

should listen to him. But since they do know how to calculate [as accurately] as he, he should listen to them."

10. Probably R. Hananiah was persuaded of his error. But the pronoun might refer to R. Yehuda, who hastened to correct the situation.
11. The high priest had to remain awake throughout the night of Yom Kippur. Priests and sages read to him from the lesser-known books of the Bible to keep him attentive.
12. That is, since he built them up with his first proclamation, he can no longer discredit them.
13. Hananiah was a Levite, so they derisively suggest that he play a musical instrument.
14. See Joshua 22:10-34. Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh built an altar in their territory on the west of the Jordan. Pinhas the Priest and the Israelites charged them with turning to foreign gods. They explain that they built the altar as a sign of their faith lest in the future the Israelites consider them aliens that "have no share in YHWH" (Josh 10:25-27).

PART III

CHAPTER 12. CONFLICT IN THE ACADEMY

1. See David Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); Jack N. Lightstone, *The Rhetoric of the Babylonian Talmud, Its Social Meaning and Context* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1994).
2. For descriptions of the Geonic academies, see Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 35-53.
3. See Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1997), 195-214.
4. The Yerushalmi mentions the benches simply to describe the setting (G). The Bavli relates that the benches were added at that time (B).
5. It also relates to the theme of lineage.
6. To facilitate comparisons I have labeled the corresponding paragraphs in the two stories with the same letter: upper case for the Yerushalmi; lower case for the Bavli. Because the Bavli has supplemented and expanded the Yerushalmi's account (or another similar version), the labeling of the paragraphs in the Yerushalmi is not consecutive. Additional literature: Devora Steinmetz, "Must the Patriarch Know 'Utzim? The

Nasi as Scholar in Babylonian *Aggadah*," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 23 (1998), 163-90; Robert Goldenberg, "The Deposition of Rabban Gamaliel II: An Examination of the Sources," *Persons and Institutions in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, ed. William Scott Green (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 9-48; Alon, *The Jews in Their Land*, 119-31, 308-22.

7. The story also appears in Yerushalmi Taanit 4:1, 67d.
8. This question was debated throughout rabbinic times. Post-talmudic codes compromised by ruling that the evening prayer is technically optional but has become an accepted practice by the people and therefore must be considered obligatory.
9. The functions of these offices are not completely clear. The *meturgeman* (or *turgeman*) was apparently a human loudspeaker, a sage who stood next to the teacher and yelled out his words to the assembly. The *hazzan* seems to have been an officer who directed the proceedings in the academy.
10. The text here is difficult and may be defective. The sages apparently interrupt the study-session, send the students home and criticize Rabban Gamaliel for constantly humiliating them.
11. He miraculously aged so that he looked appropriate for his new position; see the parallel Bavli version (d). Alternatively, this line can be understood as a straightforward description: "He was sixteen years old, and his entire head (prematurely) had become full of white hair," thus making him look older and more distinguished.
12. The phrase also appears in Mishna Yadaim 4:2 and Mishna Zevahim 1:3. These Mishnas mention that certain rulings were made "on the day they seated R. Eleazar b. Azariah in the assembly." This comment claims that the appointment of R. Eleazar described in E is the same day mentioned in these Mishnas.
13. The rows of students resembled the rows of the vines in a vineyard. The editorial comment suggests that the configuration of benches and a fence in G explains why the Mishna elsewhere uses the metaphor of a vineyard to describe the rabbinic assembly.
14. Apparently to inform him that R. Yehoshua, the offended party, had accepted Rabban Gamaliel's apology.
15. See the introduction. The water for the ritual of the red heifer must be taken from a stream or other "living" body of water, the ashes from the burned heifer. Cave water and ordinary ashes are unfit for ritual use.
16. And usher him back into office.
17. The second position in the hierarchy.

