה ליה אי מקדשנא לך אזלת לבי רב אמר לה אין איקדשא ליה בצניעה
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### **Ketubbot 62ab<sup>28</sup>**

R. Akiva was a shepherd of Kalba Savua. The latter's daughter, seeing how modest and noble he was, said to him, "Were I to be betrothed to you, would you go away to [study at] an academy?" "Yes", he replied. She was then secretly betrothed to him and sent him away. When her father heard, he drove her from his house and forbade her by a vow to have any benefit from his estate.

[R. Akiva] departed, and spent twelve years at the academy. When he returned home, he brought with him twelve thousand disciples. He heard an old man saying to her, "How long will you lead the life of a living widowhood?" "If he would listen to me", she replied, he would spend [in study] another twelve years". Said [R. Akiva]: "It is then with her consent that I am acting", and he departed again and spent another twelve years at the academy.

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<sup>28</sup> Adapted from *Kethuboth*, translated by I. W. Slotki, London, The Soncino Press, 1936, with minor changes.

<sup>29</sup> Adapted from *Nedarim*, translated by H. Freedman, London, The Soncino Press, 1936, with minor changes.

### **Nedarim 50a<sup>29</sup>**

The daughter of Kalba Savua betrothed herself to R. Akiva. When her father heard thereof, he vowed that she was not to benefit from aught of his property.

Then she went and married him. In the winter they slept in the straw storage shed, and he had to pick out the straw from her hair. "If only I could afford it", he said to her, "I would adorn you with a golden Jerusalem". [Later] Elijah came to them in the guise of a mortal, and cried out at the door, "Give me some straw, for my wife is in confinement, and I have nothing for her to lie on". "See", R. Akiva observed to his wife, "there is a man who lacks even straw". [Subsequently] she counselled him, "Go and become a scholar".

So he left her, and spent twelve years [studying] under R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua. At the end of twelve years, he was returning home, when from the back of his house he heard a wicked man jeering at his wife, "Your father did well to you. Firstly, because he is your inferior, and secondly, he has abandoned you to living widowhood all these years". She replied, "Yet were he to hear my desires, he would be absent another twelve years". "Seeing that she

ושדרתיה שמע אבוב אפקה מביתה אדרה הנאה  
מנכסיה.

אזלא ואיתנסיבה ליה בסיתוא הוה גנו בי תיבנא  
הוה קא מנקיט ליה תיבנא מן מזייה אמר לה אי  
הואי לי רמינא ליך ירושלים דדהבא אתא אליהו  
אידימי להון כאנשא וקא קרי אבבא אמר להו הבו  
לי פורתא דתיבנא דילדת אתתי ולית לי מידעם  
לאגונה אמר לה ר' עקיבא לאנתתיה חזי גברא  
דאפילו תיבנא לא אית ליה אמרה ליה זיל הוי בי  
רב.

אזל תרתי סרי שנין קמי דר' אליעזר ור' יהושע  
למישלם תרתי סרי שנין קא אתא לביתה שמע  
מן אחורי ביתיה דקאמר לה חד רשע לדביתהו  
שפיר עביד ליך אבוך חדא דלא דמי ליך ועוד  
[שבקך] ארמלות חיות כולהון שנין אמרה ליה אי  
צאית לדילי ליהוי תרתי סרי שנין אחרנייתא אמר  
הואיל ויהבת לי רשותא איהדר לאחורי הדר אזל  
הוה תרתי סרי שני אחרנייתא.

אתא בעשרין וארבעה אלפין זוגי תלמידי נפוק  
כולי עלמא לאפיה ואף היא קמת למיפק לאפיה  
אמר לה ההוא רשיעא ואת להיכא אמרה ליה  
(משלי יב) יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו.  
אתת לאיתחזווי ליה קא מדהן לה רבנן אמר להון  
הניחו לה שלי ושלכם שלה הוא.

שמע (בר) כלבא שבוע אתא ואיתשיל על נידריה  
ואשתריי מן נכסיה.<sup>27</sup>

מן שית מילי איעתר רבי עקיבא מן כלבא שבוע...

אזיל יתיב תרי סרי שנין בבי רב כי אתא אייתי  
בהדיה תרי סרי אלפי תלמידי שמעיה להווא סבא  
דקאמר לה עד כמה קא מדברת אלמנות חיים  
אמרה ליה אי לדידי ציית יתיב תרי סרי שני  
אחריני אמר ברשות קא עבידנא הדר אזיל ויתיב  
תרי סרי שני אחריני בבי רב.

כי אתא אייתי בהדיה עשרין וארבעה אלפי  
תלמידי שמעיה דביתהו הות קא נפקא לאפיה  
אמרו לה שיבבתא שאילי מאני לבוש ואיכסאי  
אמרה להו (משלי יב) יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו.  
כי מטיא לגביה נפלה על אפה קא מנשקא ליה  
לכרעיה הוו קא מדחפי לה שמעיה אמר להו  
שבקוה שלי ושלכם שלה הוא.

שמע אבוב דאתא גברא רבה למתא אמר איזיל  
לגביה אפשר דמפר נדראי אתא לגביה א"ל  
אדעתא דגברא רבה מי נדרת א"ל אפילו פרק  
אחד ואפי' הלכה אחת אמר ליה אנא הוא נפל על  
אפיה ונשקיה על כרעיה ויהיב ליה פלגא ממוניה.  
ברתיה דר"ע עבדא ליה לבן עזאי הכי והיינו  
דאמרי אינשי רחילא בתר רחילא אזלא כעובדי  
אמה כך עובדי ברתא.

<sup>27</sup> Compare textual witness.

When he finally returned, he brought with him twenty-four thousand disciples. His wife heard and went out to meet him, when her neighbours said to her, "Borrow some respectable clothes and put them on", but she replied, "A righteous man knoweth the life of his beast".

On approaching him she fell upon her face and kissed his feet. His attendants were about to thrust her aside, when [R. Akiva] cried to them, "Leave her alone, mine and yours are hers".

Her father, on hearing that a great man had come to the town, said, "I shall go to him, perchance he will invalidate my vow". When he came to him [R. Akiva asked], "Would you have made your vow if you had known that he was a great man?" "[Had he known]", the other replied, "even one chapter or even one single halachah [I would not have made the vow]". He said to him, "I am the man". The other fell upon his face and kissed his feet and also gave him half of his wealth.

The daughter of R. Akiva acted in a similar way towards ben Azzai. This is indeed an illustration of the proverb: "Ewe follows ewe, a daughter's acts are like those of her mother".

has thus given me permission", he said, "I will go back". So he went back, and was absent for another twelve years, [at the end of which] he returned with twenty-four thousand disciples. Everyone flocked to welcome him, including her [his wife] too. But that wicked man said to her, "And whither art thou going?" "A righteous man knoweth the life of his beast" she retorted.

So she went to see him, but the disciples wished to repulse her. "Make way for her," he told them, "for my [learning] and yours are hers".

When Kalba Savua heard thereof, he came [before R. Akiva] and asked for the remission of his vow, and he annulled it for him.

From six things R. Akiva became rich, from Kalba Savua...

The overall similarity between the two accounts presumably establishes the dependence of one upon the other, and the expansive additions in Nedarim<sup>30</sup> point to Ketubbot as the original.<sup>31</sup> For

<sup>30</sup> Especially the "straw" scene. For *רמינה* = adorn, see S. Paul, "Gleanings from the Biblical and Talmudic Lexica in Light of Akkadian", *Minhah le-Nahum – Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nahum M. Sarna in Honour of his 70th Birthday*, ed. M. Brettler, M. Fishbane, London 1993, pp. 255-6 ("attire").

example,<sup>32</sup> only in Nedarim are R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua mentioned by name as the teachers before whom R. Akiva sat.<sup>33</sup>

Thus Nedarim is a *terminus ad quem* for the composition of the story. This would probably suggest that the composition predates the work of the anonymous commentators.

The Ketubbot narrative contains the following major themes: attendance at the house of study is a condition of the betrothal agreement; the vow of disinheritance and its ultimate cancellation; 12 years and 12,000 disciples doubled; the wife's lack of proper garment to wear due to poverty; noble acknowledgement of his wife's merit by R. Akiva: שלי ושלכם שלה הוא.

The vow of disinheritance and its ultimate cancellation serves as the envelope wrapping the story. The epilogue telling us that their daughter acted similarly towards ben Azzai is consistent with the tendency we have seen in doubling the event by extending it to another generation.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Nedarim also deletes (see below). As we have delineated the two stories, their size is approximately equal, although Nedarim is slightly longer. Contrast Menorat Hamaor, who quotes the story from Ketubbot, and adds: ובפרק הנודר כתוב מעשה זה יותר בקוצר (R. Isaac Aboab, *Menorat Hamaor*, ed. J. F. Horev, Jerusalem 1961, p. 508).

<sup>32</sup> An additional example: the “women neighbors” and “old man” of Ketubbot become “an evil person” in Nedarim (cf. variant readings), intensifying the challenge to R. Akiva's wife. In a late expansive version: הגר אחד בשכוניתה שהיה: כיון שראה אותו היגר מבוזה ומביישה בדברים... (Addition to Avot d'Rabbi Natan, p. 163).

<sup>33</sup> The discrepancies between Ketubbot and Nedarim had been explained in the 19th century as due to the uncertainties and lack of specific information on the part of the authors of each account, who ostensibly worked independently, each recounting what he knew about an ancient account of R. Akiva's beginning. See A. D. Dubsevitze, *Hammetzaref*, Odessa 1871, p. 170. Nedarim's dependency upon Ketubbot was considered by A. Aderet, *Alei Siah* 4-5 (1977), p. 129.

