

## Talmudic Personalities

### Shimon Ben Shetach

#### Yehoshua ben Perachya and Jesus

##### Sanhedrin 107b

**The Sages taught: Always have the left hand drive sinners away and the right draw them near,** so that the sinner will not totally despair of atonement. This is **unlike Elisha, who pushed away Gehazi with his two hands** and caused him to lose his share in the World-to-Come, **and unlike Yehoshua ben Perachya, who pushed away Jesus the Nazarene with his two hands.**

§ **What is the incident involving Yehoshua ben Perachya?** The Gemara relates: **When King Yannai was killing the Sages, Yehoshua ben Perachya and Jesus, his student, went to Alexandria of Egypt. When there was peace between King Yannai and the Sages, Shimon ben Shetach sent a message to Yehoshua ben Perachya: From me, Jerusalem, the holy city, to you, Alexandria of Egypt: My sister, my husband is located among you and I sit desolate.** The head of the Sages of **Israel** is out of the country and Jerusalem requires his return.

**Yehoshua ben Perachya** understood the message, **arose, came, and happened** to arrive at a **certain inn** on the way to Jerusalem. **They treated him with great honor. Yehoshua ben Perachya said: How beautiful is this inn. Jesus, his student, said to him: But my teacher, the eyes of the innkeeper's wife are narrow [terutot]. Yehoshua ben Perachya said to him: Wicked one! Do you involve yourself with regard to that matter, the appearance of a married woman? He produced four hundred shofarot and ostracized him.**

**Jesus came before Yehoshua ben Perachya several times and said to him: Accept our, i.e., my, repentance. Yehoshua ben Perachya took no notice of him. One day Yehoshua ben Perachya was reciting Shema and Jesus came before him with the same request. Yehoshua ben Perachya intended to accept his request, and signaled him with his hand to wait until he completed his prayer. Jesus did not understand the signal and thought: He is driving me away. He went and stood a brick upright to serve as an idol and he bowed to it. Yehoshua ben Perachya then said to Jesus: Repent. Jesus said to him: This is the tradition that I received from you: Whoever sins and causes the masses to sin is not given the opportunity to repent. And the Master**

תנו רבנן לעולם תהא שמאל דוחה וימין מקרבת לא כאלישע שדחפו לגחזי בשתי ידיים [ולא כרבי יהושע בן פרחיה שדחפו ליש"ו בשתי ידיים]

הוספה מחסרונות הש"ס: רבי יהושע בן פרחיה מאי הוא בדקטליניה ינאי מלכא לרבנן אזל רבי יהושע בן פרחיה ויש"ו לאלכסנדריא של מצרים כי הוה שלמא שלח ליה שמעון בן שטח מני ירושלים עיר הקודש ליכי אלכסנדרי' של מצרים אחותי בעלי שרוי בתוכך ואנכי יושבת שוממה

קם אתא ואתרמי ליה ההוא אושפיזא עבדו ליה יקרא טובא אמר כמה יפה אנכניא זו אמר ליה רבי עיניה טרוטות אמר ליה רשע בכך אתה עוסק אפיק ארבע מאה שיפורי ושמתיה

אתא לקמיה כמה זמנין אמר ליה קבלן לא הוי קא משגח ביה יומא חד הוה קא קרי קריאת שמע אתא לקמיה סבר לקבולי אחוי ליה בידיה הוא סבר מידחא דחי ליה אזל זקף לבינתא והשתחוה לה אמר ליה הדר בך אמר ליה כך מקובלני ממך כל החוטא ומחטיא את הרבים אין מספיקין בידו לעשות תשובה ואמר מר יש"ו כישף והסית והדיח את ישראל:]