18. The sages are called shield-bearers because they wage the war of Torah; see the introduction to the story.
19. See note 9 of this chapter.
20. See chapter 10 herein.
21. The reference is to a similar story in which R. Yehoshua and Rabban Gamaliel answer R. Zadok's question about a blemished firstling in opposite ways. Rabban Gamaliel again humiliates R. Yehoshua in the academy, and the people tell Hurspit to stop (Bavli Bekhorot 36a).
22. The merit of his illustrious ancestors will protect him. But Akiba has no such merit to ward off evil.
23. R. Eleazar applies this principle of temple law—that once an object or sacrifice takes on a certain level of holiness it cannot be reduced to a less holy state—to his situation. Once he has been promoted to the position of head of the academy he will not be demoted.
24. In context the phrase means "about seventy." The comment interprets the phrase to mean "I am [in appearance] as [if I were] seventy," a response to his white hair. This source is also quoted in the Passover Haggada.
25. The castrs with ashes symbolize unworthy students, students whose insides (personal character) are as worthless as ash.
26. See note 12 of this chapter.
27. That is, whatever separates has the status of the majority from which it separates. Here Yehuda the Ammonite separated from the latter-day Ammonites, those already mixed with other nations. He therefore has the status of the majority, the mixture, not the minority, the Ammonites. Most nations may convert to Judaism.
28. Apparently he realizes that the presence of numerous students helps to resolve disputes. He therefore decides to change his ways.
29. Another example of the theme of lineage.
30. R. Akiba believes that the laundryman is a servant of Rabban Gamaliel who has come to wage the case for his reinstatement.
31. In this tradition R. Yehoshua asks his students what new teaching they heard that day in the study-house and "whose Sabbath was it" to preach—who gave the homily. They answer that it was the Sabbath of R. Eleazar b. Azariah. This comment explains R. Yehoshua's question in terms of the final compromise worked out in the story.
32. For a superb literary analysis of the Bavli, see Steinmetz, "Must the Patriarch Know 'Ugzin'?" Steinmetz discerns a chiastic structure based on the following correspondences (I have modified her divisions slightly). Sections *a/o*: in an anonymous student provokes the controversy; in o that

student is identified. Sections *b/n*: in b the academy consists of shield-bearers and conflict rages; in n a compromise is made to resolve the conflict. Sections *c/m*: in c R. Yehoshua's speech uses imagery of living and dead; in m R. Yehoshua speaks using imagery of sprinkling, a ritual that purified the living from contact with the dead. Section *d/l*: in d they depose Rabban Gamaliel who troubles R. Yehoshua; R. Akiba is mentioned; in l R. Yehoshua instructs the sages to reinstate Gamaliel; R. Akiba is mentioned. Sections *e/k*: *e* is set in R. Eleazar b. Azariah's house; he does not look like a head of the academy; *k* is set in R. Yehoshua's house; he does not look like a sage but like a smith. Sections *f/j*: in f they allow students to enter the academy; in j they allow the Ammonite proselyte to enter the congregation. Sections *g/i*: in g they add benches for the increased students; in i Torah increases as they formulate a new tractate and solve all their questions. Section *h* is the center of the chi-asm and points to the main theme: Rabban Gamaliel held back Torah from Israel by his restrictive policies. The dream emphasizes the contrast between inside and outside, also an important theme of the story. Besides the chiastic structure, there are several tripartite units (*d, e, n*). The word "distress" (*tsar*) is a keyword, appearing in sections *d, h, k, l*.

CHAPTER 13. LEADERSHIP OF THE ACADEMY

1. In this case the Babylonian storytellers expanded and transformed an earlier Palestinian story to such an extent that the literary antecedent can be discerned only with difficulty. The earlier story appears in Yerushalmi Bikkurim 3:3, 65c: "When R. Meir would go up and study in the house of assembly, all the people would see him and rise before him. When they heard this *tanna* recite [this tradition, Tosefta Sanhedrin 7:8, cited below], they wished to treat him [Meir] accordingly. He became angry and left. He said to them, 'I have heard that one increases [the level of holiness but does not decrease.]"
2. For an example of the importance of spousal lineage, see chapter 20, section G1.
3. The redactional location of the story is worthy of note. The story appears in the talmudic commentary to Mishna Horayot 3:1, which reads as follows: "[a] A priest precedes a Levite, a Levite [precedes] an Israelite, an Israelite a *manzer*, a *manzer* a *natin*, a *natin* a convert, a convert a freed slave. [b] When [is this the case]? When they are all equal. But if the *manzer* is a sage and the high priest an ignoramus, then the *manzer*-sage precedes the high-priest-ignoramus." (A *manzer* and *natin* are Jews of