<sup>34</sup> Compare also other such comments that the same event also occurred to x, e.g. Baba Metzia 83b-84a, where the saga of R. Elazar b. R. Shimon is said to have reoccurred with R. Yishmael b. R. Yose. The commentators were in a quandary as to how many of the details were repeated (see Friedman, “Historical Aggadah in the Babylonian Talmud”, p. 128 and n. 39). Regarding the R. Akiva/ben Azzai doublet under discussion here, the commentary “Rashi First Redaction” includes the detail that the betrothal to ben Azzai also took place without the knowledge of the betrothed's father! בדא ליה לבן עזאי הכי

The main differences in Nedarim are as follows: R. Akiva is not described as a shepherd; an entire paragraph is added describing the couple's poverty, which forces them to sleep during winter in the storage-shed for straw. Removal of the straw from his wife's hair is Akiva's opportunity to mention the magnificent diadem which she deserves: "If I had the where-with-all, I would crown you with a 'Jerusalem- of-Gold.'"<sup>35</sup>



Tiche-Antioch with mural crown, bronze, second century CE, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California.

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נתקדשה לו על מנת שילמוד בלא ידיעת אביה (*Perushei R. Yehudah bar Natan*, ed. J. N. Epstein, Jerusalem 1932/3, p. 34).

<sup>35</sup> Regarding the nature of this 'mural crown', and its epigraphic and iconographic evidence, see S. Paul, "Jerusalem, A City of Gold", *IEJ* 17 (1967), pp. 259-63; S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah* 8 (New York, 1973), p. 768; S. Paul, "Jerusalem of Gold – Revisited", *Amihai*, Mazar Festschrift (Jerusalem 2004, forthcoming); H. A. Hoffner, "The 'City of Gold' and the 'City of Silver'", *IEJ* 19 (1969), pp. 178-180 (cited by Paul).

The appendix regarding the daughter and ben Azzai does not appear in Nedarim at all. Rather, the end of the narrative there is devoted to explaining the source of R. Akiva's riches, the explanation being that he received them from Kalba Savua, as spelled out in the following paragraph in Nedarim, which serves as an appendix to the story there.<sup>36</sup>

The straw episode fulfills the need to describe Rachel's indigence and deprivation. Consequently, there is no need to have the neighboring women complain about her lack of proper clothing, as we find in Ketubbot. Consequently, the dress motif is eliminated, and the objection raised over her participation in greeting the sage is simply: ואת להיכא "Where do you think *you* are going?" The inclusion of the straw story and the omission of the dress motif are thus interdependent.

A further advantage to this reworking is that it enhances Rachel's image, in that picturing her in rags that do not provide sufficient covering is degrading.<sup>37</sup> It is now the disparaging "you", and not the lack of dress, that prompts the wife's self-defense, expressed by quoting a verse from Proverbs.

In his book *Carnal Israel*, Daniel Boyarin places central emphasis upon two motifs of this story:

The key to my reading is the name Rachel... The entire story of the romance of Rabbi Akiva and Rachel is generated by one root metaphor: Akiva as the shepherd and Rachel as a ewe. Rachel's declaration that "the righteous [shepherd] knows the soul [desire] of his animal" is, in fact, the key moment in the story.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The "daughter and ben Azzai" account is certainly consistent with the general context in Ketubbot, which is devoted to absentee studying husbands (my thanks to Jeffrey Rubenstein for urging me to address this point). The context in Nedarim touches upon studying under deprivation. The annulment of the vow, the larger context of tractate Nedarim, appears not to have especially interested the Nedarim redactor of this story, who actually shortened the pertinent paragraph.

<sup>37</sup> Similarly, her kissing her R. Akiva's feet described in the next line in Ketubbot is removed in Nedarim, where she "appears before him".

<sup>38</sup> P. 151.



As is well known, the story does not contain an explicit mention of the name Rachel, which is found in ARN<sup>39</sup> only. However, in the epilogue in Ketubbot we do find רחילה בת רחילה אזלא, or as Boyarin puts it, “her name is only hinted at in the talmudic text”.<sup>40</sup> The relationship between Ketubbot and ARN on this point was considered by Tal Ilan, who writes: “My guess is that the Aramaic saying in the Babylonian Talmud was understood by the Avot de-Rabbi Nathan as the name of the woman (or a pun on her name)”.<sup>41</sup>

Upon close examination we notice that the epilogue in Ketubbot actually quotes *two* juxtaposed proverbs:

והיינו דאמרי אינשי:

1 רחילה בת רחילה אזלא,

2 כעובדי אמה כך עובדי ברתא.

Indeed, all textual witnesses contain the second proverb, but the first is found only in two primary textual witnesses, the printed editions, and MS Vat. 113.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, this manuscript does not read רחילה בת רחילה as in the editions, but rather (in context) רחילה בת רחילה, אזלא as in the editions, but rather (in context) רחילה בת רחילה, אזלא. “A ewe daughter of a ewe, as the deeds of the mother so the deeds of the daughter”.<sup>43</sup>

The reading of the printed editions: רחילה בת רחילה אזלא, כעובדי אימא.

<sup>39</sup> = Avot d’Rabbi Natan.

<sup>40</sup> N. 31; correct accordingly Ilan, *Mine*, p. 291, n. 37.

<sup>41</sup> *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, Tübingen 1995, p. 81, n. 81; idem, “The Quest for the Historical Beruriah, Rachel, and Imma Shalom”, *AJSReview* 22 (1997), p. 10; idem, *Mine and Yours are Hers*, Leiden 1997, p. 79, n. 47, pp. 290, 294.

<sup>42</sup> See also *The Babylonian Talmud with Variant Readings*, Ketubbot II, Jerusalem 1966/7, p. 81 and n. 28.

<sup>43</sup> In M. Sokoloff’s *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, Ramat Gan 2002, p. 1068: “‘ewe daughter of a ewe’ [i.e. Rachel, the wife of R. Akiva, the descendant of Rachel, wife of Jacob]”. However, the paraphrase provided here does not fit the context, which is not addressing the wife of R. Akiva as the daughter in question, but *their* daughter relating to her mother. Comparison of Akiva and Rachel with Jacob and Rachel was made by Elbaum (p. 72, n. 7) with reference to a detail in a secondary collection, and by Boyarin (p. 153) with reference to Ketubbot; cf. Ilan, *Mine*, pp. 289-91.

רחילא בת רחילא, כעובדי ברתיא, כן עובדי ברתיא does indeed suggest that these are two different proverbs. However, in the manuscript reading רחילא בת רחילא, כעובדי ברתיא, כן עובדי ברתיא the two clauses can conceivably be taken as complementary parts of one proverb: “Ewe daughter of a ewe, like the deeds of the mother so the deeds of the daughter”. Reading the phrases as parts of one unit invites the theory that this is the original proverb, and the first half fell out in the reading of most textual witnesses.

We will argue against this interpretation for the following reasons: (1) Assuming common loss of text in independent textual witnesses is extremely risky, and is predicated upon coincidental accidents, or complex unproven dependencies. Furthermore, the phrase is also missing in secondary textual witnesses, such as Menorat Hamaor and Yalkut Shimoni. (2) We can marshal positive proof that the second half is an independent literary unit, and stands better alone without רחילא בת רחילא. Namely, כן עובדי אמה כן עובדי ברתיא is a quotation from the Targum to Ez 16 44.

הנה כל המשל עליך ומשל לאמר באמה ברתה.

The Targum reads:

הא כל דמתיל עליך ומתול למימר כעובדי אמה כן ברתיא.

As such the second half alone is most plausibly the original text. Whoever added רחילא בת רחילא made use of an independent zoological proverb, reminiscent of our botanical “the acorn doesn’t fall far from the tree”. Thus a compound proverb was produced, whose very length and redundancy are a clue to its composite nature, terseness being proverbial for proverbs.

The introduction of רחילא בת רחילא can be assigned to a relatively late stage of the transmission of the text of the Bavli. However, there is still room to study the significance of the insertion, and the question of Rachel being the name of R. Akiva’s wife in the eyes of the glossator.<sup>44</sup>

The sole specific mention of this name in the Talmudic-Midrashic corpus appears in ARNA, p. 29:<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Use of the name in this study is with imaginary quotation marks.

<sup>45</sup> Compare “Addition b”, p. 163. Secondary sources made greater use of the name. Cf. *Midrash HaGadol*, Shemot, ed. M. Margulies, Jerusalem 1966/7, p.

עתיד רבי עקיבא לחייב את כל העניים בדין, שאם אומרים להם מפני מה לא למדתם [תורה] והם אומרים מפני שעניים היינו, אומרים להם והלא רבי עקיבא עני ביותר ומדולדל היה.

ואם אמר מפני שטפינו מרובין, אומר' להם והלא עקיבא בנים ובנות היו לו אלא שפירנסם רחל אשתו.

It is true that the final redaction of ARNA took place after the compilation of the Bavli.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, entire exempla of the sages appear to have been added to ARNA based upon the Bavli.<sup>47</sup> However, many of these exempla clearly seem to be late additions to the core compilation, and cannot be used to demonstrate the reliance of the body of the work on the Bavli.<sup>48</sup> The Akiva complex in ARNA ch. vi (pp. 28-29) develops themes known from Palestinian sources



'And Rachel was Beautiful' by Abel Pann, Bible cover illustration, Courtesy of Itiel Pann and Mayanot Gallery, 28 King George St., Jerusalem, Copyright. [www.mayanotgallery.com](http://www.mayanotgallery.com)

and does not exhibit any indication of borrowing major themes from the Bavli account in Ketubbot or Nedarim. There is no allusion whatsoever to R. Akiva having been a shepherd or his having to labor

69, which introduces the name, apparently deriving it from ARN, in its logical place: רחל כיון שראתה אותו רחל בתו שלבן כלבא שבוע אמרה etc.

<sup>46</sup> Kister, *Prolegomenon to Avoth de-Rabbi Nathan Solomon Schechter Edition*, Jerusalem 1997, pp. 12-13. Cf. M.B. Lerner, "The External Tractates", in S. Safrai ed. *The Literature of the Sages I* (Aassen-Maastricht 1987), pp. 377-78. See below, n. 58.

