

## Bava Metzia 59a-59b

Tanur shel Akhnai

תנן התם התכו חוליות ונתן חול בין חוליא לחוליא ר"א מטטר והכמים מטמאין

§ Apropos the topic of verbal mistreatment, **we learned** in a mishna **there** (*Kelim* 5:10): **If one cut an earthenware oven widthwise into segments, and placed sand between each and every segment, Rabbi Eliezer deems it ritually pure.** Because of the sand, its legal status is not that of a complete vessel, and therefore it is not susceptible to ritual impurity. **And the Rabbis deem it ritually impure,** as it is functionally a complete oven.

וזה הוא תנור של עכנאי מאי עכנאי אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל שהקיפו דברים כעכנא זו וטמאוהו תנא באותו היום ולם ולא קיבלו הימנו השיב רבי אליעזר כל תשובות שבע

**And this is known as the oven of akhnai.** The Gemara asks: **What** is the relevance of *akhnai*, a snake, in this context? **Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said:** It is characterized in that manner due to the fact **that** the Rabbis **surrounded it with their statements like this snake**, which often forms a coil when at rest, **and deemed it impure.** The Sages **taught: On that day**, when they discussed this matter, **Rabbi Eliezer answered all possible answers in the world** to support his opinion, **but the Rabbis did not accept his explanations from him.**

אמר להם אם הלכה כמותי חרוב זה יוכיח נעקר חרוב ממקומו מאה אמה ואמרי לה ארבע מאות אמה אמרו לו אין מביאין ראיה מן החרוב חזר ואמר להם אם הלכה כמותי אמת המים יוכיחו חזרו אמת המים לאחוריהם אמרו לו אין המים מביאין ראיה מאמת

After failing to convince the Rabbis logically, Rabbi Eliezer **said to them: If the *halakha* is in accordance with my opinion, this carob tree will prove it.** The carob tree was uprooted from its place one hundred cubits, and some say four hundred cubits. The Rabbis **said to him: One does not cite halakhic proof from the carob tree.** Rabbi Eliezer **then said to them: If the *halakha* is in accordance with my opinion, the stream will prove it.** The water in the stream **turned backward** and began flowing in the opposite direction. **They said to him: One does not cite halakhic proof from a stream.**

חזר ואמר להם אם הלכה כמותי כותלי בית המדרש יוכיחו הטו כותלי בית המדרש ליפול גער בהם רבי יהושע אמר מה טיבכם לא נפלו מפני כבודו של רבי יהושע ולא זקפו מפני להם אם תלמידי חכמים מנצחים זה את זה בהלכה אתם כבודו של ר"א ועדיין מטיין ועומדין

Rabbi Eliezer **then said to them: If the *halakha* is in accordance with my opinion, the walls of the study hall will prove it.** The walls of the study hall **leaned inward and began to fall.** **Rabbi Yehoshua scolded the walls and said to them: If Torah scholars are contending with each other in matters of *halakha*, what is the nature of your involvement in this dispute?** The Gemara relates: The walls **did not fall because of the deference due Rabbi Yehoshua, but they did not straighten because of the deference due Rabbi Eliezer, and they still remain leaning.**

חזר ואמר להם אם הלכה כמותי מן השמים יוכיחו יצאתה בת קול ואמרה מה לכם אצל ר"א שהלכה כמותו בכ"מ

Rabbi Eliezer **then said to them: If the *halakha* is in accordance with my opinion, Heaven will prove it.** A Divine Voice emerged from Heaven and **said: Why are you differing with Rabbi Eliezer, as the *halakha* is in accordance with his opinion in every place that he expresses an opinion?**

הרות הנתן רבכש הימרי יבר רמא איה מימשב אל יאמ איה מימשב אל (דברים ל, יבעמד רבי יהושע על רגליו ואמר )  
ותנ יבר היחכשא תוטהל מיבר ירחא (שמות כג, במהר סיני אין אנו משגיחין בבת קול שכבר כתבת בהר סיני בתורה )  
לאליהו א"ל מאי עביד קוב"ה בההיא שעתא א"ל קא חייך ואמר נצחוני בני נצחוני בני

**Rabbi Yehoshua stood on his feet and said:** It is written: **“It is not in heaven”** ([Deuteronomy 30:12](#)). The Gemara asks: **What** is the relevance of the phrase **“It is not in heaven”** in this context? **Rabbi Yirmeya says:** Since **the Torah was already given at Mount Sinai, we do not regard a Divine Voice, as You already wrote at Mount Sinai, in the Torah: “After a majority to incline”** ([Exodus 23:2](#)). Since the majority of Rabbis disagreed with Rabbi Eliezer’s opinion, the *halakha* is not ruled in accordance with his opinion. The Gemara relates: Years after, **Rabbi Natan encountered Elijah the prophet and said to him: What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do at that time, when Rabbi Yehoshua issued his declaration? Elijah said to him: The Holy One, Blessed be He, smiled and said: My children have triumphed over Me; My children have triumphed over Me.**