- tainted descent, who may not marry untainted partners.) Thus the first part of the Mishna gives primacy to lineage for "precedence," that is, receiving honor (a). The second half gives primacy to knowledge of Torah (b). But in contrast to the story, the Mishna rules that knowledge of Torah supplants lineage as the primary criterion. This too suggests that the story warns against applying the Mishna's principle to the contemporary academy.
4. The Tosetfa actually speaks of the rabbinic court, but the Talmud applies it to the academy.
 5. "Sage" seems to have been the title of an office in the rabbinic court or academy.
 6. That is, each student rises as he passes and sits down immediately.
 7. Additional literature: Louis Jacobs, "How Much of the Babylonian Talmud Is Pseudepigraphic?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 28 (1977), 55-56; David Goodblatt, "The Story of the Plot Against R. Simeon B. Gamaliel II," *Zion* 49 (1984), 349-74 (Hebrew); Steinmetz, "Must the Patriarch Know 'Uqtsin?', 163-90; Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 176-211.
 8. Note the wordplay. Rabban Shimon b. Gamaliel "enacts" (*taqen*) a teaching for his benefit; R. Natan and R. Meir fix (*metaqen*) something for themselves.
 9. Tractate Uqtsin is the last tractate of Mishna and deals with the purity of the stems of fruits and vegetables. The rabbis choose a difficult and obscure topic for the challenge. One question to consider is whether this is a fair test or not.
 10. That is, "Who should lead the academic discussions? He who knows the whole Torah."
 11. Another wordplay: what the rabbis mean to do (*na'aveid*) is to depose (*na'avei*) the patriarch.
 12. R. Yaakov b. Ondshai repeated Tractate Uqtsin and explained it.
 13. For the translation "syrnied," see Adiel Schremer, "He Posed Him a Difficulty and Placed Him"—A Study in the Evolution of the Text of TB *Bava Qama* 117a," *Tarbiz* 66 (1997), 409-10 (Hebrew). Rashi comments "finished": when Rabban Shimon b. Gamaliel finished expounding Uqtsin he spoke to them.
 14. Measure-for-measure punishment: They tried to reduce Rabban Shimon b. Gamaliel's honor by shaming him. He reduces their honor by banishing them.
 15. That is, they removed the rabbis' names from the content of their traditions, as in J. This too reduces their honor by ensuring that they will have no place in enduring rabbinic memory.

16. Who showed them is unclear. Presumably the angels or deceased rabbis are meant.
17. That is, dreams are meaningless. Literally, "dreams neither bring up nor bring down."
18. That is, "Your family lineage is sufficiently great that you may occupy the rank of head of the court. But you cannot be the patriarch."
19. The story shifts to the next generation. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was the son of Rabban Shimon b. Gamaliel.
20. R. Yehuda HaNasi thus restores the name of R. Meir to his tradition.
21. Apparently the indirectness diminishes his honor somewhat. The tradition is not attributed to R. Meir alone (R. Meir said...) but to others as well (*They* said in the name of R. Meir...).

CHAPTER 14. THE SAGA OF RAV KAHANA

1. See Daniel Sperber, "On the Unfortunate Adventures of Rav Kahana: A Passage of Saboraic Polemic from Sasanian Persia," *Irano-Judaica*, ed. S. Shaked (Jerusalem, 1982), 83-100.
2. Recall that in the "Oven of Akhnai" (chapter 9 herein), Rabban Gamaliel ultimately dies for shaming R. Eliezer. And see the following story.
3. The manuscripts of the Bavli preserve two different recensions of the story. See Schremer, "He Posed Him a Difficulty and Placed Him," 403-16; and Isaiah Gafni, "The Babylonian *Yeshiva* as Reflected in Bava Qama 117a," *Tarbiz* 49 (1980), 192-201 (Hebrew). Additional literature: Sperber, "On the Unfortunate Adventures of Rav Kahana."
4. This explains why he took such drastic action.
5. The Persians do not allow the Jews to administer capital punishment and will therefore consider Rav Kahana to be a murderer.
6. The text here is difficult and the meaning obscure. This translation is tentative.

