

# THE MANY ROLES OF RABBINIC LEADERSHIP – LESSONS FROM THE FIRST RABBINIC PLACEMENT

Shiur based on the teaching of Rabbi Aaron D. Panken, Ph.D. ז"ל

Presentation by Rabbi Joshua Fixler, June 29, 2018

## Background Texts:

<i>Deuteronomy 25:5-10</i>	
<p>כִּי־יָשְׁבוּ אֲחִים יַחְדָּו וּמֵת אֶחָד מֵהֶם וּבֶן אֵין־לוֹ לֹא־תִהְיֶה אִשְׁת־הַמֵּת הַחֹצֵה לְאִישׁ זָר יִבְמֶהּ וּבֹא עָלֶיהָ וּלְקַחְתָּהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיִּבְמֶהּ</p>	<p>5 When brothers dwell together and one of them dies and leaves no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married to a stranger, outside the family. Her husband's brother shall unite with her: he shall take her as his wife and perform the levir's duty.</p>
<p>וְהָיָה הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵד יָקוּם עַל־שֵׁם אָחִיו הַמֵּת וְלֹא־יִמָּחֶה שְׁמוֹ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל</p>	<p>6 The first son that she bears shall be accounted to the dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out in Israel.</p>
<p>וְאִם־לֹא יִחְפֹּץ הָאִישׁ לְקַחְתָּהּ אֶת־יְבִמְתּוֹ וְעָלְתָהּ וַיִּשְׁעֶרְהָ אֶל־הַזְּקֵנִים וְאָמְרָה מֵאִין יִבְמִי לְהָקִים לְאָחִיו שֵׁם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אָבָה יִבְמִי</p>	<p>7 But if the man does not want to marry his brother's widow, his brother's widow shall appear before the elders in the gate and declare, "My husband's brother refuses to establish a name in Israel for his brother; he will not perform the duty of a levir."</p>
<p>וְקָרְאוּ־לוֹ זְקֵנֵי־עִירוֹ וְדָבְרוּ אֵלָיו וְעָמַד וְאָמַר לֹא תִפְצְתִּי לְקַחְתָּהּ</p>	<p>8 The elders of his town shall then summon him and talk to him. If he insists, saying, "I do not want to marry her,"</p>
<p>וּנְגִשָּׂה וַיִּבְמְתוּ אֵלָיו לְעֵינֵי הַזְּקֵנִים וְחָלְצָה נַעֲלוֹ מֵעַל רַגְלוֹ וַיִּרְקֶה בְּפָנָיו וְעָנְתָהּ וְאָמְרָה כִּכָּהֵן יַעֲשֶׂה לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִבְנֶה אֶת־בַּיִת אָחִיו</p>	<p>9 his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, pull the sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and make this declaration: Thus shall be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house!</p>
<p>וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּית חָלוּץ הַנָּעֹל</p>	<p>10 And he shall go in Israel by the name of "the family of the unsandaled one."</p>

<i>Daniel 10:21</i>	
<p>אֲבָל אֲנִיד לָךְ אֶת־הַרְשׁוּם בְּכַתֵּב אֱמֶת וְאִין אֶחָד מִתְּסַזְק עִמִּי עַל־אֵלֶּה כִּי אִם־מִיכָאֵל שְׂרָכָם</p>	<p>21 No one is helping me against them except your prince, Michael. <b>However, I will tell you what is recorded in the book of truth.</b></p>

<i>Proverbs 30:32</i>	
<p>אִם־נִבְלַתְּ בְּהַתְנַשָּׂא וְאִם־זִמְמוֹת יָד לָפֶה</p>	<p>32 If you have been scandalously arrogant, If you have been a schemer, Then clap your hand to your mouth.</p>

## The Fist Rabbinical Placement

<i>Yerushalmi Yevamot 12:6, 13a</i>	
<p>רְקָה דָם</p>	<p>If she spit blood...</p>
<p>רבי בא בשם רבי יהודה רבי זריקן מטי בה רבי ירמיה בשם אבא בר אבא רבי זעירא מטי בה בשם שמואל אם יש בו צהצוחית של רוק כשר</p>	<p>R. Ba in the name of R. Judah, R. Zeriqan introduced the statement [in the name of] R. Jeremiah in the name of Abba bar Abba, R. Zeira introduced the matter in the name of Samuel: "If there is any remnant of spit [in it], it is valid."</p>
<p>הגידמת במה חולצת בשיניה</p>	<p>A woman without hands—how does she remove the shoe? With her teeth.</p>
<p>בני סימוניא אתון לגבי רבי אמרין ליה בעא תתן לן חד בר נש דריש דיין וחזן ספר מתניין ועבד לן כל צורכנין ויהב לון לוי בר ססי</p>	<p>The people of Simonia came before Rabbi. They said to him, "We want you to give us a man to serve as preacher, judge, reader [of Scripture], teacher [of tradition], and to do all the things we need." He gave them Levi bar Sisi.</p>