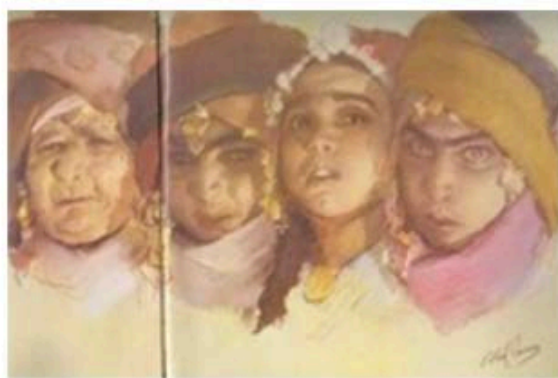
<sup>47</sup> Kister, *Studies*, p. 208.

<sup>48</sup> Kister, *ibid.*

in Torah in order to earn his wife in marriage. There it is the wife who is pictured as laboring, in order to sustain their children. Thus the name Rachel in ARNA can hardly derive from the theme of shepherd laboring to earn his wife in marriage, as Jacob for Rachel.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, not only is it not found at all in ARNB, but even in ARNA the name is only mentioned in this one sentence which expands on the theme of “many children”. In ARNB the poor are answered simply, אף ר' עקיבא מטופל היה, with no mention of the wife. This is expanded in ARNA, which reads<sup>50</sup> in context:

ואם אמר מפני שטפינו מרובין, אומר' להם והלא עקיבא בנים ובנות היו לו  
אלא שפירנסתם רחל אשתו.



'Four Matriarchs' by Abel Pann, Courtesy of Itiel Pann and Mayanot Gallery. Copyright.

In the rest of the passage she is simply called אשתו. I can speculate that the name was supplied in ARNA in order to balance the short sentence מפני שפירנסתם אשתו. A personal touch is required here, and therefore מפני שפירנסתם רחל אשתו. Directing the literary spotlight upon the virtue and merit of R. Akiva's wife in raising their children

<sup>49</sup> See above, n. 43.

<sup>50</sup> The wording in the following text is based upon manuscripts and other attestations, reflecting readings such as שפירנסה אותו, שפירנסה אותן (should be שפירנסתם אותן, שפירנסה אותן). The reading שזכתה is an error for שזנתה, possibly inspired by Berakhot 17a. See L. Finkelstein, *Introduction to the Treatises Abot and Abot of Rabbi Nathan*, New York 1950, p. 188, and especially Kister, *Studies*, p. 49. See also Tal Ilan, *Mine and Yours are Hers*, p. 82.

requires her to become a *persona* in her own right, and therefore have a name. It could have equally been Sara or Rivka, but if we are already reviewing matriarchs' names, Rachel presents a more personalized wife-figure, in the context of the biblical narrative.

The use of Rachel as the name of R. Akiva's wife in ARNA is thus a late and secondary feature. Similarly the phrase רחילא בת רחילא in Bavli Ketubbot is a late addition which is absent in the early textual witnesses.

It is difficult to establish the chronological relationship of these two embellishments with certainty. If רחילא בת רחילא was simply introduced by the glossator as a proverb he knew resembling כעובדי כעובדי, it might have helped inspire ARNA had it already come to the attention of its redactor. Conversely, if the glossator added it in Ketubbot anterior to ARNA, he could have been inspired by the late embellishment there.<sup>51</sup> In either case, it was not part of the original artistic compositions under discussion.

Regarding יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו, according to manuscript attestation of R. Nissim's Arabic work מן הישועה which cites the story from Nedarim, this verse, Proverbs 12:10 is not found in our story, but rather Proverbs 29:7<sup>52</sup> [יָדַע צַדִּיק דִּין דָּלִים [רָשָׁע לֹא יָבִין דַּעַת]. This is also the verse cited from the Nedarim version in Hagadot HaTalmud and Ein Yaakov.

The early aggadic compilation Yalkut Hamakhiri<sup>53</sup> not only reads<sup>54</sup> יודע צדיק דין דלים but, as a work arranged according to the order of Scripture, quotes the story from Nedarim in the context of Proverbs 29 rather than Proverbs 12,<sup>55</sup> thus guaranteeing the testimony of this reading. The Shittah Mekubetzet to Nedarim labels נפש בהמתו an error.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly יודע צדיק דין דלים is the reading in the Ran's commentary on Nedarim according to the first edition, which reads: יודע צדיק דין דלים: אמר (ch. 6) - יודע הו' זה שנצטערת בשבילו.

<sup>51</sup> Boyarin writes with reference to Ketubbot: "This remark makes explicit for the first time the pun on the name of 'Rachel' meaning 'ewe'" (p. 154).

<sup>52</sup> See *R. Nissim Gaon Libelli Quinque*, ed. Sh. Abramson, Jerusalem 1965, p. 464, n. 13.

<sup>53</sup> See Zunz-Albeck, *HaDerashot BeYisrael*, Jerusalem 1954, p. 415 n. 95.

<sup>54</sup> 82b-83a.

<sup>55</sup> Where it appears in Yalkut Shimoni (par. 948), citing from Ketubbot.

<sup>56</sup> יודע צדיק [דין] דלים. ואית דגרסי נפש בהמתו וטעות הוא

להם הרבה צער נצטערה עמי בתורה.

It is possible that the redactor-compiler of the Nedarim account substituted יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו for יודע צדיק דין דלים. The troubling aspect of this reconstruction is that נפש בהמתו would fit better in Nedarim, and דין דלים could be best explained in Ketubbot! Nedarim: יודע צדיק נפש ואת להיכא. Ketubbot: שאילי מאני לבוש ואיכסאי. Answer: יודע צדיק דין דלים. Answer: יודע צדיק דין דלים. Thus we cannot exclude the possibility that Nedarim, an indirect textual witness to the Ketubbot passage which it reworks, and thus perhaps the earliest witness, testifies to the reading דין דלים, which fits admirably in Ketubbot. According to this possibility, the verse that dispels the concern of the neighbors that paupers in rags<sup>57</sup> should not approach R. Akiva is יודע צדיק דין דלים. After all, do the neighboring women know that Rachel is נפש בהמתו? Only the insiders know this, Akiva and Rachel, the storyteller, the listeners, and the tradent who thought that it would be best to spell it out in the language.

Hinting at the name Rachel, and the verse יודע צדיק נפש בהמתו, revealing as these features may be, do not appear to be part of the original Bavli composition, but rather extracted from it by later tradents or glossators, so adding a further stage to the unfolding narrative.<sup>58</sup>

We therefore maintain our conclusion that the major themes of the Ketubbot exemplum are: the vow of disinheritance and its ultimate cancellation; 12 years and 12,000 disciples doubled; lack of proper garment to wear due to poverty; tender acknowledgement of his wife's merit.

As we mentioned above, two of the major differences in Nedarim are the omission of the shepherd motif, and the addition of the "straw" scene.

The shepherd theme would seem to be a sub-category of the motif

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<sup>57</sup> היתה is already specified and translated downward as לבוש ואיכסאי in the late "Addition" to ARN, p. 163, which also cites Proverbs 12, 10.

<sup>58</sup> Embellishing continued in the versions or paraphrases found in the late compilations. E.g., the introduction of R. Akiva's mother (*The Exempla of the Rabbis*, ed. M. Gaster, London 1924, p. 106; Addition to ARN, p. 163) and even Rachel's mother (*Exempla*, l. 27. There are further embellishments in both passages, which bear close comparison to each other).

“a pauper inherits the property of the wealthy nobleman for whom he worked”. The identical picture is found in a proverb mentioned several times in the talmudic-midrashic corpus: במתלא אמ' הנדי תלא מרא זייניה. קלבאי רעיא תלא קולתיה.<sup>59</sup> The traditional translation renders: “Where the master hangs up his armor, the base shepherd hangs up his pitcher”. I have argued elsewhere<sup>60</sup> that the shepherd was not at all base, and the translation should be: ‘In the place where the master of the manor would hang his cloak, the shepherd hung his crook’. This apothegm epitomizes a parable yet to be recovered, but a hypothetical reconstruction would see the master’s widow married to the modest and upright shepherd. A variation of this theme introduces the exemplum in Ketubbot.<sup>61</sup>

Nedarim shortens the beginning of the story and omits the shepherd motif entirely. In its place it adds the long “straw” scene, which portrays the poverty in a more romantic setting, and it is at the end of this scene that the wife is prompted to say “Go and study in the schoolhouse”.<sup>62</sup> This substitutes for the same effect produced by the shepherd paragraph in Ketubbot. The woman’s finding the shepherd “good and kind” is the tender moment necessary to prompt the proposal, “If I betroth myself to you will you go to the study house?” The story requires either one or the other, but not both. The version in Nedarim attempts to improve upon Ketubbot. Rather than simply being attracted by the shepherd’s moral quality, the wife’s determination to raise him through education is inspired by her impoverished husband’s noble devotion and tender treatment toward her. The lover’s hand extended to remove a straw from the hair is a

<sup>59</sup> Vayiqra Rabba 4 (p. 75) and parallels.

<sup>60</sup> “The Talmudic Proverb in Its Cultural Setting”, *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal*, 2 (2003), <http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/>.

<sup>61</sup> And is further expanded in the Addition to ARN, p. 163: אמרו בן מ' שנה היה ורועה של בן כלבא שבוע היה. ראתהו בתו שהיה צנוע מכל רועי של בית אביה אמרה ראוי זה שיהא מורה הוראה בישר', ותיקרא תורה על שמו. הלכה ונתקדשה לו בצניעה. כיון שגדלה באו עליה כל גדולים ועשירים ולא היתה מתקדשת להם. אמר לה אביה מפני מה אי את מתקדשת. עמד אביה אימן כל גדולי הדור. אמ' לה התנשאי לכל מי שתרצה. אמרה לו מתקדשת אני לעקיבא רועך. כיון שאמרה כך הוציאה מביתו והורידה (=הדירה) הנאה מנכסיו The ‘humble and virtuous shepherd’ is of course a topos of hoary antiquity. Cf. “Lipit-Ishtar, the wise shepherd [...] I, Lipit-Ishtar, the humble shepherd of Nippur” (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament with Supplement*, ed. J. B. Pritchard, Princeton 1974, p. 159).

