



Can Institutions Be Nimble? Community Organizing in Tumultuous Times

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Babylonian Talmud Bava Metzia 84a	
<p>As a result of the quarrel, Rabbi Yoḥanan was offended, which in turn affected Reish Lakish, who fell ill. Rabbi Yoḥanan's sister, who was Reish Lakish's wife, came crying to Rabbi Yoḥanan, begging that he pray for Reish Lakish's recovery. She said to him: Do this for the sake of my children, so that they should have a father. Rabbi Yoḥanan said to her the verse: "Leave your fatherless children, I will rear them" (Jeremiah 49:11), i.e., I will take care of them. She said to him: Do so for the sake of my widowhood. He said to her the rest of the verse: "And let your widows trust in Me."</p> <p>Ultimately, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, Reish Lakish, died. Rabbi Yoḥanan was sorely pained over losing him. The Rabbis said: Who will go to calm Rabbi Yoḥanan's mind and comfort him over his loss? They said: Let Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat go, as his statements are sharp, i.e., he is clever and will be able to serve as a substitute for Reish Lakish. Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat went and sat before Rabbi Yoḥanan. With regard to every matter that Rabbi Yoḥanan would say, Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat would say to him: There is a ruling which is taught in a <i>baraita</i> that supports your opinion. Rabbi Yoḥanan said to him: Are you comparable to the son of Lakish? In my discussions with the son of Lakish, when I would state a matter, he would raise twenty-four difficulties against me in an attempt to disprove my claim, and I would answer him with twenty-four answers, and the halakha by itself would become broadened and clarified. And yet you say to me: There is a ruling which is taught in a <i>baraita</i> that supports your opinion. Do I not know that what I say is good? Being rebutted by Reish Lakish served a purpose; your bringing proof to my statements does not. Rabbi Yoḥanan went around, rending his clothing, weeping and saying: Where are you, son of Lakish? Where are you, son of Lakish? Rabbi Yoḥanan screamed until his mind was taken from him, i.e., he went insane. The Rabbis prayed and requested for God to have mercy on him and take his soul, and Rabbi Yoḥanan died.</p>	<p>חלש דעתיה דרבי יוחנן חלש ריש לקיש אתאי אחתיה קא בכיא אמרה ליה עשה בשביל בני אמר לה (ירמיהו מט, יא) עזבה יתומיך אני אחיה עשה בשביל אלמנותי אמר לה (ירמיהו מט, יא) ואלמנותיך עלי תבטחו נח נפשיה דר' שמעון בן לקיש והוה קא מצטער ר' יוחנן בתריה טובא אמרו רבנן מאן ליזיל ליתביה לדעתיה ניזיל רבי אלעזר בן פדת דמחדדין שמעתתיה אזל יתיב קמיה כל מילתא דהוה אמר רבי יוחנן אמר ליה תניא דמסייעא לך אמר את כבר לקישה בר לקישה כי הוה אמינא מילתא הוה מקשי לי עשרין וארבע קושייתא ומפריקנא ליה עשרין וארבעה פרוקי וממילא רווחא שמעתא ואת אמרת תניא דמסייע לך אטו לא ידענא דשפיר קאמינא הוה קא אזיל וקרע מאניה וקא בכי ואמר היכא את בר לקישה היכא את בר לקישה והוה קא צוח עד דשף דעתיה [מיניה] בעו רבנן רחמי עליה ונח נפשיה</p>