אמרו אותו היום הביאו כל טהרות שטיהר ר"א ושרפום באש ונמנו עליו וברכיהו ואמרו מי ילך ויודיעו אמר להם ר"ע  
א מחריב את כל העולם כולו אני אלך שמא ילך אדם שאינו הגון ויודיעו ונמצ

The Sages **said:** On that day, the Sages **brought all the ritually pure items deemed pure by the ruling of Rabbi Eliezer with regard to the oven and burned them in fire, and the Sages reached a consensus in his regard and ostracized him. And the Sages said: Who will go and inform him of his ostracism? Rabbi Akiva, his beloved disciple, said to them: I will go, lest an unseemly person go and inform him in a callous and offensive manner, and he would thereby destroy the entire world.**

מה עשה ר"ע לבש שחורים ונתעטף שחורים וישב לפניו ברחוק ארבע אמות אמר לו ר"א עקיבא מה יום מיומים אמר  
לו רבי כמדומה לי שחבירים בדילים ממך אף הוא קרע בגדיו וחלץ מנעליו ונשמט וישב על גבי קרקע

**What did Rabbi Akiva do? He wore black and wrapped himself in black,** as an expression of mourning and pain, **and sat before Rabbi Eliezer at a distance of four cubits,** which is the distance that one must maintain from an ostracized individual. **Rabbi Eliezer said to him: Akiva, what is different about today from other days,** that you comport yourself in this manner? **Rabbi Akiva said to him: My teacher, it appears to me that your colleagues are distancing themselves from you.** He employed euphemism, as actually they distanced Rabbi Eliezer from them. **Rabbi Eliezer too, rent his garments and removed his shoes,** as is the custom of an ostracized person, **and he dropped from his seat and sat upon the ground.**

זלגו עיניו דמעות לקה העולם שליש בזיתים ושליש בחטים ושליש בשעורים ויש אומרים אף בצק שבידי אשה טפח  
מקום שנתן בו עיניו ר"א נשרף תנא אך גדול היה באותו היום שבכל

The Gemara relates: **His eyes shed tears,** and as a result **the entire world was afflicted: One-third of its olives were afflicted, and one-third of its wheat, and one-third of its barley. And some say that even dough kneaded in a woman’s hands spoiled.** The Sages **taught: There was great anger on that day, as any place that Rabbi Eliezer fixed his gaze was burned.**

ואף ר"ג היה בא בספינה עמד עליו נחשול לטבעו אמר כמדומה לי שאין זה אלא בשביל ר"א בן הורקנוס עמד על רגליו ל עולם גלוי וידוע לפניך שלא לכבודי עשיתי ולא לכבוד בית אבא עשיתי אלא לכבודך שלא ירבו ואמר רבוננו ש מחלוקות בישראל נה הים מזעפו

**And even Rabban Gamliel**, the *Nasi* of the Sanhedrin at Yavne, the head of the Sages who were responsible for the decision to ostracize Rabbi Eliezer, **was coming on a boat** at the time, and **a large wave swelled over him** and threatened **to drown him**. Rabban Gamliel **said: It seems to me that this is only for the sake of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus**, as God punishes those who mistreat others. Rabban Gamliel **stood on his feet and said: Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known before You that neither was it for my honor that I acted** when ostracizing him, **nor was it for the honor of the house of my father that I acted; rather**, it was **for Your honor, so that disputes will not proliferate in Israel**. In response, **the sea calmed from its raging**.

אימא שלום דביתהו דר"א אחתיה דר"ג הואי מההוא מעשה ואילך לא הוה שבקה ליה לר"א למיפל על אפיה ההוא יומא אבבא אפיקא ליה ריפתא ריש ירחא הוה ואיחלף לה בין מלא לחסר איכא דאמרי אתא עניא וקאי

The Gemara further relates: **Imma Shalom, the wife of Rabbi Eliezer, was the sister of Rabban Gamliel. From that incident forward, she would not allow Rabbi Eliezer to lower his head** and recite the *tahanun* prayer, which includes supplication and entreaties. She feared that were her husband to bemoan his fate and pray at that moment, her brother would be punished. **A certain day was** around the day of **the New Moon, and she** inadvertently **substituted a full** thirty-day month **for a deficient** twenty-nine-day month, i.e., she thought that it was the New Moon, when one does not lower his head in supplication, but it was not. **Some say that a pauper came and stood at the door, and she took bread out to him**. The result was that she left her husband momentarily unsupervised.

אשכחתי דנפל על אנפיה אמרה ליה קום קטלית לאחי אדהכי נפק שיפורא מבית רבן גמליאל דשכיב אמר לה מנא ידעת אמרה ליה כך מקובלני מבית אבי אבא כל השערים ננעלים חוץ משערי אונאה

When she returned, **she found him** and saw **that he had lowered his head** in prayer. **She said to him: Arise, you already killed my brother. Meanwhile**, the sound of a *shofar* emerged **from the house of Rabban Gamliel** to announce **that the Nasi had died**. Rabbi Eliezer **said to her: From where did you know** that your brother would die? **She said to him: This is the tradition that I received from the house of the father of my father: All the gates** of Heaven are apt to be **locked, except for the gates** of prayer for victims of verbal **mistreatment**.