<sup>62</sup> הוי = “study”. See below, Appendix.

subtle physical expression, the more powerful through its tenderness and restraint. It is enhanced by the verbal expression sustaining her spirit: others do not even have straw.<sup>63</sup>

The efficiency and tightness of talmudic narrative style work against the inclusion of both themes. Repeating the shepherd motif would create an unnecessary redundancy. Bialik-Ravnitzky combined both episodes in order to get a more romantic effect than delivered by either story separately.<sup>64</sup>

From the narrator's prospective, the primary reason for composing the episode about sleeping in the straw storage shed and his picking straw out of her hair must certainly have been creating an opportunity to mention the famed Jerusalem-of-Gold, which Akiva gave his wife, according to tradition. In ARNB<sup>65</sup> we read:

אמרו לא מת עד שיישן על מטות של זהב ועד שעשה כתר של זהב לאשתו ועד  
שעשה קורדיקוס של זהב לאשתו. אמרו לו בניו הרי הבריות משחקות עלינו.  
אמר להם איני שומע לכם אף היא נצטערה עמי בתלמוד תורה.

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<sup>63</sup> In either case, it is she who is attracted to him, contrary to the rule assigned for rabbinic literature in M. L. Satlow, "One Who Loves His Wife Like Himself": Love in Rabbinic Marriage", *JJS*, 49 (1998), p. 72.

<sup>64</sup> *Sefer HaAgadah*, Tel Aviv 1947/8, p. 179 (for artistic reworkings of the story, see L. Finkelstein, *Akiba, Scholar, Saint and Martyr*, Cleveland, 1936, pp. 22-3, and especially A. Steinsaltz, "Rachel and Rabbi Akiva", *The Strife of the Spirit*, London 1988, pp. 150-165). Boyarin also combines both themes into one story, citing "Nedarim 50a" but opening the quotation "Rabbi Akiva was the shepherd of Kalba Savua" (p. 137), which is Ketubbot. "At this point in the text of the Babylonian Talmud [Ketubbot 62b. SF], the story of Rabbi Akiva and his romance with Rachel is produced... Akiva as the shepherd [Ketubbot]... The love of Rabbi Akiva for her is marked... in very powerful ways, in the poignant wish of the poor shepherd to give his bride a very expensive gift [Nedarim]", pp. 150, 151, 153-4. This leads to the combination of the shepherd (Ketubbot) and the straw (Nedarim) motifs in the analysis: "Rabbi Akiva's relationship with his wife is figured in several ways as the relationship of a shepherd to a beloved ewe-lamb; the very site of their erotic idyll is a barn" (p. 151). In talmudic idiom the straw barn is clearly distinguished from the cattle barn, see mSotah 8, 2 and parallels. Boyarin's combining of the two accounts is also noted in A. Cohen, *Rereading the Talmud*, Atlanta Georgia 1998, pp. 118-9 (thanks to Rabbi Barry Wimpfheimer for this reference).

<sup>65</sup> Ch. 12, p. 30.



The great wealth enjoyed by R. Akiva in his latter years was the reason to mention the golden diadem and gilded sandals<sup>66</sup> worn by his wife. Their children feared that the conspicuous display of wealth would bring on ridicule. “No”, said Akiva, “I cannot withhold them from her.”<sup>67</sup> She underwent much hardship with me in my study of Torah.”<sup>68</sup> The reworking in ARNA<sup>69</sup> has the disciples voice this concern: אמרו לו תלמידיו רבי ביישתנו ממה שעשית לה: The explicit reference to ridicule is removed, and the admonition is more respectable in the mouth of the disciples than of the sons.

The theme is further developed in the Yerushalmi, now with specific reference to the Jerusalem-of-Gold. The Mishna at Shabbat 6 1<sup>70</sup> includes עיר של זהב among the ornaments which a woman may not wear in the public domain on the Sabbath. The Yerushalmi<sup>71</sup> identifies this ornament as ירושלים של זהב and informs us that R. Akiva had one made for his wife. R. Gamliel sought to dispel his own wife’s jealousy: “Would you do for me as his wife did for him? She used to sell the braids of her hair and give him money so that he could labor in the study of Torah.”<sup>72</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Like the diadem (see below), the gilded sandals are also borrowed from the women’s ornaments in the tannaitic *halakha* regarding Shabbat. Cf. Tosefta Shabbat 4:11, p.19: אבל יוצאה היא בספכה מוזהבת ובטסין ובצפויין ובחליות שלה במנעלים: Regarding the term used there for “sandals”, see S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Kifshutah* ad loc., p. 68; at yQiddushin 1 7, 61b: אמו של ר' אמו של ר' (see S. Friedman, “History and Aggadah: The Enigma of Dama Ben Netina” [Hebrew], to appear in *Jonah Fraenkel Festschrift*, near notes 63-64).

<sup>67</sup> On withholding ornaments, see bKetubbot 4a; Middle Assyrian Laws, § 37 (*ANET*, p. 183).

<sup>68</sup> The sensitivity and embarrassment of impropriety voiced by the sons (and daughters?) indicates a maturity on their part. They are not young children, and they bespeak the concerns of adults. This is consistent with our sense that the event portrays R. Akiva’s “latter years”. The couple’s age may be part of the children’s embarrassment. This was in my opinion correctly understood by the redactor of the tale in Gaster’s *Exempla*, who writes: אמרו לו בני, הרי אנו מתביישין (p. 106). [The later compilations, by their very exaggeration, sometimes help us focus on true meanings subtly imbedded in the original].

<sup>69</sup> Ch. 6, p. 29.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. mKelim 11, 8.

<sup>71</sup> 6 1, 7d; Sota 9 15, 24c.

<sup>72</sup> ולא בעיר של זהב רב יהודה אמר כגון ירושלם דדהב רבנן דקיסרין אמרין פרוש טוק טקלין

This short account in the Yerushalmi contains the motifs of the couple's poverty expressed by the selling of braids of hair, and when better times came the ultimate recognition of the wife's merit through the gift of the exquisite של זהב ירושלים diadem!

The motif of ridicule on the part of the neighbors in ARN<sup>73</sup> is now specified as the jealousy on the part of Rabban Gamliel's wife, and the undefined economic hardship in ARN ("נצטערה עמי") is romanticized in the Yerushalmi as "selling the braids of her hair". These two considerations argue for the primacy of the ARN account vis-à-vis the Yerushalmi.

*En passant*, I wish to note that the motif "selling hair to support her husband" can be traced to the Testament of Job, where Job's wife sold her hair to Satan in order to save her husband from starvation:

"...Now then if you have no money at hand [says Satan to Job's wife], offer me the hair of your head and take three loaves of bread. Perhaps you will be able to live for three more days." Then she said to herself, "What good is the hair of my head compared to my hungry husband?" And so, showing disdain for her hair, she said to him, "Go ahead, take it." Then he took scissors, sheared off the hair of her head, and gave her three loaves, while all were looking on.<sup>74</sup>

This full presentation of the "hair" sacrifice may increase our appreciation of the laconic style of the Yerushalmi, where the selling of the braids supplies the measure for measure theme explaining the

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מעשה בר' עקיבה שעשה לאשתו עיר של זהב חמתיה איתתיה דרבן גמליאל וקניית בה אתת ואמרת קומי בעלה אמר לה הכין הויית עבדת לי כמה דהוות עבדה ליה דהוות מזבנה מקליעתא פרוסטוקטולין באוריתא. דרישה ויהבה ליה והוא לעי באוריתא (vi, p. 437, q.v.), and it is so alphabetized there under *pe. S. Lieberman* suggested that the root reading may have been כרוסוקסטולין = χρυσοκαστέλλιον 'turret of gold', *apud* S. Paul, "Jerusalem, A City of Gold", (above, n. 36), pp. 262, and see: S. Lieberman. *HaYerushalmi Kiphshuto*, Jerusalem 1934, p. 102.

<sup>73</sup> The parallelism was already noted by Kister (*Studies*, *ibid.*): שים לב ששם מקנאת אשה, ואלו באדר"ן דברי התרעומת נובעים מן הבנים או התלמידים, הסוברים, כנראה, שלא נאה שאשתו של חכם גדול תלך בהידור רב מדי; תפיסה אחרת של דמות האשה

<sup>74</sup> The Testament of Job, 23 (*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, I, New York 1983, pp. 848-9; Kahana, p. 527); cf. elaboration 24 and 25. The similarity was noted by Ginzberg, *Legends*, V, p. 387, n. 29; cf. Ilan, *Mine*, p. 156-7. Job's own hair was also cropped (Job 1, 20).

gift of the diadem headdress,<sup>75</sup> a magnificent ornament placed on the head of the wife, whose braids were donated to forward her husband's education. In the Bavli Nedarim passage measure for measure is conveyed by the description of removal of straw from her hair, with the explicit and immediate comment, "If I could, I would give you the Jerusalem diadem".<sup>76</sup>

The Ketubbot account made use of the basic traditional themes regarding Rabbi Akiva's beginnings, without mention of the golden diadem, which belongs to the latter years of Rabbi Akiva's life. However, the redactor-compiler in Nedarim inserted his new paragraph in order to include an explicit prefiguration of this fabulous item. The resulting style is a literary anomaly, with the theme remaining incomplete in its context, since it is never stated in Nedarim that he ultimately gave her the diadem.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, the compiler

<sup>75</sup> Later collections sought to remove the harshness of this act by substituting a scarf for the hair ("Maasiot" in Lunzano, quoted by Lieberman, above, n. 72).

