

Fables from the Jewish Tradition

By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(1)

The Two Watchmen

Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 91a



Background to the Fable “The Two Watchmen”

Judah haNasi



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judah_haNasi

Rabbi Judah haNasi, (pronounced Yehuda haNasi, "Judah the Prince"), also known as "Rabbi" and "Rabeinu HaKadosh" ("our holy rabbi"), was a key leader of the Jewish community of Judea toward the end of the 2nd century CE, during the occupation by the Roman Empire. He is best known as the chief *editor/redactor* of the Mishnah. He was of the Davidic line, the royal line of King David, hence the title *nasi*, meaning *Prince*^[1]; the title *nasi* was also used for presidents of the Sanhedrin.^[2]

Judah haNasi was born in 135. According to the midrash, he came into the world on the same day that Rabbi Akiva died a martyr's death (Midrash Genesis Rabbah lviii.; Midrash Eccl. Rabbah i. 10) The Talmud suggests that this was a result of Divine Providence: God had granted the Jewish people another leader of great stature to succeed Rabbi Akiva. His place of birth is unknown; nor is it recorded where his father, Shimon ben Gamliel II, sought refuge with his family during the persecutions under Hadrian.

According to the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 10a-b), Rabbi Judah the Prince was very wealthy and greatly revered in Rome. He had a close friendship with "Antoninus", possibly the Emperor Caracalla,^[3] who would consult Rabbi Judah on various worldly and spiritual matters.

The Talmud records the tradition that Rabbi Judah haNasi was buried in the necropolis of Beit She'arim, in the Lower Galilee.^[4]

According to Jewish tradition, God gave the Jewish nation the Written Law - Torah - and revealed to Moses additional laws and customs, called the Oral Law. For centuries, only the Torah appeared as a written text. Fearing that the oral traditions might be forgotten, Rabbi Judah Hanasi undertook the mission of compiling them in what became known as the *Mishna*. The Mishna consists of 63 tractates codifying Jewish law, which are the basis of the *Talmud*.

Preceded by Shimon ben Gamliel II	Nasi 165 (Est.) - 220	Succeeded by Gamaliel III
--------------------------------------	--	------------------------------

References

1. *Talmud Yerushalmi*, quoted in Tosafos, Sanhedrin 5a
2. Mishna Chagiga 2:2
3. A. Mischcon, Abodah Zara, p.10a Soncino, 1988. Mischcon cites various sources, "SJ Rappaport... is of opinion that our Antoninus is Antoninus Pius." Other opinions cited suggest "Antoninus" was Caracalla, Lucius Verus or Alexander Severus.
4. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*), Tractate Bava Metzia 85a, Tractate Pesachim 49b; Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Kelaim 9, 32a-b.

Antoninus Pius



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoninus_Pius

Titus Aurelius Fulvus Boionius Arrius Antoninus (September 19, 86–March 7, 161), generally known in English as Antoninus Pius was Roman emperor from 138 to 161. He was the fourth of the Five Good Emperors and a member of the Aurelii. He did not possess the sobriquet "Pius" until after his accession to the throne. Almost certainly, he earned the name "Pius" because he compelled the Senate to deify Hadrian.

Scholars place Antoninus Pius as the leading candidate for fulfilling the role as a friend of Rabbi Judah the Prince. According to the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 10a-b), Rabbi Judah was very wealthy and greatly revered in Rome. He had a close friendship with "Antoninus", possibly Antoninus Pius, who would consult Rabbi Judah on various worldly and spiritual matters.

Body and Soul

Excerpts from: Fu Youde: Body and Soul: Comparative Studies in Biblical Judaism, Greek Philosophy and Medieval Christianity

www.wcp2003.org/Fu-Youde.doc

One of the crucial religious and philosophical problems is how to deal with the relation between human body and soul. Although many philosophers and theologians share the same proposition –“man is a union of body and soul”, they in effect understand it quite differently. What is human soul in essence? In what way are human soul and body united? The different answers to these two questions constituted monism and dualism of man in the histories of philosophy and religion. Roughly speaking, Judaism upholds monism and Greek philosophy and Christianity adopt dualism. The monistic answer in Biblical Judaism and its theoretic roots will be scrutinized more carefully and expounded in more detail than the dualistic answers in Greek philosophy and Christianity, which will be added and mainly regarded as a contrast of the former.

