

Inside the World of the Sages

Simon the Just: Last of the Men of the Great Assembly

Nechama Goldman Barash

<p>Avot 1:1 <u>Moses</u> received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to <u>Joshua</u>, <u>Joshua</u> to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be patient in [the administration of] justice, raise many disciples and make a fence round the Torah.</p>	<p><u>משה</u> קבל תורה מסיני, ומסרה ליהושע, ויהושע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים, ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת הגדולה. הם אמרו שלשה דברים, הוו מתונים בדין, והעמידו תלמידים הרבה, ויעשו סניג לתורה:</p>
---	--

Talmud Yerushalmi Berakhot 7:3

<p>Rebbi Simon in the name of Rebbi Joshua ben Levi: Why are they called the Men of the Great Assembly? Because they returned the Crown to its former status. Rebbi Phineas said, Moses fixed the formula of benediction, (Deut. 10:17) “the Great, Strong, and Awesome God.” Jeremiah said (Jer. 32:18): “the Great, Strong God,” but he left out “Awesome.” Why did he say “the Strong”? He may rightly be called strong because He sees the destruction and is silent. And why did he not say “the Awesome”? Awesome is only the Temple, as it is said (Ps. 68:36): “Awesome is the Eternal from Your holy place.” Daniel said (Dan. 9:4): “the Great and Awesome God,” he did not say “the Strong”; His sons are put in neck-irons, where is His strength? Why did he say: “the Awesome?” He may well be called “the Awesome” by the wonders He did for us in the fiery oven. But when the Men of the Great Assembly came, they reinstated Greatness to its former place, “the Great, Strong, and Awesome God.” Does flesh and blood have power to set limits in these matters? Rebbi Isaac ben Eleazar said, the prophets know that their God is Truth and they will not fawn before him.</p>	<p>רבי סימון בשם רבי יהושע בן לוי למה נקרו אנשי כנסת הגדולה שהתזירו הגדולה ליושנה. אמר רבי פינחס משה התקין מטבעה של תפילה האל הגדול הגיבור והנורא. ורמיה אמר האל הגדול הגיבור ולא אמר הנורא. למה אמר הגיבור לזה נאה לקרות גיבור שהוא רואה חורבן ביתו ושותק. ולמה לא אמר נורא אלא שאין נורא אלא בית המקדש שנאמר נורא אלהים ממקדשך. דניאל אמר האל הגדול והנורא ולא אמר הגבור בניו מסוריו בקולרין היכן היא גבורתו. ולמה אמר הנורא. לזה נאה לקרות נורא בנוראות שעשה לנו בכבשן האש. וכיון שעמדו אנשי כנסת הגדולה התזירו הגדולה ליושנה. האל הגדול הגיבור והנורא ובשר ודם יש בו פח ליתן קצבה לדברים הללו. אמר רבי יצחק בן אלעזר יודעין הו הנביאים שאלוהו אמת ואינו מחניפין לו.</p>
--	---

Simeon the Just: Last of the men of the great assembly circa 300 BCE

<p>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.</p>	<p>שמעון הצדיק היה משגירי כנסת הגדולה. הוא היה אומר, על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים:</p>
--	---