<p>says: <b>Jesus performed sorcery, incited</b> Jews to engage in idolatry, <b>and led Israel astray</b>. Had <b>Yehoshua ben Perahya</b> not caused him to despair of atonement, he would not have taken the path of evil.</p>	
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<p><b>Avot 1:6-7</b></p> <p>Joshua ben Perahiah and Nittai the Arbelite received [the oral tradition] from them. Joshua ben Perahiah used to say: appoint for thyself a teacher, and acquire for thyself a companion and judge all men with the scale weighted in his favor.</p> <p>Nittai the Arbelite used to say: keep a distance from an evil neighbor, do not become attached to the wicked, and do not abandon faith in [divine] retribution.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>אבות א-ז</b></p> <p>יהושע בן פרחיה ונתיאי הארבלים קבלו מהם. יהושע בן פרחיה אומר, עשה לך רב, וקנה לך חבר, והיו דן את כל האדם לכף זכות:</p> <p>נתיאי הארבלים אומר, הרחק משכן רע, ואל תתחבר לרשע, ואל תתיאש מן הפרענות:</p>
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**Likkutei Sihot; Matot-Masei 5742 Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson**

And the explanation is: the Talmud intended to warn even against the kind of rejection perpetrated by Yehoshua ben Perahia. For it is clear that when dealing with Yehoshua ben Perahia, it is inconceivable that he was motivated by personal considerations and the like. Furthermore, even after having rejected him he made an attempt to bring him near; nonetheless, we should be wary of this kind of rejection. After Yehoshua ben Perahia saw the consequences of this conduct, he stressed the teaching of: Judge every man favorably

**Shimon Ben Shetah**

<p><b>Avot 1:8-9</b></p> <p>Judah ben Tabbai and Shimon ben Shetach received [the oral tradition] from them. Judah ben Tabbai said: do not [as a judge] play the part of an advocate; and when the litigants are standing before you, look upon them as if they were [both] guilty; and when they leave your presence, look upon them as if they were [both] innocent, when they have accepted the judgement.</p> <p>Shimon ben Shetach used to say: be thorough in the interrogation of witnesses, and be careful with your words, lest from them they learn to lie.</p>	<p>יהודה בן טבאי ושמעון בן שטח קבלו מהם. יהודה בן טבאי אומר, אל תעש עצמך כעורך הדין. וכשיהיו בעלי דינים עומדים לפניך, יהיו בעיניך כרשעים. וכשנפטרים מלפניך, יהיו בעיניך כזכאים, כשקבלו עליהם את הדין:</p> <p>שמעון בן שטח אומר, הוי מרבה לחקר את העדים, והוי זהיר בדבריך, שמא מתוכם ילמדו לישקר:</p>
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<p>Berakhot 48a</p> <p>The Gemara relates: <b>King Yannai and the queen ate bread together. And since Yannai executed the Sages, there was no one to recite the Grace after Meals blessing on their behalf. He said to his wife: Who will provide us with a man to recite the blessing on our behalf?</b></p>	<p><b>Talmud Yerushalmi Berakhot 7:2</b></p> <p>It has been stated: 300 <i>Nezirim</i> came in the days of Simeon ben Shetah. For 150 of them he found an opening for 150 of them he did not find an opening. He came to king Yannai and said to him: There are here 300 <i>nezirim</i> who need 900 sacrifices. You should give half of</p>
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**She said to him: Swear to me that if I bring you such a man, you will not harass him. He swore, and she brought her brother, Shimon ben Shataḥ. She sat him between the King's throne and hers. The King said to him: Do you see how much honor I am according you? He responded: It is not you who honors me; rather, the Torah honors me, as it is written: "Extol her and she will exalt you; she will bring you to honor when you embrace her" (Proverbs 4:8). Yannai said to his wife: You see that he does not accept authority.**

**They gave Shimon ben Shataḥ a cup of wine over which to recite Grace after Meals. He said: How shall I recite the blessing? Shall I say: Blessed is He from Whom Yannai and his companions have eaten? I have not eaten anything. He drank that cup of wine. They gave him another cup, and he recited the Grace after Meals blessing.** By drinking the first cup he joined the other diners and was therefore eligible to recite Grace after Meals on their behalf.

