

Alyth



Alyth Chavruta Project

Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 62b

Week 5



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'Iron sharpens iron, so a person sharpens the wit of their friend.'

Proverbs 27:17



Introduction

Last week, the Gemara sought to understand what was meant by the term *tayalin* – those who are required to have sex with their wives every day – as well as those professions that were given dispensations to leave their families for longer periods (donkey drivers, camel drivers, sailors). Having dealt with these, the Gemara returns to its perennial pre-occupation: the sages themselves. Although it seems (from earlier sections) that the both Mishnah and Gemara agree that Torah scholars can only leave their wives for a maximum of thirty days (with consent or without), we now have a countervailing opinion that overrides this limit. Over the final two weeks of this course we will encounter seven rabbinic tales that illustrate what happened when rabbis followed this new opinion. We are now moving out of the realm of *halachah* and firmly into the territory of *agadah*, where the answers to our questions are even less clear-cut than before.

The text itself can be found here in both Hebrew only and Hebrew with translation. For those with some knowledge of Hebrew, we encourage you to attempt your own translation, but there is absolutely no expectation that you engage with the Hebrew. As usual, there is also no requirement to get to the end of the pack – we have provided more than you can get through in an hour of study, and we encourage you to focus on understanding a small amount rather than becoming confused by a greater amount.

Further resources and advice on how to get the most out of chavruta can be found in our [FAQs](#). We look forward to seeing you on Thursday to share our learning with each other.

Blessing for Study

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסּוֹק
בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Blessed are You, our Living God, Sovereign of the universe, whose commandments make us holy, and who commands us to devote ourselves to the study of Torah.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu la-asok b'divrey Torah.



The Hebrew Text

הספנים - אחת לששה חדשים, דברי ר' אליעזר. אמר רב ברונא אמר רב: הלכה כר"א. אמר רב אדא בר אהבה אמר רב: זו דברי ר' אליעזר, אבל חכמים אומרים: התלמידים יוצאין לת"ת ב' וג' שנים שלא ברשות. אמר רבא: סמכו רבנן אדרב אדא בר אהבה ועבדי עובדא בנפשייהו. כי הא דרב רחומי הוה שכיח קמיה דרבא במחוזא, הוה רגיל דהוה אתי לביתיה כל מעלי יומא דכיפורי. יומא חד משכתיא שמעתא, הוה מסכיא דביתהו השתא אתי השתא אתי, לא אתא, חלש דעתה אחית דמעתא מעינה, הוה יתיב באיגרא, אפחית איגרא מתותיה ונח נפשיה. עונה של תלמידי חכמים אימת? אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: מע"ש לע"ש. (תהלים א') אשר פריו יתן בעתו - אמר רב יהודה, ואיתימא רב הונא, ואיתימא רב נחמן: זה המשמש מטתו מע"ש לע"ש. יהודה בריה דר' חייא חתניה דר' ינאי הוה, אזיל ויתיב בבי רב, וכל בי שמשני הוה אתי לביתיה, וכי הוה אתי הוה קא חזי קמיה עמודא דנורא. יומא חד משכתיא שמעתא, כיון דלא חזי ההוא סימנא, אמר להו רבי ינאי: כפו מטתו, שאילמלי יהודה קיים לא ביטל עונתו. הואי (קהלת י') כשגגה שיוצא מלפני השליט ונח נפשיה. רבי איעסק ליה לבריה בי רבי חייא, כי מטא למיכתב כתובה נח נפשה דרביתא. אמר רבי: ח"ו פסולא איכא? יתיבו ועיינו במשפחות, רבי אתי משפטיה בן אביטל, ורבי חייא אתי משמעני אחי דוד. אזיל איעסק ליה לבריה בי ר' יוסי בן זימרא, פסקו ליה תרתי סרי שנין למיזל בבי רב. אחלפיה קמיה, אמר להו: ניהוו שית שנין. אחלפיה קמיה, אמר

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להו: איכניס והדר איזיל. הוה קא מכסיף מאבוה א"ל: בני, דעת קונך
יש בך, מעיקרא כתיב: (שמות ט"ו) תביאמו ותטעמו, ולבסוף כתיב:
(שמות כ"ה) ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם. אזיל יתיב תרתי סרי שני
בבי רב. עד דאתא איעקרא דביתהו. אמר רבי: היכי נעביד? נגרשה,
יאמרו ענייה זו לשוא שימרה נינסיב איתתא אחריתי, יאמרו זו אשתו וזו
זונתן בעי עלה רחמי ואיתסיאת.



The Hebrew Text with English Translation

הספנים - אחת לששה חדשים, דברי ר' אליעזר.

אמר רב ברונא אמר רב: הלכה כר"א.