CHAPTER 15. THE TRAGEDY OF R. YOHANNAN AND RESH LAQISH

1. Daniel Boyarin interprets their relationship as homoerotic attraction and argues that the spear is a phallic symbol. See *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 212-19.



Chapter 17

R. SHIMON BAR YOHAI

In this well-known talmudic story, the mercurial Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai (early second century CE) hides in a cave for thirteen years. Medieval Jewish tradition would claim that he spent this time delving into mystical secrets and writing the Zohar, the primary scripture of Kabbala. To this day his tomb near the town of Sefat is a pilgrimage site for prayer and mystical devotion. But the talmudic stories portray R. Shimon along different lines: in the Yerushalmi he is a miracle-worker; in the Bavli a zealot for Torah.

As usual, the Yerushalmi contains the briefer and earlier form of the story. This version opens with R. Shimon hiding in a cave without explaining why he fled there. Upon leaving he hears a heavenly voice decide the fate of hunted birds, from which he learns a lesson of the inexorability of providence (b). He articulates a second teaching concerning the importance of repaying a kindness: 'The city of Tiberias provided the baths in which he recuperated, so he purifies the city by miraculously exposing corpses whose precise location was not known (c). When troublemakers object to his purification, he deals with them as miracle-workers often do—by performing miracles that make them disappear. The story, on one level, argues that Tiberias is now free of corpse-impurity. Apparently some traditions circulated that the city was unclean, and the storytellers wished to dispel such notions.' The story is also part of a cycle of traditions that tell of the holy R. Shimon bar Yohai and his miraculous powers.

How different the version of the Bavli! Here R. Shimon is a radical who believes in the study of Torah as the only legitimate value. Initially he condemns Roman structures and institutions—markets, bathhouses and bridges—on the grounds that they serve

decadent purposes (A). But when he subsequently wreaks destruction on Jewish peasants for working the land, for "abandoning eternal life and busying themselves with temporal life," it becomes clear that he opposes not Roman culture specifically, but all activities other than Torah study (B2). He is portrayed not so much as a miracle-worker (though he has miraculous powers) as a sage single-minded in his devotion to Torah. While the Yerushalmi does not mention what R. Shimon did in the cave, the Bavli relates that he and his son studied Torah incessantly, interrupting their studies only for prayer. When R. Shimon returns to society, the story notes that his dialectical proficiency increased exponentially (B4).

Yet the message of the Bavli is that such an uncompromising emphasis on Torah is not desirable. Without markets, bathhouses and agriculture, society would soon crumble for lack of food, clothing, hygiene and other necessities. The ideal that all Jews devote themselves exclusively to the study of Torah is tenable only if all live in a cave where food and water are miraculously supplied and clothing not needed (B1). The story clearly rejects this perspective, for a heavenly voice rebukes R. Shimon and his son for causing destruction, prompting them to identify themselves with "the wicked in Gehennom (Hell)" and to return to the cave for another year. When they emerge, R. Shimon first visits the bathhouses, one of the structures he had condemned at the outset, and then sets about ameliorating the temporal lives of the people by purifying a certain area (B4). He invokes as his model the patriarch Jacob who built markets and established bathhouses. Ironically, R. Shimon now values the mundane activities and facilities he censured at the outset of the story and even uses his knowledge of "eternal life" to improve the "temporal life" of the people.

For all that, the story does not completely resolve the tension between Torah study and mundane life. The years of constant study in the cave have made R. Shimon bar Yohai and his son consummate masters of Torah, the ultimate ideal of the Bavli. The story perhaps hints at a middle ground when the sages emerge from the cave for the second time. They find comfort upon seeing a man running at twilight bearing myrtles in order to "honor the Sabbath" with a pleasant aroma (B3). Agricultural labor, then, may be used

for observing the commandments, for worthy religious purposes, even if it distracts time from Torah study. Yet R. Shimon retains his powers and kills twice more at the end of the story. We sense that his zealotness has been attenuated, not allayed. The storytellers realize that the ideal, that all Jews engage in full-time Torah study, is not practical. They exhibit a grudging endorsement of worldly activity, perhaps a warning to scholars not to denigrate their less learned brethren. But they stop well short of saying that anything else truly compares to Torah study as the end of life.