<sup>76</sup> Certainly the diadem motif is independent and anterior to the motif of removing straw from the hair during poverty. More than being "different traditions", the various accounts betray a thematic and chronological development. Kister (*Studies*, p. 216, n. 487) has written: אבל יש להעיר לגבי סופו הטוב של הסיפור בנו"ב (עמ' 30), לפיו ר' עקיבא 'ישן על מיטות של זהב' ו'עשה כתר של זהב לאשתו' מידה כנגד מידה כנגד העניות המתוארת בנדרים נ ע"א כשינה על גבי תבן, הדבק בשערות אשתו (ואף מרמז שם על שכרה ב'ירושלים של זהב). אלא שבאדר"ן מתוארת העניות בצורה אחרת, וכבר נתקפח טעמה של המסורת. In the previous sentence there is a citation of Elbaum's position that 12,000 disciples in ARN is dependent upon 12 years in Nedarim, which is questioned by Kister. He then suggests that an example of such a dependence is the "crown" of ARN, being dependent in a "measure for measure" relationship upon the "straw in the hair" of Nedarim, while ARN itself uses other descriptions of the poverty, and as a consequence the crown tradition of ARN falls flat, being separated from its measure for measure inspiration. This is then qualified: אבל מסתבר שאף בבבלי נדרים נ ע"א הורכבו מסורות בדיוק באותה צורה: שם נצטרף הסיפור על העוני (שסופו הצפוי ר' עקיבא העשיר) עם הסיפור בכתובות (שסופו ר' עקיבא החכם הגדול). נמצא שהמקורות מלמדים זה על זה. Nedarim is itself a composite and the phenomenon of overlapping traditions is not unique to Nedarim. He further adds: עיר ליסוד הקדום של מידה כנגד מידה בעניין 'עיר של זהב' שעשה ר' עקיבא לאשתו - השווה בנוסף לבבלי הנ"ל גם למסורת השונה במקבילה etc., *quo vid*. For our part, we entertain the progression ARNB > Yerushalmi > Bavli as consistent both with the overall literary relationships of these documents, and with the thematic development discernable in the passages under study. See above, near note 73.

<sup>77</sup> Further indicating that Nedarim is a secondary rendition. The eventual gift

was attracted to this impressive traditional detail about the famous couple, and used his literary alchemy to spin gold into straw, with its concomitant romantic effect, enjoyed by all generations since.

Before we proceed with the root themes of the Akiva saga, let us touch upon the doubled 12-year absence. Indeed, the Yerushalmi<sup>78</sup> does record a similar period of study by R. Akiva at the feet of R. Eliezer before the latter recognized him. There it is 13 years<sup>79</sup> instead of 12.

שלוש עשרה שנה עשה רבי עקיבה נכנס אצל רבי ליעזר ולא היה יודע בו, וזו היא תחילת תשובתו הראשונה לפני רבי ליעזר. אמר לו רבי יהושע הלא זה העם אשר מאסת בו, צא נא עתה והלחם בו.<sup>80</sup>

However, for the theme in the form we have it in the Bavli we must turn to the account of R. Hanania ben Hakhinai.

Vayiqra Rabba<sup>81</sup> and parallels<sup>82</sup> tell of Hanania b. Hakhinai who remained in R. Akiva's academy in Bne Brak for 13 years without communicating with his wife in any form. She finally devised a way of bringing him back, but when he returned she died from shock. The tale is too tragic to remain in this form. Fortunately we are talking about literary composition, and almost any calamity can be rectified. The wronged wife can be brought back to life at the end of the story. That's easy, even if it had to wait for a later redactor to tack it on:<sup>83</sup> ואית דאמרין חזרת. However, for literary purposes, being returned to life is insufficient to remove the residual disappointment regarding Hanania b. Hakhinai's morally flawed conduct. Another means of correcting this is retelling the entire story and repairing the

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would have been included had the diadem been part of the original and natural composition.

<sup>78</sup> Pesahim 6 3, 33b.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. ARNA 6.

<sup>80</sup> When R. Akiva raised his first challenge to R. Eliezer's teaching after 13 years, R. Yehoshua rebuked R. Eliezer for ignoring the disciples, citing Judges 9 38.

<sup>81</sup> Parasha 21 (pp. 484-6).

<sup>82</sup> Including bKetubbot 62b, our current location.

<sup>83</sup> See J. Fraenkel, *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Jerusalem 1981, p. 52, n. 29, p. 55 and n. 45; Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, p. 158, n. 39.

problematic element.<sup>84</sup> Therefore R. Akiva, Hanania's *teacher*, is also pictured as one who left his wife while studying for a similar period of years. But what a difference! It was she who sent him. Not only did she completely accept his absence and encourage him, but when she had the chance of having him back she says, "If he would only listen to me he would go for another 12 years!"<sup>85</sup> Quite a sacrifice on her part in order to correct the misconduct of her husband's disciple.<sup>86</sup>

Although Palestinian sources record Rachel's devoted support of R. Akiva's labor in Torah, it is never in the context of a 12 year absence, which was added in the Bavli<sup>87</sup> in order to rehabilitate the tarnished character of another sage. Character rehabilitation would appear to be one of the motives for the retelling of other talmudic stories. The account of R. Yohanan's rage which resulted in the tragic death of Resh Laqish is retold about Rav Kahana, with a happier ending.<sup>88</sup>

The large number of R. Akiva's disciples and the specific numbers 12,000 and its multiples are also themes mentioned in the older literature, and in many passages specifically in the context of R. Akiva's two separate periods of raising disciples. Here we quote Bereshit Rabba 61:<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> The Talmud itself puts a similar sentiment in the mouth of R. Hama b. Bisa (bKet. 62b לא איעביד כדעביד בן חנינאי). Cf. Rubenstein, "Criteria" (above, n. 10).

<sup>85</sup> Regarding the motif of "wife sending husband back for more study", see E. Bin Gorion, *The Paths of Legend, An Introduction to Folktales* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1970, p. 61.

<sup>86</sup> The tarnished image of R. Hanania is also polished in the parallel in the Bavli; cf. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, p. 158. On differences between the account in the Midrashim and that in the Bavli, see further O. Meir, *Tura*, 3 (1994) pp. 74-83. We would prefer putting the emphasis in interpreting these differences upon the literary rehabilitation of R. Hanania's character (as Boyarin did) rather than upon the way his wife is portrayed (Meir).

<sup>87</sup> Cf. also in the other Bavli episodes in proximity: פסקו ליה תרתי סרי שנין למיזל (Ketubbot 62b); רבי חמא בר ביסא אזיל יתיב תרי סרי שני (ibid.).

<sup>88</sup> The Rav Kahana narrative (bBQ 117a) can be shown to be dependent upon the Resh Laqish episode (bBM 84a), in that it incorporates details from each of the two adjacent aggadic cycles in BM, R. Elazar b. R. Shimon and R. Yohanan/Resh Laqish (see S. Friedman, "The Further Adventures of Rav Kahana – Between Babylonia and Palestine", in P. Schäfer (ed.), *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, 3, Tübingen 2002).

<sup>89</sup> P. 660. See *Minhat Yehudah* there. See also ARNB ch. 12 (p. 29) and other

ר' עקיבה א' אם העמדתה תלמידים בנערוותך העמד תלמידים בזקנותך, שאין אתה יודע אי זה מהם הקב"ה מכתב עליך הוזה או זה, ואם שניהם כאחד טובים. שנים עשר אלף (זוגות) תלמידים היו לו לר' עקיבה מגבת ועד אנטיפטריס, וכולהון מתו בפרק אחד, למה שהיתה עיניהם צרה אילו באילו. ובסוף העמיד שבעה, ר' מאיר ור' יהודה ר' יוסי ור' שמעון ור' אלעזר בן שמוע ור' יוחנן הסנדלר ור' אליעזר בן יעקב, ואית דאמ' ר' יהודה ור' נחמיה ור' מאיר ור' יוסי ור' שמעון בן יוחי ור' חנניה בן חכינאי ור' יוחנן הסנדלר. אמר להם בני הראשונים לא מתו אלא שהיתה עיניהם צרה בתורה אילו באילו, אלא תנו דעתכם שלא תעשו כמעשיהם. עמדו ומלאו כל ארץ ישראל תורה.

These traditions were the basis for the Ketubbot narrative in describing a dual 12-year absence, during each of which R. Akiva raised 12,000 disciples or a multiple thereof.<sup>90</sup> It was quite probable that the number 12,000 exerted its influence in adjusting the traditional number of years of study from 13<sup>91</sup> down to 12.<sup>92</sup>

Now let us turn to R. Akiva's son Yehoshua, who was also most fortunate in having a wife devoted to his study of Torah. She would

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parallels. To bYev 62b see variant readings, p. 398, nn. 59-61.

<sup>90</sup> Elbaum (p. 73, n. 14) contemplates the opposite relationship, namely, the other sources are dependent upon the Bavli accounts in Ketubbot and Nedarim: המספר הנקוב משתלב יפה במסופר על תקופת לימודיו של ר"ע בנדרים ובכתובות... ועל-פי המצוי שם אולי ניתן להבין מה טעם תפסו המקורות בלשון: "י"ב אלף זוגות" However, this is more than improbable in light of the fact that the Bavli account is an extended narrative weaving a multiplicity of motifs (cf. "Historical Aggadah" [above, n. 21], p. 139 and n. 106; "The Further Adventures" [above, n. 89] n. 54), and the fact that this number of Rabbi Akiva's disciples is already found in various Palestinian sources. Furthermore, the Palestinian motifs of the number of disciples and their death have independent sources in other Palestinian passages, and were later transferred to R. Akiva's disciples, as has been demonstrated by Aaron Amit, "The Death of Rabbi Akiva's Disciples: A Literary History" (forthcoming). M. Kister (*Studies*, p. 216, n. 487) already questioned Elbaum's suggestion: זוגות: אלף זוגות: תלמודים של ר' עקיבא, שהוא, לדעתו, תולדת המסורת על לימודיו של ר' עקיבא י"ב שנה ועוד י"ב שנה (בבלי נדרים נ"א), אבל זה ספק (מספרים אלה רגילים למדי בהקשרים שונים).