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עשו לו בימה גדולה והשיבוהו עליה אתון ושאלון ליה הגידמת במה היא חולצת ולא אגיבון	They up a great stage and seated him on it. They came and asked him, "A woman without arms—with what does she remove the shoe?" And he did not answer.
רקה דם	If she spit blood...?
ולא אגיבון	And he did not answer.
אמרין דילמה דלית הוא מרי אולפן נישואל ליה שאלון ליה דאגדה	They said, "Perhaps he is not a master of the law. Let us ask him something about lore. "
אתון ושאלון ליה מהו הדין דכתיב (דניאל י) אבל אגיד לך את הרשום בכתב אמת אם אמת למה רשום ואם רשום למה אמת	They came and asked him, "What is the meaning of the following verse, as it is written, 'But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book, in truth' (Daniel 10:21). If it is truth, Why is it described as inscribed? And if it is inscribed, why is it described as truth?"
ולא אגיבון	He did not answer them.
אתון לגבי דרבי אמרון ליה הדין פייסונא דפייסנתך	They came back to Rabbi and said to him, "Is this a mason of your mason's guild [a pupil of your school ] [Jastrow, p. 1163]?"
אמר לון חייכון בר נש דכוותי יהיבית לכון	He said to them, "By your lives! I gave you someone who is as good as I am."
שלח אייתיתיה ושאל ליה אמר ליה רקה דם מהו	He sent and summoned him and asked him. He said to him, "If the woman spit blood, what is the law?"
אמר ליה אם יש בו צחצוחית של רוק כשר	He answered him, "If there is a drop of spit in it, it is valid."
הגידמת במה היא חולצת	"A woman without arms -- how does she remove the shoe?"
אמר ליה בשיניה	He said to him, "She removes the shoe with her teeth."
אמר ליה מהו הדין דכתיב אבל אגיד לך את הרשום בכתב אמת אם אמת למה רשום ואם רשום למה אמת	He said to him, "What is the meaning of the following verse as it is written, 'But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book, in truth' (Daniel 10:21). If it is truth, why is it described as inscribed, and if it is inscribed, why is it described as truth?"
אמר ליה עד שלא נתחתם גזר דין רשום משנתחתם גזר דין אמת	He said to him, "Before a decree is sealed, it is described as inscribed. Once it is sealed, it is described as truth."
אמר ליה ולמה לא אגיבתיון	He said to him, "And why did you not answer the people when they asked you the same questions?"
אמר ליה עשו לי בימה גדולה והושיבו אותי עליה וטפה רוחי עלי	He said to him, "They made a great stage and seated me on it, and my spirit became exalted."
וקרא עליו (משלי ל) אם נבלת בהתנשא ואם זמות יד לפה	He recited concerning him the following verse of Scripture, "'If you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or if you have been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth.' (Proverbs 30:32)"
מי גרם לך להתנבל בדברי תורה על שנישאת' בהן עצמך	"What caused you to make a fool of yourself in regard to teachings of Torah? It was because you exalted yourself through them"
Translation: Neusner, Jacob. <i>The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Yebamot</i> . Vol. 21, The University of Chicago Press, 1987. p 390-391	

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## Outline from Rabbi Aaron Panken, Ph.D.