The Bavli story exhibits several literary features worthy of note. Overall, the structure is carefully worked out. The opening section reports R. Shimon's negative opinion of what the Romans "established" (A); the conclusion describes his favorable attitude to what Jacob "established" and the purification he "fixes/establishes" (C1, C2). R. Shimon withdraws from society in two stages, first to the academy (B1), then to the cave (B2). He reemerges in two stages as well, first with a second stint in the cave (B3), then to the baths (B4). A and C display balanced, tripartite structures. A reports three rabbis sitting, their three perspectives on Roman works, R. Yehuda's praise of three Roman achievements, R. Shimon's threefold denigration and the Roman authorities' three decrees. C quotes Rav's statement that Jacob arrived whole in three things, followed by three opinions of what he established.² The story also employs several keywords that point to its crucial tensions, including *tiqen* (establish, fix; see A, C1) and *olam* (world, life; see B2, B3, C3).³

A. R. Shimon bar Yohai, the Miracle-worker (Yerushalmi Shev'it 9:1, 38b)

[a] R. Shimon b. Yohai hid in a cave for thirteen years, in a cave with carobs of *teruma*,⁴ until his body broke out in skin disease. After thirteen years he said, "Why don't I go out and see what is going on in the world?"

[b] He went out and sat at the mouth of the cave. He saw a hunter hunting birds. As he spread his net he heard a heavenly voice say "Pardoned!"⁵ and it escaped. He said, "Even a bird does not perish without Heaven. How much the more so a human being!"

[c] When he saw that matters had calmed down,⁶ he said, "Let us go and bathe in the public baths in Tiberias." He said, "We should do a service!⁷ [for the city] as our patriarchs did. *And he was gracious to the city* (Gen 33:18).⁸ They set up stands for selling in markets." He said, "Let us purify Tiberias."

[d] He took lupines, cut them up and threw them down. Whenever there was a corpse, it floated and rose above.

[e] A Samaritan saw him and said, "Why don't I go and make fun of this elder of the Jews?" He took a corpse. He went and buried it where he [R. Shimon] had purified. He came to R. Shimon b. Yohai. He said to him, "Did you not purify such-and-such a place? Come and I will raise up [a corpse] for you from there."

[f] R. Shimon b. Yohai saw with the holy spirit that he had placed it there. He said, "I decree that those above should descend and those below should rise."⁹ And thus it happened to him.

[g] When he passed by Migdal he heard the voice of a scribe say [sarcastically], "Here is Bar Yohai who purified Tiberias." He said to him, "[May [such-and-such] befall me if I did not hear [a tradition] that Tiberias would someday be purified. And in any case, were you not one of the assembly?"¹⁰ He turned him into a heap of bones.



B. The Education of R. Shimon bar Yohai (Bavli Shabbat 33b-34a)

[A] R. Yehuda and R. Yose and R. Shimon were sitting, and Yehuda b. Gerim¹ was sitting beside them. R. Yehuda opened and said, "How pleasant are the acts of this nation [Rome]. (1) They established (*tiqnu*) markets. (2) They established (*tiqnu*) bathhouses. (3) They established (*tiqnu*) bridges." R. Yose was silent. R. Shimon bar Yohai answered and said, "Everything they established (*tiqnu*), they established (*tiqnu*) only for their own needs: (1) They established (*tiqnu*) markets—to place prostitutes there; (2) bathhouses—to pamper themselves; (3) bridges—to take tolls." Yehuda b. Gerim went and retold their words, and it became known to the government. They said: "(1) Yehuda who extolled—let him be extolled. (2) Yose who was silent—let him be extolled to Sephhoris. (3) Shimon who disparaged—let him be killed."