<p>Babylonian Talmud Berkahot 28a</p>	
<p>It was taught: On that day that they removed Rabban Gamliel from his position and appointed Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya in his place, there was also a fundamental change in the general approach of the study hall as they dismissed the guard at the door and permission was granted to the students to enter. Instead of Rabban Gamliel's selective approach that asserted that the students must be screened before accepting them into the study hall, the new approach asserted that anyone who seeks to study should be given opportunity to do so. As Rabban Gamliel would proclaim and say: Any student whose inside, his thoughts and feelings, are not like his outside, i.e., his conduct and his character traits are lacking, will not enter the study hall. The Gemara relates: On that day several benches were added to the study hall to accommodate the numerous students. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Abba Yosef ben Dostai and the Rabbis disputed this matter. One said: Four hundred benches were added to the study hall. And one said: Seven hundred benches were added to the study hall. When he saw the tremendous growth in the number of students, Rabban Gamliel was disheartened. He said: Perhaps, Heaven forbid, I prevented Israel from engaging in Torah study. They showed him in his dream white jugs filled with ashes alluding to the fact that the additional students were worthless idlers. The Gemara comments: That is not the case, but that dream was shown to him to ease his mind so that he would not feel bad.</p>	<p>תָּנָא אוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם, סְלִקוּהוּ לְשׁוּמְרֵי הַפֶּתַח וּבִתְנֵה לְהֵם רְשׁוּת לְתַלְמִידִים לִיכְנֹס. שְׁהִיָּה רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל מְכַרִּיז וְאוֹמֵר: כָּל תַּלְמִיד שֶׁאֵין תּוֹכוֹ כְּבָרוֹ, לֹא יִכְנֹס לְבֵית הַמְדָּרָשׁ. הֵהוּא יוֹמָא אֲתוֹסְפוּ כַּמָּה סְפָסְלִי. אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: פְּלִיגִי בֵּה אַבָּא יוֹסֵף בֶּן דּוֹסִתַּאי וְרַבְּנָן. חַד אָמַר: אֲתוֹסְפוּ אַרְבַּע מָאָה סְפָסְלִי. וְחַד אָמַר: שְׁבַע מָאָה סְפָסְלִי. הָוָה קָא חֲלָשָׁה דְעֵתִיָּה דְרַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל, אָמַר: דְלָמָּא חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם מְנַעַתִּי תוֹרָה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל. אַחְזוּ לִיה בְּחַלְמִיָּה חֲצָבִי חִיּוּרֵי דְמַלְיוּן קִטְמָא. וְלֹא הִיא, הֵהִיא לִלְתוּבֵי דְעֵתִיָּה, הוּא דְאַחְזוּ לִיה.</p>
<p>Leviticus 19:17-18</p>	
<p>You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kin but incur no guilt on their account. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against members of your people. Love your fellow [Israelite] as yourself: I am יהוה</p>	<p>לֹא־תִשְׁנֵא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ הוֹכֵחַ תּוֹכִיחֵהוּ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חָטָא: לֹא־תִקֶּם וְלֹא־תִטַּר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמֹדךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:</p>

Babylonian Talmud Arakhin 16B

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: **“You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall rebuke [hokhe’ah tokhiah] your neighbor, and do not bear sin because of him”** (Leviticus 19:17). Why does the verse specify **“in your heart”**? One **might** have thought that the verse means: **Do not hit him, do not slap him, and do not ruin him** due to hatred. Therefore **the verse states “in your heart.”** This teaches that **the verse speaks of hatred in the heart. From where** is it derived **with regard to** one who **sees an unseemly matter in another that he is obligated to rebuke him? As it is stated: “You shall rebuke [hokhe’ah tokhiah] your neighbor.”** If one **rebuked him** for his action **but he did not accept** the rebuke, **from where** is it derived **that he must rebuke him again? The verse states: “You shall rebuke [hokhe’ah tokhiah],”** and the double language indicates he must rebuke **in any case.** One **might** have thought that one should continue rebuking him **even if his face changes** due to humiliation. Therefore, **the verse states: “Do not bear sin because of him”;** the one giving rebuke may not sin by embarrassing the other person. **It is taught** in a *baraita* that **Rabbi Tarfon says: I would be surprised if there is anyone in this generation who can receive rebuke.** Why? Because **if** the one rebuking **says to him: Remove the splinter from between your eyes,** i.e., rid yourself of a minor infraction, the other **says to him: Remove the beam from between your eyes,** i.e., you have committed far more severe sins. **Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria says: I would be surprised if there is anyone in this generation who knows how to rebuke** correctly, without embarrassing the person he is rebuking. **And Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Nuri says: I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses before me that Akiva was lashed,** i.e., punished, **many times on my account, as I would complain about him before Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel the Great. And all the more so I thereby increased his love** for me. This incident serves **to affirm that** which is stated: **“Do not rebuke a scorner lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you”** (Proverbs 9:8). A wise man wants to improve himself and loves those who assist him in that task.