**Rabbi Abba, son of Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba, said (that Rabbi Yoḥanan said): That which Shimon ben Shataḥ did, reciting Grace after Meals on their behalf, he did on his own, and not in accordance with the accepted *halakha*, as Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba said that Rabbi Yoḥanan said as follows: One who recites Grace after Meals cannot fulfill the obligation of others to recite it until he eats an olive-bulk of grain.**

The Gemara **raises an objection** based on what was taught in a *baraita*: **Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: One who entered and reclined together with those who were dining, even if he only dipped with them a small bit of food in spicy brine that was before them and ate with them only a single dry fig, he joins them.** This *baraita* demonstrates that one need not necessarily eat grain to recite Grace after Meals on their behalf.

The Gemara responds: Indeed, **he joins them, but he cannot satisfy the obligation of the many unless he has eaten an olive-bulk of grain.**

Similarly, this *halakha* was also stated: **Rav Ḥana bar Yehuda said in the name of Rava: Even if he only dipped with them a small bit of food in brine and ate with them only a single dry fig, he joins them. And to satisfy the obligation of the many, he does not satisfy**

them from your side, I shall give half from my side. The king sent him 450 animals. An informer went around and said that the other one had not given anything from his own money. King Yannai heard about it and got angry. Simeon ben Shetaḥ feared and fled After some time, important people from the Persian empire came to king Yannai

At the meal, they said to him: We remember that there was here an old man who gave us a rabbinic discourse. He told them what had happened. They said to him, send and bring him! He sent and gave him his word he came and sat between king and queen. He said to him, why did you trick me? He said, I did not trick you; you with your money and I with my learning, as it is written ([Eccl. 7:12](#)) "In the shadow of wisdom, in the shadow of money He said to him, why did you disappear? He said to him, I heard that my lord was angry with me and I wanted to fulfill the verse ([Is. 26:20](#)) "Hide a little bit until the rage passes;" he used about himself ([Eccl. 7:12](#)): "Knowledge is an advantage, wisdom lets its possessor live." He said to him, why did you sit between king and queen? He said to him, it is written in the book of Ben Sirach "Esteem it and it will raise you and set you between princes." He said, bring him a cup that he may recite Grace. He took the cup and said: "Let us give praise for the food that Yannai and his company ate." He said to him, are you still obstinate as ever? He said to him, what should I say, "for the food that we did not eat?" He said, bring him something that he may eat. They brought, he ate and recited: "For the food that we ate."

their obligation until he eats an olive-bulk of grain.

**Sanhedrin 6:4**

**The place of stoning** from which the condemned man is pushed to his death is a platform **twice the height** of an ordinary person. He is made to stand at the edge of the platform, and then **one of the witnesses** who testified against him **pushes him down by the hips**, so that he falls face up onto the ground. If **he turned over onto his chest**, with his face downward, the witness **turns him over onto his hips**. **And if he dies through this** fall to the ground, the obligation to stone the transgressor is **fulfilled**. **And if** the condemned man does **not die** from his fall, **the second witness takes the stone** that has been prepared for this task **and places**, i.e., casts, **it on his chest**. **And if he dies with** the casting of this first stone, the obligation to stone the transgressor **is fulfilled**. **And if** he does **not die** with the casting of this stone, then **his stoning** is completed **by all of the Jewish people**, i.e., by all the people who assembled for the execution, **as it is stated:** **“The hand of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people”** ([Deuteronomy 17:7](#)). The corpses of all those **who are stoned are hung** after their death; this is **the statement of Rabbi Eliezer**. **And the Rabbis say:** Only the corpse of **the blasphemer**, who has cursed God, **and the corpse of the idol worshipper are hung**. The corpse of **a man is hung facing the people**, but the corpse of a **woman**, out of modesty, is hung with **facing the tree**; this is **the statement of Rabbi Eliezer**. **And the Rabbis say:** the corpse of **a man is hung**, but the corpse of a **woman is not hung**. **Rabbi Eliezer** said to the Rabbis: Did **Shimon ben Shatah** not hang in Ashkelon **women** who were found guilty of witchcraft, proving that the corpse of a woman who is executed is also hung? **They said to him:** No proof can be brought from