<p>Yoma 69a</p> <p>§ The <i>baraita</i> taught that the priestly vestments may not be worn outside the Temple. The Gemara challenges this: Is it really not permitted to wear priestly vestments in the country? Wasn't it taught in another <i>baraita</i>, in <i>Megillat Ta'anit</i>: The twenty-fifth of Tevet is known as the day of Mount Gerizim, which was established as a joyful day, and therefore eulogizing is not permitted.</p> <p>What occurred on that date? It was on that day that the Samaritans [kutim] requested the House of our Lord from Alexander the Macedonian in order to destroy it, and he gave it to them, i.e., he gave them permission to destroy it. People came and informed the High Priest, Shimon HaTzaddik, of what had transpired. What did he do? He donned the priestly vestments and wrapped himself in the priestly vestments. And the nobles of the Jewish People were with him, with torches of fire in their hands. And all that night, these, the representatives of the Jewish people, approached from this side, and those, the armies of Alexander and the Samaritans, approached from that side, until dawn, when they finally saw one another.</p> <p>When dawn arrived, Alexander said to the Samaritans: Who are these people coming to meet us? They said to him: These are the Jews who rebelled against you. When he reached Antipatris, the sun shone and the two camps met each other. When Alexander saw Shimon HaTzaddik, he descended from his chariot and bowed before him. His escorts said to him: Should an important king such as you bow to this Jew? He said to them: I do so because the image of this man's face is victorious before me on my battlefields, i.e., when I fight I see his image going before me as a sign of victory, and therefore I know that he has supreme sanctity.</p> <p>He said to the representatives of the Jewish people: Why have you come? They said to him: Is it possible that the Temple, the house in which we pray for you and for your kingdom not to be destroyed, gentiles will try to mislead</p>	<p>יומא סט.</p> <p>והתניא: בעשרים ותמשה [בטבת] יום הר גרזים [הוא], דלא למספד?</p> <p>יום שבקשו פותיים את בית אלהינו מאלקסנדרוס מוקדון להחריבו, ונתנו להם. באו והודיעו את שמעון הצדיק. מה עשה? לבש בגדי כהונה, ונתעטף בבגדי כהונה, ומיקרי ישראל עמו, ואבוקות של אור בידיהו. וכל הלילה, הללו הולכים מצד זה, והללו הולכים מצד זה, עד שעלה עמוד השחר.</p> <p>כיון שעלה עמוד השחר, אמר להם: מי הללו? אמרו לו: יהודים שמרדו בה. כיון שהגיע לאנטיפטריס זרקה חמה ופגעו זה בזה. כיון שראה לשמעון הצדיק, ירד ממרכבתו והשתחנה לפניו. אמרו לו: מלך גדול כמותך ישתחנה ליהודי זה!? אמר להם: דמות דיוקנו של זה מנצחת לפני בבית מלחמתי.</p> <p>אמר להם: למה באתם? אמרו: אפשר בית שמתפללים בו עליה ועל מלכותך שלא תתקרב, ותעוד גוים להחריבו? אמר להם: מי הללו? אמרו לו: פותיים הללו, שעומדים לפניך. אמר להם: הרי הם מסורין בידיכם.</p> <p>מיד נקבום בעקביהם ותלאום בזנבי סוסיהם, והיו מגרין אותן על הקוצים ועל הברקנים, עד שהגיעו להר גרזים. כיון שהגיעו להר גרזים — חרשוהו, ונרעוהו פרשינו, כדרך שבקשו לעשות לבית אלהינו. ואותו היום עשאוהו יום טוב.</p>
---	--

<p>you into destroying it, and we would remain silent and not tell you? He said to them: Who are these people who want to destroy it? The Jews said to him: They are these Samaritans who stand before you. He said to them: If so, they are delivered into your hands to deal with them as you please.</p> <p>Immediately, they stabbed the Samaritans in their heels and hung them from their horses' tails and continued to drag them over the thorns and thistles until they reached Mount Gerizim. When they arrived at Mount Gerizim, where the Samaritans had their temple, they plowed it over and seeded the area with leeks, a symbol of total destruction. This was just as they had sought to do to the House of our Lord. And they made that day a festival to celebrate the salvation of the Temple and the defeat of the Samaritans.</p>	
--	--

<p>Sotah 33a And there was another incident involving Shimon HaTzaddik, who heard a Divine Voice emerging from the House of the Holy of Holies that was saying: The decree that the enemy intended to bring against the Temple is annulled, and Gaskalgas, Caligula, has been killed and his decrees have been voided. And people wrote down that time that the Divine Voice was heard, and later found that it matched exactly the moment that Caligula was killed. The Gemara concludes: And this Divine Voice was speaking in the Aramaic language.</p>	<p>וְשׁוֹב מֵעֵשָׂה בְּשִׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק שִׁשְׁמַע בֵּת קוֹל מִבֵּית קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוּשִׁים שֶׁהוּא אוֹמֵר בְּטִילת עֲבִידתָא דְאָמַר שְׁנָאָה לְאַיִתָאָה עַל הַיְכָלָא וְנִהְרַג גַּסְקַלְגַּס וּבִטְלוּ גְזֵירוֹתָיו וְכָתְבוּ אוֹתָהּ שְׁעָה וְכִיּוּנוּ וּבְלִשׁוֹן אַרְמִי הִיא אוֹמֵר</p>
---	---