אמר רב אדא בר אהבה אמר רב: זו דברי ר' אליעזר, אבל חכמים אומרים: התלמידים יוצאין לת"ת ב' וג' שנים שלא ברשות.

אמר רבא: סמכו רבנן אדרב אדא בר אהבה ועבדי עובדא בנפשייהו.

כי הא דרב רחומי הוה שכיח קמיה דרבא במחוזא, הוה רגיל דהוה אתי לביתיה כל מעלי יומא דכיפורי. יומא חד משכתיה שמעתא, הוה מסכיא דביתהו השתא אתי השתא אתי, לא אתא, חלש דעתה אחית דמעתא מעינה, הוה יתיב באיגרא, אפחית איגרא מתותיה ונח נפשיה.

'Sailors once every six months. These are the words of Rabbi Eliezer.'¹

Rav Baruna² said in the name of Rav,³ 'The *halachah* goes with Rabbi Eliezer.'

Rav Ada bar Ahavah⁴ said in the name of Rav, 'These are the words of Rabbi Eliezer. But the Sages say, "Scholars may depart to study Torah for two or three years without consent."'

¹ A quotation from the original mishnah.

² Not much is known of Rav Baruna, except that he was a student of Rav (see below) in Babylonian in the third century CE.

³ Rav (full name Abba Aricha) went from Babylonia to the Land of Israel to study under Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (traditionally believed to be the redactor of the Mishnah) in the early third century CE. When he returned, he is traditionally believed to have founded the first rabbinic academy in Babylonia.

⁴ Rav Ada bar Ahavah was a student of Rav (see above) in Babylonian in the third century CE. He was (according to legend) born on the day of the death of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi and became famous for being a miracle worker.

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Rava⁵ said, ‘The rabbis rely upon [the ruling of] Rav Ada bar Ahavah, but they act accordingly [at risk of] their lives.’

As in the case of Rav Rachumi,⁶ who would stand before Rava in Mechuza.⁷ He would regularly go home every Erev Yom Kippur. One day, he was engrossed in his studies. His wife was waiting for him [saying], ‘Now he is coming, now he is coming...’ He did not come, she became disheartened⁸ and a tear dropped from her eye. [At that moment] he was sitting on the roof, and the roof gave way beneath him and he died.

Questions

1. Rav Ada bar Ahavah’s intervention is a wholly new idea – do you think it is justified? Why do you think it is only interjected now? You may find it useful to read the texts from Tosefta and the Jerusalem Talmud on page 11 and the commentary of Jeffrey Rubenstein on page 12.
2. What is the message of the story of Rav Rachumi?
3. The story of Rabbi Rachumi was told by MK Ruth Calderon in her maiden speech in the Israeli Knesset in 2013, and you can watch her speech by clicking [here](#). What do you understand to be her argument about the text?

⁵ Rava (bar Yosef bar Chama) was one of the preeminent sages in the first half of the fourth century CE in Babylonia.

⁶ Very little appears to be known about Rav Rachumi, except that he was a Babylonian sage in the Talmudic period.

⁷ Mechuza was one of the centres of Jewish learning in Babylonia in the Talmudic period.

⁸ The Aramaic *chalash da'ta* literally means ‘her mind became weak’.



עונה של תלמידי חכמים אימת?

אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: מע"ש לע"ש.

אשר פריו יתן בעתו - אמר רב יהודה, ואיתימא רב הונא, ואיתימא רב נחמן: זה המשמש מטתו מע"ש לע"ש.

יהודה בריה דר' חייא חתניה דר' ינאי הוה, אזיל ויתיב בבי רב, וכל בי שמישי הוה אתי לביתיה, וכי הוה אתי הוה קא חזי קמיה עמודא דנורא. יומא חד משכתייה שמעתא, כיון דלא חזי ההוא סימנא, אמר להו רבי ינאי: כפו מטתו, שאילמלי יהודה קיים לא ביטל עונתו. הואי כשגגה שיוצא מלפני השליט ונח נפשיה.

When is the conjugal obligation of Torah scholars?

Rav Yehudah⁹ said in the name of Shmuel,¹⁰ 'From Erev Shabbat to Erev Shabbat.'

'[Like a tree planted beside streams of water,] which yields fruit in season, [whose foliage never fades, and whatever it produces thrives]' (Psalm 1:3) – Rav Yehudah said (and some say it was Rav Chuna, and some say it was Rav Nachman),¹¹ 'This [refers to] one who has sex with his wife from Erev Shabbat to Erev Shabbat.'

Yehudah was the son of Rabbi Chiya¹² and the son-in-law of Rabbi Yannai.¹³ He went and sat in the house of study. Every [Shabbet Eve] at twilight, he

⁹ Rav Yehudah (bar Yechezkel) was a student of Rav (see above) and was one of the most important teachers in Babylonia in the second half of the fourth century CE.