(B1) He went with his son and hid in the academy. Each day his wife brought him bread and a jug of water and they ate.¹² When the decree became more severe, he said to his son, "Women are simpleminded. They may abuse her and she will reveal [us]."¹³

(B2) He went, and they hid in a cave. A miracle happened for them and a carob tree and a spring were created for them. They sat up to their necks in sand. By day they sat and studied, and they took off their clothes. When the time came to pray, they went out and dressed and covered and went out and prayed and again took off their clothes, in order that they not wear out.¹⁴ They dwelled in a cave for thirteen years. Elijah came to the opening of the cave. He said, "Who will inform Bar Yohai that the emperor died and the decree is annulled?" They went out and they saw men plowing and sowing. They said, "They abandon eternal life [Torah] and busy themselves with temporal

life?" Everywhere they turned their eyes was immediately burned. A heavenly voice went out and said to them, "Did you go out to destroy my world? Return to your cave!"

(B3) They dwelled for twelve months. They said, "The sentence of the wicked in Gehennom [Hell] is twelve months."¹⁵ A heavenly voice went out [and said], "Go out from your cave." They went out. Wherever R. Eleazar smote R. Shimon healed. He said, "My son, you and I are sufficient for the world." They saw a certain old man who was holding two bunches of myrtle running at twilight. They said to him, "Why do you need these?" He said to them, "To honor the Sabbath."¹⁶ [They said,] "Would not one suffice for you?" [He said] "One for *Remember [the Sabbath]* (Exod 20:8) and one for *Observe [the Sabbath]* (Deut 5:12)." He [R. Shimon] said to him [his son], "See how dear is a commandment (*mitzva*) to Israel."¹⁷ Their minds were set at ease.¹⁸

(B4) R. Pinhas b. Yair, his son-in-law, heard [that R. Shimon bar Yohai had returned] and went out to greet him. He took him into the bathhouse. He was massaging his flesh. He saw that there were clefts in his flesh. He was weeping and the tears were falling from his eyes and hurting him [R. Shimon]. He said to him, "Woe am I that I see you so." He [R. Shimon] said to him, "Happy that you see me so. For if you did not see me so, you would not find me so [learned]."¹⁹ For originally when R. Shimon bar Yohai raised an objection R. Pinhas b. Yair solved it with twelve solutions. Subsequently when R. Pinhas b. Yair objected, R. Shimon bar Yohai solved it with twenty-four solutions.

[C1] He said, "Since a miracle occurred I will go and fix (*arain*) something, since it says, *And Jacob came whole (shalem)* (Gen 33:18)." And Rav said, "(1) Whole in his body, (2) whole in his money, (3) whole in his Torah."²⁰ *And he was gracious to the city* (Gen 33:18).²¹ (1) Rav said, "He established (*tiqen*) coinage for them."²² (2) And Shmuel said, "He established (*tiqen*) markers for them."²³ (3) And R. Yohanan said, "He established (*tiqen*) bathhouses for

them." He [R. Shimon bar Yohai] said, "Is there something to fix (*teiqonei*)?"²⁴

[C2] They said to him, "There is a place of doubtful impurity, and it causes trouble for priests to go around it."²⁵ He said, "Does anyone know if there was a presumption of purity here?" A certain old man said, "Here Ben Azai cut down lupines of *teruma*."²⁶ He did the same. Wherever it [the ground] was hard he ruled pure. Wherever it was loose he marked.²⁴

[C3] A certain old man said, "R. Shimon bar Yohai made a cemetery pure."²⁵ He [R. Shimon bar Yohai] said, "If you had not been with us, or even if you had been with us but had not voted with us, you would have spoken well. But now that you were with us and voted among us, should they say, '[E]ven] prostitutes paint each other. How much the more so [should] scholars!'"²⁶ He cast his eyes at him and his soul departed. He went out to the market. He saw Yehuda b. Gerim. He said, "Is this one still in the world?" He set his eyes upon him and turned him into a heap of bones.