סנהדרין ו:ד  
בית הסקילה היה גבוה שתי קומות. אחד מן העדים דחפו על מתניו. נהפך על לבו, הופכו על מתניו. אם מת בה, יצא. ואם לאו, השני נוטל את האבן ונותנה על לבו. אם מת בה, יצא. ואם לאו, רגימתו בכל ישראל, שנגמרו דברים יז (יד) העדים תהיה בו בראשנה להמיתו ויד כל העם באחרנה. כל הנסקלין נתלין, דברי רבי אליעזר. וחכמים אומרים, אינו נתלה אלא המגדף והעובד עבודה זרה. האיש תולין אותו פניו כלפי העם, והאשה פניה כלפי העץ, דברי רבי אליעזר. וחכמים אומרים, האיש נתלה ואין האשה נתלית. אמר להן רבי אליעזר, והלא שמעון בן שטח תלה נשים באשקלון. אמרו לו, שמנים נשים תלה, ואין דנין שנים ביום אחד.

here, as **he hanged eighty women** on that day, **and** the *halakha* is that the same court **may not judge** even **two** people charged with capital transgressions **on the same day**. It is therefore clear that he was not acting in accordance with Torah law, but rather his execution of the eighty women was an extraordinary punishment necessitated by unusually pressing circumstances.

**MISHNAH Hagiga 2:2:** Yose ben Yoezer<sup>110</sup>*The pairs enumerated here were the joint heads of the Pharisaic leadership from Hasmonean to Herodian times, as enumerated in Avot, Chapter 1.* says not to lean on<sup>111</sup>*The verse requires that the owner of a well-being sacrifice lean with his hands on the animal before it is slaughtered (Lev. 3:2,7,13), but there is no indication that omission of the ceremony would in any way disqualify the sacrifice. By tradition, the owner has to push down on the animal with all his force. Doing this on a holiday is at least rabbinically forbidden as illegitimate use of an animal. Now it is explained in Eruvin Chapter 10 that most, but not all, rabbinic restrictions on Sabbath and holidays were disregarded in the Temple. The disagreement is whether the prohibition to push down on an animal is observed in the Temple for holiday sacrifices offered on a holiday or not.,* Yose ben Joḥanan says to lean on. Joshua ben Perahia says not to lean on, Matthew from Arbel says to lean on. Jehudah ben Tabḥai says not to lean on, Simeon ben Shetaḥ says to lean on. Shemaiah says to lean on, Avtalion says not to lean on. Hillel and Menaḥem did not disagree. Menaḥem left and Shammai entered; Hillel says to lean on, Shammai says not to lean on. The first ones were Patriarchs, the second Presidents of the Court.

#### **HALAKHAH:**

<sup>119</sup>*This is a version of the text in Sanhedrin 6:5 (Notes 77 – 82), mainly following the Genizah text there. We have stated: Jehudah ben Ṭabbai was Patriarch, and Simeon ben Shetaḥ President of the Court; there are Tannaim who switch.*

What happened in Alexandria supports him who said, Jehudah ben Tabḥai was Patriarch. [The people of Jerusalem] wanted to appoint him Patriarch in Jerusalem. He fled and went to Alexandria. The people from Jerusalem did write: From the great Jerusalem to the small Alexandria: How long still will my betrothed live in your midst and I am sitting sorrowful about him?

He took leave and started on a ship. He said, I remember the lady of the house who received us; what is she missing? One of his students told him, her eye is damaged. He told him, you have sinned twice; first that you suspected me, and second that you looked at her. Did I say that she was beautiful in looks? I only said that about her deeds. He was angry at him and he went away (died)

