

FAMILY MATTERS

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R. Ishmael taught: Great is peace, for even of the Great Name, written though it be in sanctity, did the Holy One blessed be He, say that it may be blotted out in water, for the purpose of making peace between husband and wife.

R. Meir used to deliver discourses on Sabbath evenings. There was a woman there in the habit of listening to him. Once the discourse lasted a long time, and she waited until the exposition was concluded. She went home and found that the candle had gone out. Her husband asked her, 'Where have you been?' She answered: 'I was sitting listening to the voice of the preacher.' Said he to her: 'I swear⁴ I will not let you enter here until you go and spit in the face of the preacher.' She stayed away⁴ one week, a second, and a third. Said her neighbours to her: 'Are you still angry one with the other? Let us come with you to the discourse.' As soon as R. Meir saw them, he saw by means of the Holy Spirit [what had happened], and said: 'Is there a woman among you clever at whispering a charm over an eye?' The woman's neighbours said to her: 'If you go and spit in his eye you will release your husband

[[from his vow]. When she sat down before him she became afraid of him, and said to him: 'Rabbi, I am not expert at whispering an invocation over an eye.' Said he to her: 'For all that, spit in my face seven times, and I will be cured.' She did so, and he said to her: 'Go tell your husband: You told me to do it once, and I spat seven times.' Said his disciples to him: 'Should people thus abuse the Torah? Could you not have told one of us to whisper an invocation for you?' Said he to them: 'Is it not good enough for R. Meir to be like unto his Creator?'—for R. Ishmael has taught: Great is peace, since even of the Great Name, written though it be in sanctity, the Holy One, blessed be He, has said: 'Let it be blotted out in water for the purpose of making peace between husband and wife.'

②

AND ISRAEL SAID UNTO JOSEPH: NOW LET ME DIE (XLVI, 30). Hananiah b. Hakinai and R. Simeon b. Yoḥai went to study Torah under R. Akiba at Bnei Brak,² and spent thirteen years there. R. Simeon b. Yoḥai used to send letters home and so knew what was happening there. Hananiah b. Hakinai did not send letters home and did not know what was happening there. His wife sent him a message: Your daughter has attained puberty; come and arrange for her marriage. Now R. Akiba learnt this through divine inspiration and announced: Whoever has a daughter of ripe years, let him go and arrange for her marriage. What did he [Hananiah] do? He went to a well, where he heard the women who drew water say, 'O daughter of Hakinai, fill your pitcher and go up [home].'³ She went and he followed, until she entered her house. His wife barely saw him when her soul departed. Some say that it returned.⁴

③ FOR SAILORS, ONCE IN SIX MONTHS. THESE ARE THE WORDS OF R. ELIEZER. R. Beruna¹ stated in the name of Rab:² The halachah follows R. Eliezer. R. Adda b. Ahabah, however, stated in the name of Rab: This is the view of R. Eliezer only, but the Sages ruled! Students may go away to study Torah without the permission [of their wives even for] two or three years.³

Raba stated: The Rabbis⁴ relied on R. Adda b. Ahabah⁵ and act accordingly at the risk of [losing] their lives.⁶ Thus R. Rehumi who was frequenting [the school] of Raba at Mahuza⁷ used to return home on the Eve of every Day of Atonement. On one occasion⁸ he was so attracted by his subject [that he forgot to return home]. His wife was expecting [him every moment, saying,] 'He is coming soon,⁹ he is coming soon'.⁹ As he did not arrive she became so depressed that tears began to flow from her eyes. He was [at that moment] sitting on a roof. The roof collapsed under him and he was killed.¹⁰

How often¹¹ are scholars to perform their marital duties?—Rab Judah in the name of Samuel replied: Every Friday night.¹¹

(TB Ket 62b)

④ R. Idi said: There was a woman in Sidon, who lived ten years with her husband, and had borne no child. They went to R. Simeon b. Yoḥai, and asked to be divorced. He said to them, 'As your coming together was with a banquet, so let your separation be with a banquet.' They agreed, and made for themselves a holiday and a banquet, and she made her husband drink more than enough. When his mind returned to him, he said to her, 'My daughter, look out what is most precious to you in my house, and take it, and go to your father's house.' What did she do? When he had gone to sleep, she beckoned to her servants and handmaids, and said to them, 'Carry him on the mattress to my father's house.' In the middle of the night he woke up, and he said to her, 'Whither have I been brought?' She said, 'To the house of my father.' He said to her, 'What have I to do there?' She said, 'Did you not tell me last night to take what was most precious to me from your house, and to go with it to the house of my father? There is nothing in the world more precious to me than you.' They went back to R. Simeon b. Yoḥai, and he prayed for them, and they were given a child. Hence you may learn that as God 'visits' (Gen. xxi, 1) the barren woman, so the righteous 'visit' the barren woman. [The meaning apparently is that the influence of the prayer of the righteous Rabbi procured the child.] And, moreover, if this woman, who said to her husband that nothing was to her more precious than he, was blessed by God with a child, how much more will God bless the Israelites who hope day by day for God's salvation, and who say, 'We have nothing more precious in the world than thee: "We will be glad and rejoice in thee"' (Cant. I, 4). (Cant.R. I, § 1, 2, on I, 4; f. 8a.)