<sup>91</sup> Yerushalmi and ARNA for R. Akiva and Midrashim for Hanania b. Hakhinai.

<sup>92</sup> J. S. Zuri (*Rabbi Akiva*, Jerusalem 1923/4 [Hebrew], p. 4) took "twelve" as simply a general talmudic round number. Nedarim codex Vatican 110 reads הוי תליסר... להוי תליסר.

stand all night holding the lamp while he read; it was also her task to roll the scroll from beginning to end and back to the beginning, both poignantly portrayed in Midrash Tehillim:<sup>93</sup>

דבר אחר, מצא אשה מצא טוב (קהלת יח כב). אבל אשה רעה מרה ממנה. מעשה בבנו של ר' עקיבא שנשא אשה, מה עשה כיון שנכנסה עמו לחדר היה עומד כל הלילה וקורא בתורה ושונה בהגדות, אמר לה סבי לון בוצינא ומנהרין לי, סבת ליה בוצינא ואנהרה ליה כל לילה, והות קיימא קמיה ומנהרא, והוה פתיחא ספרא וגלייה ליה מן רישא לסיפא ומן סיפא לרישא, וכל לילה איתקיימא ומנהרא ליה עד דאתא צפרא, בצפרא קרב ר' עקיבא לגביה, אמר ליה מצא או מוצא, אמר ליה מצא, הוי מצא אשה מצא טוב.

The subject of Yehoshua's study was Scripture and *aggadot*.<sup>94</sup> *Aggadot* were probably selected for this story because they were the first part of the Oral Torah allegedly written in books, thus requiring a lamp. Were Yehoshua to have studied these by day and *mishnayot* by night the story could not be told.<sup>95</sup> However, a realistic explanation is

<sup>93</sup> 59, 3 (p. 302).

<sup>94</sup> Re MSS attestation, see n. 23 there.

<sup>95</sup> A propos, it would appear that the practice of studying Mishna from written books rather than oral recitation can be ascertained in the reworking of the Akiva traditions performed by ARNA upon ARNB (cf. above, n. 46)!

אבות דרבי נתן, נוסח ב, פרק יב, עמ' 30      אבות דרבי נתן, נוסח א, פרק ו, עמ' 29

אמרו לו שכיניו עקיבא (איבדתו עשן) עמדו עליו שכניו ואמרו לו עקיבא אבדתו בעשן [איבדתו בעשן] מכור חבילתך וקח בה שמן. מכור אותן לנו וטול שמן בדמיהן ושנה לאור הנר. אמר להם איני שומע לכם [שני] דברים אמר להם הרבה ספוקים אני מסתפק בהן אחד שאני טובים יש לי בה אחת שאני מתחמם כנגדה שונה בהן ואחד שאני מתחמם כנגדן ואחד שאני ישן ואחת שאני משתמש לאורה. בהם.

This passage is not included by J. N. Epstein in his list of proposed proofs of writing Oral Law (*Introduction to the Mishnaic Text* [=Mavo Lenusah HaMishnah], Jerusalem 2000<sup>3</sup>, p. 700. He does include there ARNA 25 (p. 41a)). Although that passage is certainly inconclusive (see S. Schlesinger, "On the Writing Down of the Oral Torah in the Time of the Talmud", *Sinai* 117 [5756/1995], p. 49) the repeated occurrence of š.n.h. there in contrast to the Shir HaShirim parallel cited there bears a second look in light of the passage cited here. Our proposal regarding ch. 12 is made with full awareness of the caution which must be exercised in marshaling evidence of written books for the Oral Law. We find in yKilaim 9 3 32b = yKetubbot 12 3 35a (cf. Bereshit

not lacking – after studying *halakha* by day, Scripture and *aggadot* provide less demanding subjects by night.

It would seem that the principle of בטר רחילא אולא is applied here to the daughter-*in-law* of Rachel and Akiva. However, this point requires clarification. Exactly how the motif of “wife devoted to her husband’s Torah study” was transferred between R. Akiva and his son Yehoshua now becomes the focus of our attention, and indeed the linchpin of our thesis. The key passage is Tosefta Ketubbot 4 7 (p. 67), which recounts the betrothal agreement negotiated between Yehoshua and his wife:

נושא אדם אשה על מנת שלא לזון על מנת שלא לפרנס, ולא עוד אלא שפוסק עמה שתהא זנתו ומפרנסתו ומלמדתו תורה. מעשה ביהושע בנו של ר' עקיבא שנשא אשה ופסק עמה על מנת שתהא זנתו ומפרנסתו ומלמדתו תורה. היו שני בצרות, עמדו וחלקו. התחילה קובלת עליו לחכמים, וכשבא לבית דין אמ' להם "היא נאמנת עלי יתר מכל אדם". אמרה להם, "ודיי כך התנה עמי". אמרו לה חכמים, "אין כלום אחר הקיצה".

R. Akiva’s son Yehoshua was a scholar or a sage in his own right. The contract which he executed with his wife upon their marriage became a halakhic paradigm. One may betroth with the explicit condition that not only is *he* exempt from supporting *her*, but she undertakes to

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Rabba 33): בההיא שעתא אשגרת עיניי בכל ספר תילים אגדה. H. L. Strack cites this passage as his first testimony for the writing down of aggadic material in Palestine: “Hiyya (an uncle of Rab’s) reads in the bathhouse a haggadic work on the Psalms” (*Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, New York/Philadelphia 1959, p. 13). Sokoloff also renders: “at that moment I passed my eyes over the whole book of *Aggada* on Psalms” (*A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, Ramat Gan 1990, p. 538; B. Lifshitz, “Aggadah and its Place in the History of the Oral Law”, *Shenaton Ha-Mishpat Ha-Ivri* 22 [2001-04], p. 268). However, ספר תילים אגדה certainly means the aggada of the book of Psalms (cf. ySukkah 3 10 54a = yMegilla 1 9 72a בעשרה לשונות של שבה). Had R. Hiyya been reading a book, he would have been observed doing this, and the excuse would fall flat. אשגרת עיניי indicates “casting one’s thoughts”; cf. yShabbat 7 2, 9b where the same phrase is used for mentally searching the entire Pentateuch for the orthographic forms of the word מלאכה (cf. Pn Moshe and bMegilla 18b; M. Assis, הגהות ופירושים בירושלמי שבת, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 48 [1977], pp. ט-ה). On the question of oral tradition in written form, see S. Naeh, “The Structure and Division of *Torat Kohanim* (A): Scrolls”, *Tarbiz* 66 (1997), pp. 505-512.



support him so that he is free to study Torah.<sup>96</sup>

Yehoshua's case is the precedent for such a law. His bride accepted this condition willingly and with devotion. However, they did not, or at least she did not, sufficiently anticipate the eventuality of hard times, the dry years, years of drought, during which the fulfillment of the bargain became too difficult for her. As part of the ensuing dispute the remaining property was divided between the two. "Take your half and support yourself. I simply cannot". "No", he said, "a bargain is a bargain. I'm doing my part. You do yours". In response she appealed to the sages, and when the matter came to court, Yehoshua said, "I accept all her statements as truth without any hesitation. She is more trustworthy to me than any person on earth". The plaintiff spoke up. "Indeed", she said, "we did make such an agreement upon betrothal". "Well then" said the judges, "there can be no retracting once a binding contract has been executed".<sup>97</sup>

Most of the major themes of the Akiva exemplum are already here in the Yehoshua case. The study of Torah is a condition of the betrothal agreement. The bride was afflicted by poverty and hardship.<sup>98</sup> The tender appreciation for the wife is explicitly voiced by the husband: "She is more trustworthy to me than any person on earth". However, in this primary source reality intrudes. Even the best understandings between husband and wife can sometimes end up in court. Still, the real life story is stirring. Is this not the stuff that exempla are made of?

At this point the *Aggada* takes over. Midrash Tehillim gives

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<sup>96</sup> Tal Ilan correctly gives preference to the interpretation that financial support and not actual instruction is meant, both in the general and specific case (*Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, p. 194 and n. 33; this position is reversed in her *Mine*, pp. 168-9 and n. 24).

<sup>97</sup> קיצא is קצצה used in various legal contexts for a binding agreement. It figures in the laws of acquisition בקצצה קונים חזרו להיות (yKid 1 5 60c and parallel). See also Z. Falk, *IVRA* 17 (1966), p. 173. The word *kinyan* also came to mean an irrevocable agreement, and is substituted for קיצא in the Yerushalmi parallel of this *baraita* in our Yerushalmi text: אין אחר קניין כלום as in bBB 152b. As to the text of the Yerushalmi, see S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, Ketubbot, p. 245.

<sup>98</sup> During the years of drought. The simple meaning of the original agreement certainly seems to be that she would labor to support him. Contrast Zuri: "He married a rich woman who supported him" (p. 5); A. Büchler: "He married the daughter of a wealthy landowner", *Studies in the Period of the Mishna and the Talmud* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1967, pp. 116, 135.

aggadic expression to the assistance in study extended to Yehoshua by his devoted wife, picturing her holding the lamp and winding the scroll. However, the stature and fame of R. Akiva are an overwhelming force which attracts this inspiring account and draws it from son to father: מעשי בנין סימן לאבות.

R. Akiva's unnamed wife sold the braids of her hair and gave him the money so that he could labor in the study of Torah. The cash transfer made possible by self sacrifice corresponds to the event reported about Yehoshua. However, a romantic element is added – she sold the braids of her hair. Romanticizing is an integral aspect of the retelling process.

Yehoshua's wife undertook to feed him and support him. על מנת שתהא זנתו ומפרנסתו. In ARNA this theme is applied to R. Akiva's wife supporting and maintaining their children, the various textual witnesses<sup>99</sup> reflecting the same terminology: מפני שפירנסם רחל אשתו; מפני שזנתה רחל אשתו.