What happened in Ascalon supports him who said, Simeon ben Shetaḥ was president. Two pious men were in Ascalon. They ate together, drank together, and studied Torah together. One of them died, and nobody attended his funeral. The son

of Ma`yan the publican died; the entire city stopped working to attend his funeral. The other pious man started crying and said woe, do the haters of Israel have no hope? He was shown in a dream that it was said to him, do not denigrate your Master's children. This one committed one sin and died with it, the other one did one good deed and died with it<sup>122</sup>*It is a general answer to the question צדיק ורע לו רשע וטוב לו "why do the just suffer and the wicked enjoy their lives?" that the wicked enjoy the rewards for their few good deeds and the just are punished for their few sins in this world, to create a clean slate for reward and punishment in the World to Come..* What sin did this pious man commit? Far be it that he committed a sin, but once he put on his head phylacteries before his arm

What good deed did the son of publican Ma`yan do? Far be it that he ever committed a good deed, but once he prepared a breakfast for the city council but they did not come to eat it. He said, let the poor eat it, so it should not go to waste. Some say, he was walking in the street when a loaf fell down from and a poor person picked it up. He did not say anything [in order not to embarrass him]. After days this pious man saw his comrade the pious walking in gardens, in orchards, at water sources, and he saw the son of Ma`yan the publican with his tongue out on the river bank trying in vain to reach the water.

He also saw Miriam, Onion-leaf's daughter. Rabbi Eleazar bar Yose said, she was hanging on her breast nipples. Rabbi Yose ben Hanina said, the hinge of Hell's door was fixed in her ear. He asked them, why? They told him, because she fasted and made herself famous<sup>125</sup>*Fasting without repentance is sinful (Nedarim 9:1 Note 25).* Some say, she fasted one day and was dissolute two. He asked them for how long is she in this state? They told him, until Simeon ben Shetah comes, when we shall remove it from her ear and put it in his ear. [He asked them, and why?]

They told him, because he said, that if I would be elected Patriarch, I would kill sorcerers. But now he was made Patriarch and he did not kill them. In fact, there are eighty women sorcerers in the cave of Ascalon who hurt the world. You shall go and tell him! He told them, I am afraid that since he is Patriarch he will not believe me. They told him, if he will believe you it will be good. In case that he will not believe you, perform a sign in front of him: put your hand on an eye and take it out, put it back and it will be back. He went and told him. He wanted to perform [the miracle] before him, but he told him, I know that you are a pious person; more than that you could do. In fact, I never spoke it with my mouth<sup>91</sup>*Ps. 113:1.* even though I intended so in my thoughts.

Immediately Simeon ben Shetah went on a stormy day and took with him eighty select men. He gave them eighty clean garments, put them in eighty new amphoras, and put them on them upside down. He told them, when I whistle once, put on your garments. When I whistle for the second time, come in all of you together. When you enter, each of you shall choose one and lift her from the ground, since the nature of this sorcery is that separated from the earth it cannot do anything. He went and stood at the entrance to the cave. He said ארים, ארים<sup>126</sup>*The meaning of these words is unknown. Cf. Sanhedrin 6:5, Note 93.,* open for me, I am one of yours. They asked, how did you come here on such a day? He said, I was walking between the raindrops. They asked him, what do you want to do here? He said, to learn and to teach. Every one should make what he is able to. One of them said what she said

and produced bread. One of them said what she said and produced meat. One of them said what she said and produced dishes. One said what she said and produced wine. They asked him, what can you do? He told them, when I whistle twice, I shall bring here eighty select men for your pleasure and entertainment. They told him, that is what we desire. When he whistled the first time, they put on their garments; when he whistled for the second time, they all entered together. He said, every one who comes shall select his mate. They lifted them, took them away, and crucified them<sup>127</sup>*A certain anachronism..* That is what we have stated: “It happened that Simeon ben Shetaḥ hanged women in Ascalon. [They said, he hanged eighty women but one does not try two on the same day.” But the hour needed it<sup>128</sup>*He acted under the king’s police powers, disregarding all judicial rules..]*

**Ketubot 8:11**

[Simeon ben Shetaḥ](#) decreed three things: that a man may do business with the marriage contract of his wife; that children should go to school; and that glassware is susceptible to impurity.