<p>Nedarim 9b</p> <p>As it is taught in a baraita that Rabbi Shimon HaTzaddik said: In all my days as a priest, I never ate the guilt-offering of a ritually impure nazirite except for one occasion. One time, a particular man who was a nazirite came from the South and I saw that he had beautiful eyes and was good looking, and the fringes of his hair were arranged in curls. I said to him: My son, what did you see that made you decide to destroy this beautiful hair of yours by becoming a nazirite? A nazirite must shave off his hair at the completion of his term. If he becomes impure before the completion of his term, he shaves off his hair and starts his term of naziriteship again.</p> <p>He said to me: I was a shepherd for my father in my city, and I went to draw water from the spring, and I looked at my reflection [babavua] in the water and my evil inclination</p>	<p>גְּדָרִים ט': דְּתַנְיָא, אָמַר (רַבִּי) שְׁמַעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק: מִיָּמַי לֹא אָכַלְתִּי אֲשֶׁם נְזִיר טָמֵא אֶלָּא אֶחָד. פַּעַם אַחַת בָּא אֶדָם אֶחָד נְזִיר מִן הַדְּרוֹם, וְרָאִיתִיו שֶׁהוּא יָפֵה עֵינָיִם וְטוֹב רוּאֵי וְקוֹצוֹתָיו סְדוּרוֹת לוֹ תַלְמָלִים. אָמַרְתִּי לוֹ: בְּנִי, מָה רָאִיתָ לְהַשְׁחִית אֶת שְׁעָרְךָ זֶה הַנְּאָה? אָמַר לִי: רוּעָה הָיִיתִי לְאַבָּא בְּעִירִי, הִלְכְתִּי לְמִלְאוֹת מַיִם מִן הַמַּעְיָן וְנִסְתַּמְכַּלְתִּי בְּבּוּאָה שְׁלִי, וּפְחַז עָלַי יָצְרִי וּבְקוֹשׁ לְטוֹרְדָנִי מִן הָעוֹלָם. אָמַרְתִּי לוֹ: רְשָׁע! לָמָּה אַתָּה מַתְנַאֵה בְּעוֹלָם שְׂאִיגוּ שְׁלָךְ, בְּמִי שֶׁהוּא עֲתִיד לְהִיּוֹת רַמָּה וְתוֹלַעָה? הַעֲבוּדָה, שְׂאִיגְלַחְךָ לְשָׂמַיִם! מִיָּד עָמַדְתִּי וְנִשְׁקַתִּיו עַל רֵאשׁוֹ, אָמַרְתִּי לוֹ: בְּנִי, כְּמוֹךָ יָרְבוּ נוֹזְרֵי נְזִירוֹת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. עָלֶיךָ הַפְּתוּב אוֹמֵר "אִישׁ כִּי יִפְלֵא לְגֵדֵר נְזִיר לְהַזִּיר לֵה"."</p>
--	--

quickly overcame me and sought to expel me from the world. I said to myself: Wicked one! Why do you pride yourself in a world that is not yours? Why are you proud of someone who will eventually be food in the grave for worms and maggots, i.e., your body? I swear by the Temple service that I shall shave you for the sake of Heaven.

Shimon HaTzaddik continues the narrative: **I immediately arose and kissed him on his head. I said to him: My son, may there be more who take vows of naziriteship like you among the Jewish people. About you the verse states: "When either a man or a woman shall clearly utter a vow, the vow of a nazirite, to consecrate himself to the Lord" (Numbers 6:2).**

Tosefta Sotah 13:7

So long as Simeon the Just was alive the Western Lamp remained permanently lit. When he died, they went and found it extinguished. From that time onward, sometimes they found it extinguished and sometimes lit.

So long as Simeon the Just was alive the altar fire was perpetual. When they arranged it in the morning it would gain in intensity throughout the day and they were able to offer the daily burnt-offerings and additional offerings, with their libations. And they did not add to it more than two loads of woods with the daily burnt-offering of twilight so as to fulfill the commandment of adding wood, as it is said: "the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it, it shall not go out; the priest shall burn wood on it every morning" [Leviticus 6:5]. After Simeon the Just died, the power of the altar fire diminished. For even after they had laid it out in the morning, they still needed to add wood to it all day long.