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3. R. Abba b. Kahana opened his discourse by citing:
I said of laughter: It is mingled (Eccl. 11, 2).⁴ If the wedding

feast is disturbed,¹ of what benefit is the rejoicing? A story is told of one of the dignitaries of Kabul² who gave his son away in marriage. On the fourth day³ he invited guests to his house. When they had eaten and drunk and made their hearts merry he said to his son: 'Go up and bring us a barrel from the upper chamber.' When he went up a serpent bit him and he died. He [the father] waited for him to come down, and as he did not come down, he said: 'I will go up and see what is the matter with my son.' He went up and found that he had been bitten by a serpent and was dead, lying among the barrels. He waited until the guests had finished their meal and said to them: 'My masters! Not to bless my son with the bridegroom's blessing have you come, but pronounce over him rather the mourner's blessing! Have you not come to bring my son under the bridal canopy? Come, carry him to his grave!' R. Zakkai of Kabul concluded [the funeral oration] for him: '*I said of laughter: It is mingled.*'

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R. Aḥa said: There is a story of a man who kept on selling his household goods and drinking wine with the proceeds. Said his sons: 'Our father will leave nothing for us.' So they plied him with drink, and made him drunk, and took him out and placed him in a cemetery.¹ Wine merchants passed the gate of the cemetery, and hearing that a seizure for public service was to take place in the province, they left their loads within the cemetery and went to witness the uproar in the province. The man, waking up from his sleep and seeing a skin bottle above his head, untied it and put it in his mouth. Three days later his sons said: 'Should we not go to see what father is doing?' They went and found him with the wine-skin in his mouth. They said: 'Even here has your Creator not forsaken you. Seeing that He has given you [wine], we do not know what we should do to you.' They made an arrangement amongst themselves that the sons should in turn provide him with drink, one son one day.

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R. Me'ir sat discoursing on a Sabbath afternoon in the House of Study. While he was there, his two sons died. What did their mother do? She laid them upon the bed, and spread a linen cloth over them. At the outgoing of the Sabbath R. Me'ir came home, and said to her, 'Where are my sons?' She replied, 'They went to the House of Study.' He said, 'I did not see them there.' She gave him the *Handalah* cup, and he said the blessing for the outgoing of the Sabbath. Then he said again, 'Where are my sons?' She said, 'They went to another place, and now they have returned.' Then she gave him to eat, and he ate and said the blessing. Then she said, 'I have a question to ask you.' He replied, 'Ask it.' She said, 'Early to-day a man came here, and gave me something to keep for him; now he has come back to ask for it again. Shall we return it to him or not?' He replied, 'He who has received something on deposit must surely return it to its owner.' She replied, 'Without your knowledge I would not return it.' Then she took him by the hand, and brought him up to the bed, and took away the cloth, and he saw his sons lying dead upon the bed. Then he began to weep, and said about each, 'O my son, my son; O my Rabbi, my Rabbi! My sons, as all men would say; Rabbi, Rabbi, because they gave light to their father's face through their knowledge of the Law.' Then his wife said to him, 'Did you not say to me that one must return a deposit to its owner? Does it not say, "The Lord gave, the Lord took, blessed be the name of the Lord"?' (Job 1, 21). So she comforted him and quieted his mind. (Midr. Prov. XXXI, 10, f. 54b)

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Later¹⁴ he¹⁵ was engaged in preparations for the marriage of his son into the family of R. Jose b. Zimra. It was agreed that he¹⁶ should spend twelve years at the academy.¹⁷ When the girl was led before him¹⁸ he said to them, 'Let it¹⁹ be six years'. When they made her pass before him [a second time] he said, 'I would rather marry [her first] and then proceed [to the academy]'. He felt abashed²⁰ before his father, but the latter said to him, 'My son, you²¹ have the mind of your creator;²² for in Scripture it is written first, *Thou bringest them in and plantest them*²³ and later it is written, *And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.*' [After the marriage] he departed and spent twelve years at the academy. By the time he returned his wife²⁴ had lost the power of procreation. 'What shall we do?', said Rabbi. 'Should we order him to divorce her, it would be said: This poor soul waited in vain! Were he to marry another woman, it would be said: The latter is his wife and the other his mistress.' He prayed for mercy to be vouchsafed to her, and she recovered.