¹⁰ Shmuel was a contemporary of Rav (see above). Together they were the two eminent Babylonian sages of their generation in the third century CE.

¹¹ Rav Chuna was a contemporary of Rav Yehudah (above), and Rav Nachman (bar Ya'akov) was a student of Shmuel (above).

¹² Rabbi Chiya was one of the younger contemporaries of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (see below). Born in Babylonia, he travelled to the Land of Israel and lived in Tiberias.

¹³ Rabbi Yannai was a student of Rabbi Chiya (above) in the early third century CE.

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would go home, and when he would come, a pillar of fire would be seen preceding him. One day, he was engrossed in his studies. When the sign [of his return] was not seen, Rabbi Yannai said to them, 'Turn over his bed, for if Yehudah were alive, he would not neglect his conjugal obligation.' It was like an error coming from a ruler,¹⁴ and he [Yehudah] died.

Questions

1. Why does this section begin with Rav Yehudah's question, when it could be argued it has already been answered at least once already?
2. How many times per week do you understand a Torah scholar should have sex with his wife, according to Rav Yehudah (in the name of Shmuel)?
3. What is the purpose of the story of Yehudah?

¹⁴ This phrase is a quotation from the book of Kohelet (10:5), referring to a royal decree which, once made, is irreversible.



רבי איעסק ליה לבריה בי רבי חייא, כי מטא למיכתב כתובה נח נפשה דרביא. אמר רבי: ח"ו פסולא איכא? יתיבו ועיינו במשפחות, רבי אתי משפטיה בן אביטל, ורבי חייא אתי משמעיה אחי דוד.

אזיל איעסק ליה לבריה בי ר' יוסי בן זימרא, פסקו ליה תרתי סרי שנין למיזל בבי רב. אחלפיה קמיה, אמר להו: ניהוו שית שנין. אחלפיה קמיה, אמר להו: איכניס והדר איזיל. הוה קא מכסיף מאבוה א"ל: בני, דעת קונך יש בך, מעיקרא כתיב: תביאמו ותטעמו, ולבסוף כתיב: ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם.

אזיל יתיב תרתי סרי שני בבי רב. עד דאתא איעקרא דביתהו. אמר רבי: היכי נעביד? נגרשה, יאמרו ענייה זו לשוא שימרה נינסיב איתתא אחריתי, יאמרו זו אשתו וזו זונתן בעי עלה רחמי ואיתסיאת.

Rabbi¹⁵ arranged for his son [to marry into] the house of Rabbi Chiyah.¹⁶ When it came to write the ketubah, the young woman died. Rabbi said, 'Heaven forbid there is a disqualification [in either of our family lines]!' They sat and investigated their family [trees]. [They discovered that] Rabbi was [descended] from Shefatyah the son of Avital,¹⁷ whereas Rabbi Chiyah was [descended] from Shima the brother of David.¹⁸

[Rabbi] went to arrange for his son [to marry into] the house of Rabbi Yose ben Zimra.¹⁹ They agreed to give him [the groom] twelve years to go to the house of study. They passed [the bride] before him. He said to them, 'Let it be six years.' They passed her before him [again]. He said to them, 'Let me first bring [her under the chuppah] and after I will go.' He was embarrassed

¹⁵ Rabbi (Yehudah HaNasi) is traditionally considered to be the author of the Mishnah. He was the leader of the rabbinic community in the Land of Israel in the late-second and early third centuries CE.

¹⁶ See above.

¹⁷ Shefatyah was the son of Avital and King David (2 Samuel 3:5).

¹⁸ Shima was listed as one of the sons of Jesse in 1 Chronicles 2:13.

¹⁹ Little is known of Rabbi Yose ben Zimra outside of this story.

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before his father. He [Rabbi] said to him, ‘My son, the mind of your Maker is within you. From the beginning it is written, “You will bring them and plant them [in Your own mountain, the place You made to dwell in, Eternal, the sanctuary, Eternal, which your hands established]” (Exodus 15:17). But at the end it is written, “And let them make Me a sanctuary, and I shall dwell amongst them” (Exodus 25:8).’

He [Rabbi’s son] went and sat in the house of study for twelve years. By the time he returned to his wife she was infertile. Rabbi said, ‘What shall we do!? If he divorces her, they will say “This poor thing waited in vain.” If marries another woman, they will say “This one is his wife, this one is his whore.” He sought mercy for her,²⁰ and she was healed.

Questions

1. Why do you think the story in the first paragraph is included?
2. What does this episode tell us about the relationship between marriage and Torah study?
3. What is the overall message of the story?

²⁰ In other words, he prayed to God on her behalf.