So long as Simeon the Just was alive, the Two Loaves and the Showbread were blessed. The Two Loaves were divided on Atzeret among the priests and the Showbread on each festival to all the watches. Some of them ate and were sated, while others ate and left bread over. And no one received more than an olive's bulk. But when Simeon the Just died, the Two Loaves and the Showbread were no longer blessed. The modest priests kept their hands off the bread, and while the gluttons divided it up among themselves, none of them received more than the size of a bean.

The year in which Shimon the Righteous died [he said to them] "in this year I will die" "how do you know this?" they responded. He (Shimon the Righteous) responded: "all of the Yom

תוספתא סוטה יג:ז

כל זמן שהיה שמעון הצדיק קיים [היתה] נר מערבי תדיר משמת הלכו ומצאוהו שכבה מכאן ואילך מוצאין אותה פעמים כבה פעמים [דולק] כל זמן שהיה שמעון הצדיק קיים היתה מערכה תדירה כשמסדרין אותה בשחרית היתה מתגברת והולכות כל היום כולו והיו מקריבין עליה תמידין ומוספין ונסכיהן ולא היו מוסיפין עליה אלא שני גזרי עצים עם תמיד של בין הערבים כדי לקיים מצות [עצים] שנאמר (ויקרא ו:ה') ובער עליה הכהן משמת שמעון הצדיק תשש כחה של מערכה כשמסדרין אותה [משחרית] לא היו נמנעין מלהוסיף עליה עצים כל היום כולו כל זמן שהיה שמעון הצדיק קיים ברכה נכנסת בשתי [הלחם] ובלחם הפנים שתי הלחם מתחלקת בעצרת לכהנים ולחם הפנים ברגל לכל המשמרות [לאנשי משמר] יש מהן שאוכלין ושובעין ויש שאוכלין ומותירין ולא עלה ביד כל אחד ואחד אלא כזית משמת שמעון הצדיק לא היתה ברכה נכנסת לא בשתי הלחם ולא בלחם הפנים הצנועין מושכין ידיהן והגרגרנין חולקין ביניהם ולא עלה ביד כל אחד ואחד אלא כפול. מעשה בכהן אחד מצפורי שנטל חלקו וחלק חבירו ואעפ"כ לא עלה בידו אלא כפול והיו קורין אותו בן [חמסן] עד היום .

שנה שמת בה שמעון הצדיק [אמר להם בשנה זו אני] מת אמרו לו מנין אתה יודע אמר להם כל ימות הכפורים היה זקן [אחד לובש] בגדים לבנים ומתכסה לבנים נכנס עמי [ויוצא] עמי שנה זו נכנס עמי ולא יצא לאהרן הרגל חלה שבעת ימים ומת משמת שמעון הצדיק פסקו מלברך בשם <ס"א> [נמנעו אחיו מלברך בשם].

Kippur days there was an old man dressed in all white who would go with me into the holy of holies and leave with me, on this year he went in with me but did not come out with me." Seven days passed after the holiday and he died. From the time of the death of Rabbi Shimon the Righteous they ceased blessing in the name of Hashem.

Menachot 109a-b

מתני' הפהנים ששמשו בבית חוניו – לא שמשו במקדש שבירושלים, ואין צריך לומר לדבר אחר, שצאמר: "אף לא יעלו פהני הבמות אל מזבח ה' בירושלם כי אם אכלו מצות בקרב אהיהם". הרי אלו כבעלי מומין – חולקין ואוקלין ולא מקריבין.

MISHNA: The priests who served in the temple of Onias may not serve in the Temple in Jerusalem; and needless to say, if they served for something else, a euphemism for idolatry, they are disqualified from service in the Temple. As it is stated: “Nevertheless the priests of the private altars did not come up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, but they did eat *matza* among their brethren” (II Kings 23:9). The halakhic status of these priests is like that of blemished priests in that they receive a share in the distribution of the meat of the offerings and partake of that meat, but they do not sacrifice offerings or perform any of the sacrificial rites.