- A. Halakhic opening: Two arcane halakhic issues –
  - 1. spit blood - chain of tradition then halakhic answer
  - 2. *halitzah* of an armless woman – anonymous answer
- B. Aggadic section –
  - 1. Simonia’s rabbinical search
    - communal statement of desire for leadership
    - a) enumeration of perceived roles of a rabbi
    - b) Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi’s (Rabbi, henceforth) placement of Levi Bar Sisi
  - 2. The Test
    - a) people of Simonia sit Levi on a large platform
    - b) question on “spit blood”
    - c) Levi’s failure to answer
    - d) question on “armless woman’s *halitzah*”
    - e) Levi’s failure to answer
    - f) community adjusts its expectations (=Levi’s last chance)
    - g) question on Daniel 10:21 – truth and inscriptions/impressions
    - h) Levi’s failure to answer
    - i) people of Simonia complain to Rabbi
    - j) Rabbi exclaims that Levi is just like him
  - 3. The Retest
    - a) Rabbi summons Levi and asks him three questions
      - i. spit blood – Levi answers correctly
      - ii. armless woman – Levi answers correctly
      - iii. Daniel 10:21 – truth and impressions – Levi answers correctly
  - 4. Reflection
    - a) Rabbi asks why Levi did not answer the people
    - b) Levi answers: they made me a large platform and sat me on it, and my spirit swelled
  - 5. Conclusion/Moral Learning
    - a) Rabbi applies Proverbs 30:32 to Levi, to teach lesson
    - b) “If you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or have been devising evil, put your hand to your mouth.”
    - c) Lesson: use Torah to exalt yourself, you will look like a fool in the end

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### Matrix to Some Possible Approaches to Elements in PT Yevamot Text

*Chart from Rabbi Aaron Panken, Ph.D. Fall 2015 – Letters correspond to the outline above*

Text	Context	Subtext
Halakhic section (A)		
“She spit blood” (A1)	Arcane, perhaps even hypothetical halakhic topic, values halakhic thinking, interprets unclear or incomplete base texts and sets law	Rabbis’ ability to function when confronted with complex, challenging, irregular questions
Rabbi Ba...in the name of Shmuel (A1)	Rabbinic respect for and preservation of chain of tradition and transmission, retains source of halakhic reasoning to allow evaluation	Place of contemporary Rabbis within that chain of tradition, transmission and innovation; how to evaluate prior links in that chain
<i>Halitzah</i> of woman without arms (A2)	Second arcane, perhaps hypothetical halakhic topic	Feminist concerns, issues of powerlessness and treatment of those with disabilities
Aggadic Section (B)		
Simonia’s desire for rabbinical leadership (B1a)	Community’s stated desire for rabbinical leadership, and inherent validation of rabbinical leadership	Contemporary relationship between Rabbi and community, evaluation of communal willingness to be led and personal abilities
Simonia’s expression of perceived communal needs (B1b)	Communal expression of perceived roles of rabbinical leadership during Tannaitic period	Contemporary roles of the rabbi—acceptable, appropriate, achievable?
שׂרֵיפּ preacher (B1b)	Interpreter of Scripture, speaker in public settings, represents authentic interpretation	Torah knowledge, aptitude for interpretation, public speaking skills, authenticity
דִּין judge (B1b)	Response to actual court cases brought before communal rabbinical leader	Judgment, mediation, decision-making, management
חֲזָן <i>hazzan</i> (B1b)	Sexton – official who managed service/worship	Understanding of music/art/other affective and inspirational aspects of Judaism
סֹפֵר scribe/Bible teacher (B1b)	Teacher of Bible to children	Pedagogy, approach to diverse educational audiences, text knowledge
מְתוּיָן teacher of Tannaitic tradition (B1b)	Teacher of Tannaitic tradition	Extension of teaching past Bible to broad whole of Jewish tradition

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עבד לן כל צורכינן will meet all our needs (B1b)	Multi-faceted and not completely defined list of needs	“Other tasks as assigned;” how to define anew the role of the rabbi in contemporary Jewish society; responding to panoply of needs
Rabbi’s placement of Levi Bar Sisi (B1c)	Authority of Rabbi, power over his students	Rabbinical placement system; control over own destiny in career
The Platform (B2a)	Levi’s elevation, physically and status- wise	Contemporary respect for the rabbi; fishbowl
The Test (B2b-h)	Examination of suitability of Levi Bar Sisi for leadership position; silence in the face of questioning; powerlessness	Meeting or exceeding expectations; failure; evaluation by nonprofessionals; truth vs. impression
The Complaint (B2i-j)	Surprise, disappointment of failure, Rabbi’s denial of problem as Levi is “just like him,” one of his students	Dealing with failure of colleagues and students; denial of difficulty, pride; community vs. rabbi; professional reviews
The Retest (B3)	Proof of Rabbi’s position and Levi’s suitability	Poor performance under pressure, action vs. inaction at key moments that matter
Reflection (B4)	Rabbi probes Levi’s difficulty, discovers his large platform problem	Seeking guidance from experienced colleagues, elders; self-reflection after failure
Conclusion/Moral Learning (B5)	Verse as appropriate medium for teaching moral lesson, humility above all	Use of tradition at “teachable moments;” humility in a modern context; avoiding use of position or Torah to self-aggrandize