If There’s No Bread, There’s No Torah: The Other Careers of the Talmudic Rabbis

Dr. Rachel Rosenthal

Dr. Rachel Rosenthal is an adjunct assistant professor of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary and a Research Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America. She received her PhD in Rabbinic Literature from JTS, where her dissertation focused on how rabbinic analysis of the case of the stubborn and rebellious son provides models for moral education and development. In addition to her work at JTS and Hartman, Rachel teaches at Central Synagogue, Lincoln Square Synagogue, and in a variety of other settings around the world. She has also served on the faculty of the Maimonides Scholars Program, Nishma: A Summer of Torah Study, and Drisha, where she was a graduate of the Drisha Scholars Circle. She received a BA in Religious Studies from the University of Pennsylvania.
## If There’s No Bread, There’s No Torah: The Other Careers of the Talmudic Rabbis

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<th>Avot d’Rabbi Natan Version A Chapter 11</th>
<th>מסכתות קמטות מסכת אבות דרבי נatan</th>
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<td>Love work: what does this entail? This teaches that a person should love work, and a person should not hate work, because just as the Torah was given as a covenant, so too work was given as a covenant, as it says, “Six days you shall labor and do all of your work, and the seventh day is Shabbat for the Lord your God.”</td>
<td>אבות דרבי נatan מבשה מתנה בברית מתנה ובabras במדרשתא ענין בשאת לה’ אלחורי (שם מתנה מ’):</td>
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<th>Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 49b</th>
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<td>When Rabbi Yehuda would go to the study hall he would carry a pitcher on his shoulder, saying: Labor is great, as it brings honor to the laborer who performs it. Rabbi Shimon would carry a basket on his shoulder, saying: Labor is great, as it brings honor to the laborer who performs it.</td>
<td>רבבי יהודה אמר לו לבן א’à קורדא ש’טים מהלכאתא怎么会 מלתחה אמר אà חכמה את א’à קורדא ש’טים</td>
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<th>Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 82b</th>
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| It is taught: Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: I never saw a deer who dries figs, nor a lion a porter, nor a fox a storekeeper. And yet they earn their livelihood without anguish. But all these were created only to serve me, and I was created to serve the One Who formed me. If these, who were created only to serve me, earn their livelihood without anguish, then is it not right that I, who was created to serve the One Who formed me, should earn my livelihood without anguish? But I have committed evil actions and have lost my livelihood, as it is stated: “Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have held back good from you” (Jeremiah 5:25). | מנה רביע ש’טים מ’אלחקא א’à קורדא מיינא או אלאף א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טים אà ת‘אר א’à קורדא ש’טו

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rarosenthal@jtsa.edu
It is taught: Rabbi Nehorai says: I set aside all the trades in the world, and I teach my son only Torah, as all other trades serve one only in the days of his youth, but in the days of his old age, behold, he is left to lie in hunger. But Torah is not like this: It serves a person in the time of his youth and provides him with a future and hope in the time of his old age. With regard to the time of his youth, what does it say? “But they that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength” (Isaiah 40:31). With regard to the time of his old age, what does it say? “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be full of sap and richness” (Psalms 92:15).

Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 113a

[Rav said]: dates in your storeroom, run to the brewery. And how many dates should one keep for himself? Rava said: Up to three se’a. Rav Pappa said: If I were not a beer manufacturer I would not have become wealthy. Some say that it was Rav Hisda who said: If I were not a beer manufacturer I would not have become wealthy. What is the meaning of the word sudana, the Aramaic term for a brewer? Rav Hisda said: A pleasant secret [sod na’e] and acts of loving kindness.

Babylonian Talmud Yoma 35b

They told him about Hillel the Elder, who every day would work and earn a Tarphik. Half of it he would give to the keeper of the Beit Midrash, and half of it for his sustenance and the sustenance of the people of his household. One time, he was not able to earn [anything] and the keeper of the Beit Midrash would not allow him to enter. He went up and sat on the skylight so that he could hear the words of the Living God from the mouths of Shemaya and Avtalayon. They said that day was the eve of Shabbat and in the time of Tevet [i.e. the winter], and snow.
fell down on him from the sky. When dawn came, Shemaya said to Avtalyon, “Avtalyon my brother, on every day the house [of study] is illuminated, and today it is dark. Perhaps it is a cloudy day. Their eyes glanced and saw the image of a man on the skylight. They went up and found him under three *amot* of snow. They undressed him and bathed him and anointed him and placed him next to the fire. They said, “It is appropriate to desecrate Shabbat for this one.”

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<th>Babylonian Talmud Taanit 21a</th>
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| **Ilfa and Rabbi Yoḥanan** studied Torah, they became very hard-pressed for money. They said: Let us get up and go and engage in commerce, and we will fulfill, with regard to ourselves, the verse: “Although there should be no needy among you” (Deuteronomy 15:4). They went and sat under a dilapidated wall and were eating bread, when two ministering angels arrived.  

Rabbi Yoḥanan heard that one angel said to the other: Let us knock this wall down upon them and kill them, as they abandon eternal life and engage in temporal life. The other angel said to him: Leave them, as there is one of them whose time of achievement stands before him. Rabbi Yoḥanan heard all this, but Ilfa did not hear. Rabbi Yoḥanan said to Ilfa: Did the Master hear anything? Ilfa said to him: No. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Since I heard and Ilfa did not hear, learn from this that it is I whose time stands before me.  