§ The mishna teaches: **And needless to say, if priests served for something else, a euphemism for idolatry, they are disqualified from service in the Temple.** The Gemara comments: **From the fact that it says: Needless to say, if they served for something else, by inference, the temple of Onias is not a temple of idol worship, but rather a temple devoted to the worship of God. It is taught in a *baraita* like the one who says that the temple of Onias is not a temple of idol worship. As it is taught: During the year in which Shimon HaTzaddik died, he said to his associates: This year, he will die, euphemistically referring to himself. They said to him: From where do you know? Shimon HaTzaddik said to them: In previous years, every Yom Kippur, upon entering the Holy of Holies, I had a prophetic vision in which I would be met by an old man who was dressed in white, and his head was wrapped in white, and he would enter the Holy of Holies with me, and he would leave with me. But this year, I was met by an old man who was dressed in black, and his head was wrapped in black, and he entered the Holy of Holies with me, but he did not leave with me. Shimon HaTzaddik understood this to be a sign that his death was impending. Indeed, after the pilgrimage festival of *Sukkot*, he was ill for seven days and died. And his fellow priests refrained from reciting the Priestly Benediction with the ineffable name of God. At the time of his death, he said to the Sages: Onias, my son, will serve as High Priest in my stead. Shimi, Onias’ brother, became jealous of him, as Shimi was two and a half years older than Onias. Shimi said to Onias treacherously: Come and I will teach you the order of the service of the High Priest. Shimi dressed Onias in a tunic [*be'unkeli*] and girded him with a ribbon [*betziltzul*] as a belt, i.e., not in the vestments of the High Priest, and stood him next to the altar. Shimi said to his fellow priests: Look what this man vowed and fulfilled for his beloved, that he had said to her: On the day that I serve in the High Priesthood I will wear your tunic and gird your ribbon. The fellow priests of Onias wanted to kill him because he had disgraced the Temple service with his garments. Onias ran away from them and they ran after him. He went to Alexandria in Egypt and built an altar there, and sacrificed offerings upon it for the sake of idol worship. When the Sages heard of the matter they said: If this person, Shimi, who did not enter the position of High Priest, acted with such jealousy, all the more so will one who enters a prestigious position rebel if that position is taken away from him. This is the statement of Rabbi Meir. According to Rabbi Meir, the temple of Onias was built for idol worship. Rabbi Yehuda said to him: The incident was not like this. Rather, Onias did not accept the position of High Priest**

because his brother Shimi was two and a half years older than him, so Shimi was appointed as High Priest. **And even so**, even though Onias himself offered the position to Shimi, **Onias was jealous of his brother Shimi**. Onias said to Shimi: **Come and I will teach you the order of the service of the High Priest. And Onias dressed Shimi in a tunic and girded him in a ribbon and stood him next to the altar. Onias said to his fellow priests: Look what this man, Shimi, vowed and fulfilled for his beloved**, that he had said to her: **On the day that I serve in the High Priesthood I will wear your tunic and gird your ribbon. His fellow priests wanted to kill Shimi**. Shimi then **told them the entire incident**, that he had been tricked by his brother Onias, so the priests **wanted to kill Onias**. Onias **ran away from them, and they ran after him**. Onias **ran to the palace of the king, and they ran after him**. **Anyone who saw him would say: This is him, this is him**, and he was not able to escape unnoticed. Onias **went to Alexandria in Egypt and built an altar there, and sacrificed offerings upon it for the sake of Heaven. As it is stated: “In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at its border, to the Lord”** (Isaiah 19:19). According to Rabbi Yehuda, the temple of Onias was dedicated to the worship of God. **And when the Sages heard of the matter they said: If this one, Onias, who fled from the position of High Priest and offered it to his brother, still was overcome with such jealousy to the point where he tried to have Shimi killed, all the more so will one who wants to enter a prestigious position be jealous of the one who already has that position.** § As a corollary to the statement of the Sages with regard to one who is jealous and wants the position of another, **it is taught in a baraita that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Peraḥya said: Initially, in response to anyone who would say to me: Ascend to the position of Nasi, I would tie him up and place him in front of a lion out of anger for his suggestion. Now that I have become the Nasi, in response to anyone who tells me to leave the position, I would throw a kettle [kumkum] of boiling water at him out of anger at his suggestion.** It is human nature that after one ascends to a prestigious position he does not wish to lose it. **As evidence of this principle, Saul initially fled from the kingship, as he did not wish to be king, as stated in the verse: “When they sought him he could not be found... Behold he has hidden himself among the baggage”** (I Samuel 10:21–22). **But when he ascended to the kingship he tried to kill David**, who he thought was trying to usurp his authority (see I Samuel, chapters 18–27).