Supplementary Material

Tosefta Ketubot 5:6

המדיר את אשתו מתשמיש המטה בש"א שתי שבתות כלדת נקבה בה"א
שבת אחת כלדת זכר וכימי נדתה יתר על כן יוציא ויתן כתובה

הפועלים שתיים בשבת אם היו עושין מלאכה בעיר אחרת פעם אחת
בשבת החמרים אחת לשתי שבתות הגמלין אחת לשלשים יום הספנין
אחת לששה חדשים :

One who prohibits his wife from the use of the bed, the House of Shammai says [he may do so for] two Shabbats, as in the case of the birth of a female. The House of Hillel says [he may do so for] one Shabbat, as in the case of the birth of a male and the days of *niddah*. Any longer than this and he must divorce her and give her her *ketubah*.

Workers [are obligated to have sex with their wives] twice per Shabbat; those who work in another city, once a week; donkey drivers once every two weeks; camel drivers once every thirty days; sailors once every six months.

Jerusalem Talmud, Ketubot 30b

רבי ירמיה בעא אילין תלמידי חכמים לא מסתברא מיעבדינון בטילין

אמר רבי מנא לא מסתברא דלא כאספון שהן יגיעין יותר

רב אמר אוכלת עמו מלילי שבת ללילי שבת בלשון נקייה :

Rabbi Yirmiyah²¹ inquired, 'These Torah scholars, is it not reasonable to treat them as *tayalin*?

²¹ Rabbi Yirmiyah, originally from Babylonia, became the head of the rabbinic academy of Tiberias in the Land of Israel in the early fourth century CE.

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Rabbi Mana²² said, 'No! Is it not reasonable to treat them like sailors, as they are more exerted.'

Rav²³ said [quoting Mishnah Ketubot 5:9], "She eats with him from Shabbat night to Shabbat night" – in clean language.'

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*

While it is by no means unprecedented for the Amoraim to reject the Mishnah in favour of a dissenting view found in the Tosefta, it is somewhat unusual to introduce a new, otherwise undocumented Tannaitic opinion as the authoritative law, as does Rav Ada bar Ahavah. Given its complete lack of attestation in Tannaitic sources and the Amoraic discussion of the previous folio, the opinion would seem to be pseudepigraphic: the 'sages' to which Rav Ada b. Ahavah refers are really later Babylonian rabbis who found the one-month limitation inconvenient, not the colleagues of R. Eliezer. Extending the dispensation to leave one to several years can be seen as a necessary adjustment to a later (Babylonian?) situation in which sages had to travel greater distances to study Torah. But it can also be seen as a self-serving invention that caters to the sages' interests. The next comment ('Rava said, "The rabbis relies on the words of Rava Ada b. Ahavah and acted accordingly at the cost of their lives."'), illustrated by the subsequent story of a sage's death, implies that the latter is the case. Without entering into the legal debate, the comment undermines the dispensation by warning that sages who acted in accord with Rav Ada b. Ahavah's tradition paid a heavy price. We have, then, an interesting example of the aggadah and halachah in conflict: the halachah permits extended periods of Torah study, while the Aggadah cautions sages to think twice before putting the law into practice.

²² Rabbi Mana, also known as Rabbi Mani II (both names are short for Manachem), taught at Sepphoris in the Land of Israel in the fourth century CE.

²³ See above.



A Guide to the Texts

The Mishnah is a Jewish legal code from approximately 200 CE, containing legal rulings and disputes of the sages which are written down there for the first time. It is the first part of what is called the 'Oral Law', which for traditional Jews is just as authoritative as the Written Law (the Tanach). The Mishnah is divided into six 'orders', and each order is divided into tractates. Tractate Ketubot is included in the order of *Nashim* (Women), and deals with issues of marriage.

Tosefta is a longer work than the Mishnah, though it has the same structure, and is believed to have been written at approximately the same time. There is much scholarly debate as to the relationship between the two texts. Some argue that Tosefta constitutes the first commentary on the Mishnah, since it often expands on basic statements made in the Mishnah. Others have argued that the Mishnah followed Tosefta as a simplification. Yet others have claimed that both the Mishnah and Tosefta emerged from an earlier text that did not survive.

The **Jerusalem Talmud** (also known as the Palestinian Talmud or *Yerushalmi*) is essentially a commentary on the Mishnah from the Land of Israel, containing the discussions of rabbis from the period just after the Mishnah was finished (around 200 CE), until 414 CE when Jewish autonomy in the Land of Israel finally came to an end.

The **Babylonian Talmud** (also known simply as The Talmud or *Bavli*) is another commentary on the Mishnah from Babylonia, containing the discussions of rabbis from the period just after the Mishnah was finished (around 200 CE), until it was finally redacted in approximately 700 CE.

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein is Skirball Professor of Jewish Thought and Literature at New York University, and is the author of a number of books about the composition and editing of the Talmud. *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* was published in 2003.

HAPPY STUDYING!

If you have any further questions, please be in touch with Rabbi Elliott

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