Rabbi Yoḥanan said to Ilfa: I will return home and fulfill with regard to myself: “For the poor shall never cease out of the land” (Deuteronomy 15:11). Rabbi Yoḥanan returned to the study hall, and Ilfa did not return. By the time that Ilfa came back, Rabbi Yoḥanan had been appointed head of the academy.  

His colleagues said to Ilfa: If the Master had sat and studied, wouldn’t the Master have been appointed head? Ilfa replied: If the Master had waited, the angels would have arrived and desecrated Shabbat for him.
head of the academy? Ilfa went and suspended himself from the mast of a ship, saying: If there is anyone who can ask me a question concerning a baraita of Rabbi Ḥiyya and Rabbi Oshaya, and I do not resolve his problem from a mishna, I will fall from the mast of this ship and be drowned.

A certain old man came and taught him: If there is a man who, upon his deathbed, says: Give a shekel to my sons every week, but where, they are fit for the court to give them a sela, i.e., double the amount, they give them a sela. But if he said: Give them only a shekel, the court gives them only a shekel per week. Ilfa said to the old man: In accordance with whose opinion is this ruling? It is Rabbi Meir, who said: It is a mitzva to fulfill the statement of the dead.

If one said: If my sons die, others should inherit their portion in their stead, whether he said: Give them a shekel, or whether he said: Give them only a shekel, the court gives his sons only a shekel per week. Ilfa said to the old man: In accordance with whose opinion is this ruling? It is Rabbi Meir, who said: It is a mitzva to fulfill the statement of the dead.

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good, appeared to him and said to him: son of Hyrcanus, why are you crying? Eliezer said to him: Because I want to learn Torah. Eliyahu said to him: If you want to learn Torah, go up to Jerusalem to R. Yochanan ben Zakkai.

Babylonian Talmud Brachot 28a

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<th>They said: How long will Rabban Gamliel continue afflicting him? Last year on Rosh HaShana, he afflicted him. Regarding the firstborn, in the incident of Rabbi Tzadok, he afflicted him. Here too, he is afflicting him. Let us remove him from his position as Nasi.</th>
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<td>Who shall we establish in his place? Shall we establish Rabbi Yehoshua? Rabbi Yehoshua was party to the incident. Shall we establish Rabbi Akiva? Perhaps Rabban Gamliel would cause him to be divinely punished as he lacks the merit of his ancestors.</td>
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<td>Rather, let us establish Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya. He is wise, rich, and a tenth generation descendant of Ezra. He is wise, so if Rabban Gamliel raises a challenge, he will answer it. And he is rich, so if the need arises to pay homage to the Caesar’s court, so he too is able to go and pay homage. And he is a tenth generation descendant of Ezra, so he has the merit of his ancestors, and Rabban Gamliel will be unable to cause him to be punished. They came and said to him: Would the Master consent to being the Head of the Yeshiva? He said to them: I will go and consult with my household. He went and consulted with his wife. She said to him: Perhaps they will remove you. He said to her: Let a person use an expensive goblet one day and let it break tomorrow. She said to him: You have no white hair. That day, he was eighteen years old, a miracle transpired for him and eighteen rows of hair turned white. That explains that which Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya said: I am as one who is seventy years old and he did not say: I am seventy years old....</td>
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לבר יוחנן בן זקיקא

אמרה: של מי צוערה ניילה בר אפרת? ברימא עשתה צוערה, בבריתּוּ בתשעה.

ולבר זונוקִיא, נצרה נמי צוערה, הבא נמצאה, ואמרת: נצבריה!

אמרו: של מי צוערה ניילה בר אפרת? בבריתּוּ בתשעה?

בראש ו yazılı נצעריה כמה עד: אמרו בו מעשה בבכורות, צעריה אשתקד השנה, צעריה נמי הכא, צעריה צדוק, דראבי!

ונעבריה?

אילמי אוני ניילה, דלאו לודת אבות.

אמרו: של מי צוערה ניילה בר אפרת? בא הראביデンא בבי אביה, באו אימלך איזיל: אמר להם.

לך מעברין דלמא: אמרה: באדי אוני יומא, אילמי אוני יומא.

 Artículo de la Asociación de la Universidad de Princeton

Dr. Rachel Rosenthal rarosenthal@jtsa.edu
Rabban Gamliel said: Since this is the situation, I will go and appease Rabbi Yehoshua. When he reached Rabbi Yehoshua’s house, he saw that the walls of his house were black. Rabban Gamliel said to Rabbi Yehoshua: From the walls of your house it is apparent that you are a blacksmith. Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: Woe unto a generation that you are its leader as you are unaware of the difficulties of Torah scholars, how they make a living and how they feed themselves.

Rabban Gamliel said to him: “I insulted you, forgive me.” Rabbi Yehoshua paid him no attention. “Do it in deference to my father.” He was appeased.

They said: Who will go and inform the Sages? This launderer said to them: I will go. Rabbi Yehoshua sent to the Sages to the study hall: The one who wears the uniform will wear the uniform, the one who did not wear the uniform will not say to the one who wears the uniform, remove your uniform and I will wear it. Rabbi Akiva said to the Sages: Lock the gates so that Rabban Gamliel’s servants will not come and disturb the Sages...