The ultimate application of the story of Yehoshua and his wife, although not recorded in the intervening parallels, appears in the Bavli, as the events flow backwards from son to father, and the legal precedent is converted into an exemplum. The study of Torah as a condition specified at betrothal connects these sources directly. It also serves as an indication of the primacy of Ketubbot over Nedarim, where the exhortation by the bride in favor of study is transferred from betrothal to the scene in the straw storage shed.

“12 years and 12,000 disciples doubled” is borrowed in the Bavli from other contexts regarding R. Akiva.<sup>100</sup> The vow of disinheritance and the establishing of Kalba Savua as the bride's father is an embellishment in the framework of the Bavli, duplicating themes from the legend about the beginnings of R. Eliezer. In those stories the vow of disinheritance figures in the explicit context of other siblings, and the name Kalba Savua is also mentioned.<sup>101</sup> The other themes,

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<sup>99</sup> See above, n. 51.

<sup>100</sup> See above.

<sup>101</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 41 (42), p. 398 (and parallels [ARNA, 6, p.31; ARNB, 13, p. 32]): לאחר ימים עלה אביו לנדותו מנכסיו ומצאו יושב ודורש וגדולי מדינה יושבין לפניו, בן ציצית הכסת וניקודימון בן גוריון ובן כלבה שבוע... אמר לו אביו לא עליתי בני אלא לנדותך מנכסיי, עכשיו הרי כל נכסיי נתונים לך במתנה. This interpretation was also suggested by Tal Ilan (*Mine*, p. 213); cf. J. Neusner, *Judaism and Story*, Chicago 1992, p. 118. A different opinion is expressed by J. Fraenkel (*Iyyunim*, p. 113, n. 14),

however, namely, the study of Torah as a condition of the betrothal agreement; the wife's affliction of poverty; and the husband's acknowledgement of his wife's merit, are all motifs taken over from the details of the original legal tradition concerning Yehoshua and his wife.

<b>Yehoshua</b>	<b>Akiva</b>
The study of Torah is a condition of the betrothal agreement.	Attendance at the house of study is a condition of the betrothal agreement. The vow of disinheritance and its ultimate cancellation. 12 years and 12,000 disciples doubled.
The bride was afflicted by poverty and hardship.	Lack of proper garment to wear due to poverty.
Tender appreciation for the wife explicitly voiced by the husband.	Acknowledgement of his wife's merit.

The closest approximation to the original literary kernel<sup>102</sup> of the Akiva legend is in ARNB, in short unconnected pericopae.<sup>103</sup> Akiva is

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who wishes to consider an independent older source containing the vow of disinheritance by R. Akiva's father-in-law: בעיקר החלק האחרון, ייתכן שסיפור האב, שבן, הוא ממקורו סיפור שני שהיה בתחילה עצמאי ושולב בתוך סיפור הבת

<sup>102</sup> See "Historical Aggadah" (above, n. 21), p. 122, on the necessity to identify a "literary kernel" before searching for a "historical kernel". Positive determination that data originates in the embellishments of expansive fiction can be more exact than rigorous skepticism alone. Boyarin already rejected search in the Bavli account of R. Akiva for a historical kernel: "...it is impossible, of course, to read the story either as a representation of actual historical-biographical reality, or a literary version of a 'kernel' of biographical truth" (*Carnal Israel*, pp. 137-38). In any case, he still flirts with the idea: "The historical reading is problematic, that is, beyond the bare facts that there was an Akiva, that he was married, and that apparently he and his wife suffered great poverty while he studied Torah. This much of the story seems so frequently told as to be established historically, though given the nature of rumor, one may even wonder at this" (n. 9). [This represents methodological tightening of an earlier version: "... that there was an Akiva, that his wife was named Rachel (although given the emblematic value of her name in the story, maybe even this is fictive), and that apparently they suffered great poverty while he studied Torah. This much of the story seems so frequently told as to be established historically" ("Internal Opposition in Talmudic Literature: The Case of the Married Monk", *Representations*, 36 (1991), p. 108, n. 9)].

<sup>103</sup> Elbaum (p. 73) compares the ARNB account to a "mosaic". On lack of

unlearned and poor, but determined to conquer the study of Torah, and eventually raises 12,000 pairs of disciples. Ultimately he is rewarded with great riches, and bestows magnificent gifts upon his wife. He justifies this extravagance with the recollection of the suffering she underwent during his studies.<sup>104</sup> In ARNA her role moves from passive suffering to active contribution; she supports the children. In the Yerushalmi her contribution is made directly to Akiva, and romanticized: cutting off her braids and giving him the money for his study of Torah.

Only in the Bavli are all these themes and more woven into a continuous narrative, as they are further developed and romanticized. Most creatively, their son Yehoshua's betrothal bargain is taken over by the parents. Akiva's boorishness now has him cast as a shepherd. The disinheritance theme is borrowed from R. Eliezer's appearance before Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, and connected to one of the personalities who was sitting in the audience: Kalba Savua. The 12,000 disciples are combined with the 13>12 years of study. This period was cast as one of separation from his wife, an absence which was retroactively imposed upon R. Akiva so that he could correct Hanania b. Hakhinai's wrongdoing, and his wife could redouble her devotion and sacrifice to new extremes.

This full exemplum then falls into the hands of a talmudic author working within the framework of Nedarim, who cannot resist retelling it, perhaps in order to add the other fabulous tradition about R. Akiva, even though it does not fall within the chronological range of this story. The Yerushalmi had already identified the head ornament with the Mishnah's "city of gold", glossed as ירושלים של זהב. The brilliant prefiguration of the golden diadem in the straw scene also allows the storyteller to shift Ketubbot's betrothal pact (*la Yehoshua*) to a more tender and stirring scene. Delaying the exhortation to study to a time after the betrothal and anticipating the Jerusalem-of-Gold in the early years of the marriage bring both themes together in the storage shed, as the couple exchange their mutual vows of love.

To the degree that the similarity between Akiva and his son Yehoshua regarding their betrothal stipulations eluded scholars who addressed the story of Akiva and Rachel, the reason could have been

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connection in ARN in general, see Kister, *Studies*, p. 216.

<sup>104</sup> I cannot agree with Tal Ilan's assertion that "its lavishness contradicts the poverty theme" (*Mine*, note 42 above, p. 108).

their basic historical approach. Furthermore, had they juxtaposed the passages and contemplated the resemblance they might have taken it as a chance coincidence, or a historical event, where the second generation followed the first, and consequently not germane in understanding the talmudic record about the father.<sup>105</sup> The Bavli's Akiva narratives in Ketubbot and Nedarim were largely taken as embellishments upon a basic factual tradition or preexisting literary core story of more or less the same scope regarding Akiva the shepherd, thus dulling appreciation of the composer's creative artistry.<sup>106</sup>

The alternative presented here is receptivity to the radical reworking of motifs inherent to original narrative composition, especially, but not exclusively, in the Bavli. The reuse of motifs is not limited to embellishing earlier traditions about the protagonist. Rather, the literary historian must consider use of themes adjacent to the hero, such as the Yehoshua tradition, or those external to him, such as motifs transferred from other sages. The Akiva legend in the Bavli was composed by a skilled literary artist, woven from brief and isolated components into a polished and seamless creation.

Full appreciation of aggadic narrative and its artistry cannot be captured as a still, focusing upon the end product in splendid isolation, but requires investigating the overall kinetic unfolding of all its stages.

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<sup>105</sup> Zuri (p. 5) mentioned Yehoshua's betrothal stipulation without any hint of relating it to the betrothal condition proposed to R. Akiva in Ketubbot. Ilan seems to project a historical background ("Perhaps in R. Aqiba's family it is more reasonable to suppose that his son's wife supported her husband" (*Jewish Women*, p. 194, n. 33; in this context she also refers to Elbaum's point of applied literary motifs [Elbaum, above, n. 20, p. 71, n. 2]). Ilan's goal in *Mine and Yours* is retrieving history (as stated in the subtitle) rather than literature. In consonance with this she writes: "The most crucial procedure is to discard all material in the stories of Rabbi Aqiva's wife that is clearly a-historical" (p. 292).

<sup>106</sup> Sh. Valler (*Women and Womanhood in the Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, Tel Aviv, p. 77) writes regarding Ketubbot and Nedarim: על-פי ההבדלים המצוינים לעיל קרוב להנחת, שהסיפור הגרעיני על ר' עקיבא כלל פרטים אלה: א. בתו של בן כלבא שבוע התאהבה בו בהיותו עני, נישאה לו, עוררה את כעס אביה והודרה מנכסיה; ב. ר' עקיבא התחיל ללמוד בגיל מבוגר ונעדר מביתו תקופה ממושכת; ג. ר' עקיבא הגיע למעלה גבוהה בתורה והיו לו תלמידים רבים; ד. האהבה בין ר' עקיבא לבין אישתו לא כבתה, למרות הניתוק Compare Dubsevit (above, note 33). הממושך ביניהם

The composer of the Babylonian narrative under investigation wishes to use the Akiva traditions as the vehicle for portraying his resolution of the conflicting loyalties of marriage and a life of study. He can forge a corrective for the insensitivity of ultra-Torah devotion which marred the past, but cannot resolve the conflict without demanding the ultimate sacrifice from the Torah-wife. The mechanics and problematics of this solution are raised from the mundane to the sublime by consecrating the couple's arrangement with romanticized love.

### Appendix : הוי = "Study" (n. 63)

Scholarly attention has long been directed to uses of הוי such as והוינא and הוינא ורביא, הוי בה ר"פ, הויות דאביי ורביא. In Seder Tannaim we Amoraim<sup>107</sup> we find: הוי בה"ר' פלוני<sup>108</sup> and others. These and related phrases in the Bavli and Yerushalmi have been assigned a range of related meanings, such as "deduce", "examine", "raise a difficulty", "solve", "conclude".<sup>109</sup> In this context, mention

<sup>107</sup> Ed. K. Kahan, Frankfurt a. M. 1935, p. 31; *Sefer Kriat*, Jerusalem 1964/5, p. 321.