Translation by Sefaria

תנו רבנן (ויקרא יט, יז) לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך יכול לא יכנו לא יסטרנו ולא יקלקלנו ת"ל בלבבך שנאה שבלב הכתוב מדבר מנין לרואה בחבירו דבר מגונה שחייב להוכיחו שנאמר (ויקרא יט, יז) הוכח תוכיח הוכיחו ולא קבל מנין שיחזור ויוכיחו תלמוד לומר תוכיח מכל מקום יכול אפי' משתנים פניו ת"ל לא תשא עליו חטא תניא א"ר טרפון (תמיהני) אני אם יש בדור הזה שמקבל תוכחה אם אמר לו טול קיסם מבין עיניך אמר לו טול קורה מבין עיניך אמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה תמיהני אם יש בדור הזה שיודע להוכיח ואמר רבי יוחנן בן נורי מעיד אני עלי שמים וארץ שהרבה פעמים לקה עקיבא על ידי שהייתי קובל עליו לפני רבן (שמעון ברבי) וכל שכן שהוספתי בו אהבה לקיים מה שנאמר (משלי ט, ח) אל תוכח לץ פן ישנאך הוכח לחכם ויאהבך

Pirkei Avot 1:2	
Shimon the Righteous was one of the last of the men of the great assembly. He used to say: the world stands upon three things: the Torah, the Temple service, and the practice of acts of piety.	שְׁמֵעוֹן הַצְּדִיק הִיָּה מְשִׁירֵי כְּנֹסֶת הַגְּדוֹלָה. הוּא הִיָּה אוֹמֵר, עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד, עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוֹדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים:
Pirkei Avot 1:18	
Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel used to say: on three things does the world stand: On justice, on truth and on peace, as it is said: “execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates” (Zechariah 8:16).	רַבֵּן שְׁמֵעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אוֹמֵר, עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד, עַל הַדִּין וְעַל הָאֱמֶת וְעַל הַשְּׁלוֹם, שְׁנֹאֲמַר (זְכַרְיָה ח) אֶמֶת וּמִשְׁפָּט שְׁלוֹם שִׁפְטוּ בְּשַׁעְרֵיכֶם:

There is a story of a rabbi, Rabbi Zvi Elimelech, who in the middle of the celebration of Purim suddenly ceased the festivities and turned to his students and said, “Prepare the carriages, it is time for us to fulfill the commandment that appears at the end of the megillah. It is time to blot out Amalek!” The students were scared. They did not understand, but, trusting their rabbi, they prepared the carriages, got in, and took off into the night. The rabbi had the carriages drive down to the nearest inn which was filled with cossacks who were well into their nightly drinking. The rabbi got out of the carriage and strode into the inn, his students cowering behind him. As he walked in, he looked around and picked out the biggest cossack, the one who was obviously in charge, and walked right over to him.

The rabbi stuck out his hand, palm up, and asked the Cossack to dance. There was a silence that swept the room before the Cossack slapped his hand down into the rabbi’s waiting palm and they began to dance wildly throughout the room. The students all went and found their own Cossack partners and soon everyone was tearing up the dance floor.

At the end of the song, the rabbi turns to his partner and says, “I heard that there is a pogrom planned for tomorrow.” The Cossack looked sheepishly at the floor and grumbled in affirmation. The rabbi said, “There will be no pogrom tomorrow.” The Cossacks face brightened and they began to dance again in agreement, hugging and kissing. Needless to say, many drinks were shared as they all danced into the night.

כִּי זִכָּר כָּל-הַמְּעֻשִׂים לְפָנֶיךָ בָּא.

The memories of all creatures are known to You
(High Holiday Mahzor)

My Memory fails me

Things happened.

We both experienced them. You saw them your way—
colored by experiences in your past, or by resentment or impatience.
I saw them my way—colored by fear, by pride, by the fact that I am myself and not you.

So our memories of what happened were very different from the start.
And then, before we knew it, memories hardened into myths and myths into dogma.
Now we find ourselves divided. We stare across the chasm, but we don't see each other.

Wife, Husband • Child • Parent • Friend
Race • Nation • Religious Group

I'm tired of being alone on my side of
the chasm. I'm using up so much
energy fearing and resenting you.
Sometimes I wish you and I could crack
the dogma, peel away the mythology,
and trade memories.

What would it be like if we could see
each other's pictures of the history we share?
If we could see each other?

What we need here, you and I, is a little
humility and a lot of house-cleaning.

Humility: to say, "Only God sees
history whole and knows the whole truth.

All I have is my perception. It's valid, it's
precious, but it's fragmentary. Maybe I ought
to try seeing as God sees, from all the angles."

Housecleaning: Memory is selective,
and I'm carrying around years
of slanted, narrow memories.

I can't see past them.
It must be the same for you.
What we need to do is let some of them go.
Trade a few. Listen.

Maybe, if I ask you how things look to you,
between us we'll see something
we never saw before.

We wish for all humanity a year of broadened vision and shared perspectives.



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