**Bava Batra 21b**

In **the latter clause we arrive at** the case of **schoolchildren** who come to learn Torah in his house, **and** this ruling applies **from** the time of **the ordinance of Yehoshua ben Gamla and onward.**

What was this ordinance? **As Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: Truly, that man is remembered for the good, and his name is Yehoshua ben Gamla. If not for him the Torah would have been forgotten from the Jewish people. Initially, whoever had a father would have his father teach him Torah, and whoever did not have a father would not learn Torah at all.** The Gemara explains: **What verse did they interpret homiletically** that allowed them to conduct themselves in this manner? They interpreted the verse that states: **“And you shall teach them [otam] to your sons”** (Deuteronomy 11:19), to mean: **And you yourselves [atem] shall teach, i.e., you fathers shall teach your sons.**

When the Sages saw that not everyone was capable of teaching their children and Torah study was declining, **they instituted** an ordinance **that teachers of children should be established in Jerusalem.** The Gemara explains: **What verse did they interpret homiletically** that enabled them to do this? They interpreted the verse: **“For Torah emerges from Zion”** (Isaiah 2:3). **But still, whoever had a father, his father ascended with him to Jerusalem and had him taught, but whoever did not have a father, he did not ascend and learn.** Therefore, the Sages **instituted** an ordinance **that teachers of children should be established** in one city **in each and every region [pelekh]. And they brought the students in at the age of sixteen and at the age of seventeen.**

**But** as the students were old and had not yet had any formal education, a student **whose teacher grew angry at him would rebel against him and leave.** It was impossible to hold the youths there against their will. This state of affairs continued **until Yehoshua ben Gamla came and instituted** an ordinance **that teachers of children should be established in each and every province and in each and**

**every town, and they would bring the children in to learn at the age of six and at the age of seven.**

### **Ketubot 82b**

The Gemara discusses the background for the rule that the husband's property is mortgaged for the marriage contract. **Rav Yehuda said: At first they would write for a virgin two hundred dinars and for a widow one hundred dinars.** They would then demand that this amount be available in cash, **and then the men would grow old and would not marry women,** as they did not all possess such large sums of money, **until Shimon ben Shataḥ came and instituted** an ordinance that a man need not place the money aside in practice. Rather, **all of his property is guaranteed for her marriage contract.**

The Gemara comments: **That opinion is also taught in a baraita: At first they would write for a virgin two hundred and for a widow one hundred dinars, and they would grow old and would not marry women,** since the women were concerned that their marriage contract money would be wasted or lost, and they had no guarantee that it would be collected. The Sages therefore **instituted** an ordinance **that they should place it,** the sum of the marriage contract, **in her father's house,** thereby ensuring its safekeeping. **And still** problems arose, as **when he was angry at his wife, he would say to her: Go to your marriage contract,** as it was too easy for them to divorce.

Therefore, the Sages **instituted** an ordinance **that they would place it in her father-in-law's house,** i.e., in her husband's house. And **wealthy women would craft** their marriage contract money into **baskets of silver and of gold,** while **poor ones would craft it** into a **large vessel** for the collection of **urine,** as their marriage contract was large enough only for a small vessel.

**And still, when he was angry at her he would say to her: Take your marriage contract and leave, until Shimon ben Shataḥ came and instituted** an ordinance **that** he does not actually give her the money for her marriage contract. Rather, **he should write to her: All my property is guaranteed for her marriage contract,** and it is not localized to a particular place or object. Consequently, he would need to sell some of his property if he wished to divorce her, and would therefore think carefully before undertaking such a drastic course of action.

### **Tosefta KiFeshuta, Ketubot, p. 370**

It was difficult for them to spend two hundred zuzim for the sake of marrying a woman and because they did not normally marry adult women, the money would belong to her father and the husband would have no profit from it. They therefore amended the arrangement so that the ketuba would be deposited in the wife's father's house for the wife's benefit and were she to die thereafter, her sons would inherit from her. The problem was that when the husband was angry he would say – take your ketuba and leave. Hence they enacted a third decree ordering her to leave the ketuba in her father in law's house until Shimon ben Shetah made a decree making the ketuba a source for negotiation, and he would write "all my property is pledged to your ketuba"