2. See the other chapters in this part.
3. See chapters 9 and 14 herein for other such deaths.
4. Additional literature: Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 212–19; Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 272–75.
5. On kinship ties through marriage to a sister see chapter 4, story A, sections F and Q, and chapter 9, section L.
6. His decision to dedicate himself to Torah sapped his physical strength. A common talmudic motif is that study weakens a man because he directs all his energy to the Torah.
7. This is a type of pseudo-Mishna based on Mishna Kelim 14:5: “The sword—when is it subject to impurity? When it is polished. And the knife? When it is whetted.” Utensils, not raw materials, are subject to impurity. The question is at what point in the manufacturing process a sword or knife has the status of a utensil.
8. Or, “He went out of his mind.”

CHAPTER 16. THE TRAGEDY OF HONI

1. On the origins of this nickname, see chapter 18 herein. However, the character of Honi the Circle-Drawer, the sage in this story, differs from the character of Honi the Rainmaker in chapter 18. Different storytellers have portrayed the character in disparate ways for their own purposes.
2. The psalm (in the rabbinic understanding) was sung by the Jews who returned to the Land of Israel from Babylonia after the first exile, which lasted seventy years (586–16 BCE; see Jer 25:11, 29:10).
3. The formula “Thus people say” is used to introduce popular proverbs. Rava means that the story of Honi exemplifies this saying.

PART IV

CHAPTER 17. R. SHIMON BAR YOHAI

1. Josephus, *Antiquities* 18:38, reports: “For he (Herod) knew that this settlement was contrary to the law and tradition of the Jews because Tibertias was built on the site of tombs that had been obliterated, of which there were many there. And our law declares that such settlers are unclean for seven days.”
2. Both sections are chiasmic: A begins with three rabbis sitting, mentions Yehuda b. Gerim and lists R. Yehuda’s three praises. The corresponding half of the chiasm begins with R. Shimon’s condemnations,

- mentions Yehuda b. Gerim and lists the three Roman responses. In C. R. Shimon states that he will fix something and then quotes Rav’s threefold description of Jacob. The corresponding half offers the three opinions on what Jacob did, followed by R. Shimon asking if there is something to fix.
3. Other versions of the story appear in *Genesis Rabbah* 79:6; *Periqta deRav Kahana* §11; *Qoblet Rabbah* 10:8 (26b). Additional literature: Lee Levine, “R. Simeon b. Yohai and the Purification of Tibertias: History and Tradition,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 49 (1978), 143–85; Ofra Meir, “The Story of R. Shimon bar Yohai and His Son in the Cave—History or Literature?” *The Poetics of Rabbinic Stories* (Tel-Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1993), 11–35 (Hebrew); Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 105–38.
 4. *teruma* is “heave-offering,” the tithe of crops, fruit and dough given to priests.
 5. *dimos* = *dismissus*. This is the Latin technical term for a judicial pardon.
 6. This is the only hint of his reason for hiding. Perhaps there was a persecution and he fled for his life. The storytellers evidently assumed that their audience was familiar with the life of R. Shimon b. Yohai and knew why he concealed himself in a cave.
 7. Alternatively, “We should institute a legal remedy” (*taqqana*).
 8. In context the verse means, “He encamped before the city.” This midrashic reading takes “encamped” (*vayithan*) as “he was gracious” (*vayithan*).
 9. That is, those above ground, the Samaritan, should die, and the corpse he had buried should rise up.
 10. Apparently an assembly of sages had accepted R. Shimon’s purification process. The scribe participated in the assembly but now casts aspersions on the decision.
 11. *Ben Gerim* means “the son of proselytes.” The name is clearly symbolic, a combination of “Jew” (*yehuda* = *yehudi*) and “Gentile” (*ben gerim*). At issue is the Jewish attitude to Gentile culture.
 12. In the academy R. Shimon and his son survive on minimal subsistence, bread and water, and have minimal contact with others, only the sages of the academy and the wife/mother. They withdraw from sophisticated Gentile culture (markets, bathhouses) to the Jewish culture of Torah in the academy. The withdrawal to the cave is more extreme. See note 14 of this chapter.
 13. The expression “women are simpleminded,” a legal maxim that appears elsewhere in the Bavli, means that women are naive. Like children, they easily can be deceived and tricked.