<sup>108</sup> Regarding הויא (see Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, p. 373), mention should be made of Syriac )YfwfwuX, 'demonstration', 'proof' (cf. Rosenthal, *Towards the Redaction* [below, n. 109], p. 260).

<sup>109</sup> See L. Ginzberg, "Beiträge zur Lexikographie des Aramäischen", ed. S. Krauss, *Festschrift Adolf Schwartz zum siebzigsten Geburtstage*, Berlin 1917, p. 347; E. S. Rosenthal, *Towards the Redaction of TB Tractate Pesah Rishon*, doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University 1959, pp. 259-61 and notes; Y. Sussmann, *Babylonian Sugiyot to the Orders Zera'im and Tohorot*, doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University 1969, pp. 169-70 n. 17; and copious citation of literature in both; D. Boyarin, "Towards the Talmudic Lexicon III", ed. M. A. Friedman, M. Gil, *Te'uda*, 4 (1986), pp. 125-6; M. Asis, *Studies in Memory of the Rishon Le-Zion R. Yitzhak Nissim*, Vol. 2, Jerusalem 5755, pp. נב-נא; L. Moscovitz, "Lishanei Aharinei in the Talmud Yerushalmi", *Sidra* 8 (1992), p. 72; idem, "Double Readings in the Yerushalmi – Conflations and Glosses", *Tarbiz* 66 (1997), p. 196. In connection with Rosenthal's position that the root is הוי Boyarin remarks: באו מתקני הלשון... והחזירו את החי"ת - 'מהוי' - על-כל-פנים, לא השאירו 'מהוי'... ואם-כן סרה התמיהה שבקטעי הגניזה לבבלי כבר מצאנו לרוב את הנוסח המתוקן מהוי-מהוי (p. 125, p. 126, n. 44). If the intention here is to claim that the orthographic form מהוי for מהוי does not occur, this is not the case. See E. S.

has also been made<sup>110</sup> of passages in the Yerushalmi such as:

אמר ר' סידור, יהודה בר' עבד(ין) הווי במכשירין שיתא ירחין. בסופא  
אתא חד תלמיד מן דר' סימאי ושאל ליה ולא אגיביה. אמ' ניכר הוא זה שלא  
עבר על פיתחה שלתורה.<sup>111</sup>

In the same context:

ר' יוחנן ור' שמעון בן לקיש עבדין הווי בהדא פירקא תלת שנין ופלוג.  
אפקון מיניה ארבעין חסר אחת תולדות על כל חדא וחדא. הן דאשכחון  
מיסמוך סמכין. הן<sup>112</sup> דלא אשכחון מיסמוך [עבדוניה] משום מכה בפטיש. בנוי  
דר' חייא רובא עבדן הווי בהדין פירקא שיתא ירחין. אפקון מיניה שית  
מילין על כל חדא וחדא. בנוי דר' חייא רובא הווי<sup>113</sup> בשיטת אבוהון, דתני ר'  
חייא הקוצר הבוצר המוסק הגודד התולש האורה כולהן משום קוצר.

From these passages in yShabbat it would appear that הוי also bears a related but less specified meaning,<sup>114</sup> closer to “study”.

In his *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*<sup>115</sup> M. Sokoloff cites one of the above-cited passages s.v. עבד, under its 12th meaning: “to spend time”, and thus translates: “PN’s sons spent six months (studying) that chapter”.<sup>116</sup> This presentation indicates the analysis that

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Rosenthal, ed. Sh. Shaked, *Irano-Judaica*, Jerusalem 1982, “For the Talmudic Dictionary – *Talmudica Iranica*” (Hebrew), p. 113, n. 39 (also indicating *af'el*); Y. Kara, *Babylonian Aramaic in the Yemenite Manuscripts of the Talmud*, Jerusalem 1983, p. 60, number 18; Saul Lieberman Institute Henkind Data Base (CD ROM), search: מהוי; ומהוי.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. B. Ratner, *Ahavat Zion Virushalayim*, Ma'asrot, Vilna 1906/7, pp. 105-6; Rosenthal.

<sup>111</sup> Shabbat 7 2, 9b.

<sup>112</sup> ה.א. ... מן. Cf. Melekhet Shlomo; eds: הן... הן.

<sup>113</sup> Rosenthal (p. 260) editorially adds עבדון (with question mark) before הווי. The words from בנוי to הווי are lacking in the citation in Melekhet Shlomo 7,2 and are apparently an accidental doubling from above. Without them translate “...they extracted from it six things for each one, consistent with their father’s approach”, as R. Hiyya associated six categories with “reap”. There is no need to repeat the phrase in question.

<sup>114</sup> According to the specified meaning the sages are seen as occupied in “demonstratio, argumentum” (Rosenthal, pp. 259-60).

<sup>115</sup> = *DJPA*.

<sup>116</sup> p. 392.

עבד meaning “to spend time” is the main verb in this sentence,<sup>117</sup> the word<sup>118</sup> הוּוּ is an auxiliary verb, and the (correct) meaning “studying” is not expressed, but supplied from context.

Such an understanding is corroborated by Sokoloff’s transcription of the text: בני דר' חייא רובא עבד<י>ן הוּוּ {י} בהדין פירקא שיתא ירחין. The angle brackets indicate an “editorial addition”, and converting עבד into a plural form is indeed warranted (compare the preceding passage, which we have quoted above).<sup>119</sup> The curled brackets (“editorial deletion”) convert הוּוּי into the auxiliary verb הוּוּ. This, however, is not at all warranted. We have seen that the form עבדין הוּוּי also occurs above.

In our opinion, עבד is the auxiliary verb,<sup>120</sup> and הוּוּי is the main verb, with the meaning “recite”,<sup>121</sup> “study”. Thus translate: “PN’s sons were studying that chapter for six months”, a broader and more general meaning of הוּוּי than usually assigned in the past.

In our bNedarim passage we read:

אמרה ליה זיל הוּוּי בי רב. אזל הוּוּה תרתני סרי שנין קמי דר' אליעזר ור' יהושע... הדר אזל הוּוּה תרתני סרי שני אחרנייתא.

The second occurrence of the verb here (הוּוּה) is missing in the editions, but preserved in the versions.<sup>122</sup> Context requires: “Go and study in the schoolhouse. He went and studied 12 years before R. Eliezer and R.

<sup>117</sup> This is also the interpretation represented in the parenthetical comment in *Additamenta ad Librum Aruch Completum*, Vienna 1937, p. 157.

<sup>118</sup> See below.

<sup>119</sup> Melekheth Shlomo copied here עבדון. The past tense is indeed superior according to the analysis we shall adopt, and was editorially emended as such in all occurrences in our passage by Rosenthal (p. 260).

<sup>120</sup> Cf. C. Levias, *A Grammar of Galilean Aramaic*, intro. M. Sokoloff, New York 1986, p. 199. Compare yNed 11 1 42c: יהוד' איש הוצא עביד טמיר במערתא etc.

<sup>121</sup> Sukkah 1 5 52a כהנא ואסא עלון והוון קומי רב כהדא דשמואל (not cited in Sokoloff, *DJPA*).

<sup>122</sup> See *The Babylonian Talmud with Variant Readings*, Nedarim II, Jerusalem 1990/1, p. 38 and n. 20 (add: Yalkut Shimoni). The omission in the editions leaves an incomplete sentence: אזל תרתני סרי שנין קמי דרבי אליעזר ודר' יהושע (and indeed the word הוּוּה is supplied by R. Yoel Sirkis [Bah], probably from Yalkut Shimoni).



Yehoshua... he went again and studied another 12 years”.<sup>123</sup> Thus הוה = study. This interpretation is further supported by the parallelism with Ketubbot:

#### נדריים

#### כתובות

אזיל יתב תרי סרי שנין בבי רב      אזל הוה תרתי סרי שנין קמי דר' אליעזר ור' יהושע

In his *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, Sokoloff lists as meaning I, 5 of the verb הוה: “to stay, last, pass”. Here, the final meaning of the verb without prepositions, the Nedarim passage is cited, and translated: “Go stay in the *be rav*. He went (and) stayed for two years in the presence of PN<sub>1</sub> and PN<sub>2</sub> [i.e. he learned from them]”.<sup>124</sup> Once more, the brackets supply the simple meaning of the passage: learned, studied.<sup>125</sup> In our opinion, the Aramaic dialect of Nedarim preserves here a usage of הוה corresponding to the more established usage in the Yerushalmi cited above.

We consequently conclude that הוה בי רב contains a further instance of הוה = “study”, and should be added to the other usages of הוה discussed in the past.

<sup>123</sup> The Soncino translation reads: “‘Go, and become a scholar.’ So he left her, and spent twelve years [studying] under R. Eliezer and R. Joshua... so he went back and was absent for another twelve years” (*The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. I. Epstein, London 1936, p. 136). This approach represents three different *ad hoc* solutions.

<sup>124</sup> P. 371. The talmud text is cited there as follows: זיל הוי בבי@רב אזל הוה תרתין. שנין קמי ר' אליע' ור' יהוש' (The “@” sign is explained on p. 54). The citation is from MS Munich 95. The author’s system using a select manuscript per tractate is explained on pp. 18, 24 (and see p. 57). In this case the practice of using the text of the “best manuscript” without further comment is misleading, in that “two years” is clearly an error, as can be seen from the Munich manuscript itself in context: אמר' ליה זיל הוי בבי רב. אזל הוה תרתין שנין קמי ר' אליע' ור' יהוש'. למישלם תרתין סרי שנין קם ואת' לבית'.

<sup>125</sup> From context rather than lexical submeaning of הוה. Consequently this occurrence was not connected with meaning II,6 or with הוואה or הווא (p. 373).