14. The existence in the cave illustrates life devoted exclusively to study of Torah. Without agriculture, food and drink come from nature, if miraculous, sources. Carobs, moreover, are generally considered animal fodder in talmudic sources. The rabbis preserve their clothes by staying naked most of the time, submerged up to their necks, resembling carrots or tubers. They don their clothes only for prayers, since one cannot pray while naked, and the rapid series of verbs implies that they shed them as quickly as possible. The scene shows the necessary conditions for devoting one's life exclusively to Torah. The question is whether it is tenable.
15. That is, "We sinned with our destructive gaze. But even if we are judged as completely wicked, our sentence could not be longer than twelve months."
16. He intends to place the myrtles on the table or in the house to provide a pleasant fragrance. Some commentaries draw a parallel between the two myrtles and two Sabbath lamps.
17. The man is so caring about the commandments that he takes one myrtle for each verse commanding Sabbath observance, not just one myrtle for the Sabbath.
18. The phrase "Their minds were set at ease" is omitted in several manuscripts. This leaves open the question of their reaction. Were they mollified by this answer or equally disdainful?
19. A similar dialogue appears in the story of Nahum of Gamzu. See chapter 34 herein.
20. Jacob comes "whole" after surviving his encounters with Esau and with the angel against whom he wrestles all night.
21. See note 8 of this chapter. Significant is the association of Jacob (= Israel) with markets, coins and bathhouses, which R. Yehuda attributed to the Romans. The exegesis thus connects to the question of the Jewish attitude toward—and even appropriation of—Gentile culture.
22. Priests (*kohanim*) are forbidden to come into contact with graves or corpses except under certain circumstances.
23. See note 4 of this chapter.
24. How this purity rest works and the significance of the lupines are not clear. Apparently the loose ground indicates the presence of a corpse. This part of the story was probably borrowed from the Yerushalmi and garbled in the transmission process.
25. A cemetery cannot be purified. The old man charges that R. Shimon bar Yohai improperly ruled the area pure.
26. The vote is not mentioned explicitly, but we must infer that the sages voted to accept R. Shimon's determination of purity. R. Shimon now

charges that the old man, who participated in the decision, should not impugn his ruling and reveal the dissension among the sages. Even prostitutes, who are jealous and competitive, nonetheless help beauty one another, if only to receive similar treatment in return. Others who see the old man criticize R. Shimon will consider the squabbling sages worse than prostitutes.

CHAPTER 18. HONI THE CIRCLE-DRAWER

1. For additional literature, see William Scott Green, "Palestinian Holy Men: Charismatic Leadership and Rabbinic Tradition," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.19.2 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1979), 619–41; Jacob Neusner, *Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 307–28.
2. The story appears here, Mishna Taanit 3:9–12, because it illustrates this principle. In E the people ask Honi to pray for the rains to stop, but he refuses to do so.
3. The title *me'ugel*, usually understood as circle-drawer, also means rolling or leveling and is used of the plastering of roofs (see Mishna Makkot 2:1). A roof-repairer would be especially interested in heavy rains, which force people to fix their roofs more often on account of the damage.
4. According to the Talmud, this was the "lost and found" location on the Temple Mount. Finders brought lost objects there for their owners to claim.
5. Honi declines to pray for rain to stop. He will do so only when a large stone erodes, that is, never. Note too the structural parallel. In both B and E the people make a request of Honi, first to pray for rain to fall, then to pray for it to cease. First he instructs them to bring in the ovens lest they soften in the rain, then he directs them to see if a stone wears away in the rain. These exchanges bracket the tripartite unit, D1–D3.
6. *Mihutei*: The meaning of this word is not completely clear.
7. Adar falls around late February or March. Because the first rains typically fall in late October or November, by Adar the situation is acute. This version probably mentions Adar because in the Mishna's account (section B) Honi directs the people to bring in their Passover ovens, and Passover falls in Nisan, the month that follows Adar.
8. The meaning of this idiom, apparently an expression of respect, is unclear. The sense seems to be that Honi is such an accomplished miracle-