Monism in Judaism

Human spirit or soul is not an independent substance separable from body. The spirit is not, as a part of the whole, put together with the body; nor is it added to body

externally and accidentally. Rather it enters body as living element. Therefore the combination of body and soul is a perfect internal union. In it soul cannot exist without body and in reverse, body cannot be body without its soul. In the Scriptural verse that "God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2: 7).

Dualism in Greek Philosophy and Christianity

It is interesting to contrast the Jewish monism of man with the major Christian thought of man. As a daughter religion of Judaism, Christianity inherited the Jewish monotheism. However, regarding the relation between body and soul, it mainly accepted the dualistic outlook from Plato and Aristotle. As we all know, Christianity originated at the end of Biblical Judaism. As a great contributor to the formation and development of Christianity, the Apostle Paul based his doctrine of salvation on the dualism of human body and soul. For him, human body is sinful. But the soul is holy. The salvation of man is to free himself from the sinful body through refining his soul with the help of the Holy Spirit. During the formative period of Christian theology, some church fathers opposed the Platonic dualism of man. For instance, Tertullian (145-220 C.E) upheld the materiality of human soul, its co-existence and growth together with the body. But in the greatest theologians like Aurelius Augustine and Thomas Aquinas the dualism of body and soul won the advantage.

? How is monism related to monotheism?

? What is the relationship between the different concepts of "body and soul" in Judaism and Christianity and the way these two religions see the place of human beings in society?

? What is the "advantage" of adopting dualism as a way of defining the relationship between body and soul?

The Two Watchmen Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 91a

סנהדרין דף צא.א

אמר ליה אנטונינוס לרבי: גוף ונשמה יכולין לפטור עצמן מן הדין, כיצד? גוף אומר: נשמה חטאת, שמיום שפירשה ממני - הריני מוטל כאבן דומם בקבר. ונשמה אומרת: גוף חטא, שמיום שפירשתי ממנו - הריני פורחת באויר כצפור. אמר ליה, אמשול לך משל, למה הדבר דומה: למלך בשר ודם, שהיה לו פרדס נאה, והיה בו בכורות נאות, והושיב בו שני שומרים, אחד חיגר ואחד סומא. אמר לו חיגר לסומא: בכורות נאות אני רואה בפרדס. בא והרכיבני ונביאם לאכלם. רכב חיגר על גבי סומא, והביאום ואכלום. לימים בא בעל פרדס. אמר להן: בכורות נאות היכן הן? - אמר לו חיגר: כלום יש לי רגלים להלך בהן? - אמר לו סומא: כלום יש לי עינים לראות? מה עשה - הרכיב חיגר על גבי סומא ודן אותם כאחד. אף הקדוש ברוך הוא מביא נשמה וזורקה בגוף, ודן אותם כאחד. שנאמר (תהלים נ') יקרא אל השמים מעל ואל הארץ לדין עמו. יקרא אל השמים מעל - זו נשמה, ואל הארץ לדין עמו - זה הגוף.

A king owned a beautiful orchard where some delicious fruit was ripening. He hired two watchmen to guard it: one was blind and the other was lame.

The lame watchman said, "I see some delicious fruit that has just ripened"; then he climbed onto the blind watchman's shoulders and picked the fruit, which they both ate.

A little while later the king arrived. "Where is my beautiful fruit?" he asked.

The lame watchman replied, "Do I have feet to walk with?"

The blind watchman said, "Do I have eyes to see with?"

And what did the king do? He had the lame watchman climb onto the blind watch man's shoulders and judged them both as if they were one man.

Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 91a

The context of this fable is a conversation between Antoninus (probably the name that the Talmud gave to the emperor Marcus Aurelius, who lived 121-180 C.E.) and Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Nasi (135–219 C.E.). In this conversation, Antoninus maintains that the body and the soul, on being judged in the hereafter, can excuse each other for their sins, thus avoiding divine punishment. The body—according to Antoninus—could allege that the soul was the source of sin, since without the soul, the body is transformed into an inert mass, while the soul can allege that it, without the materialism brought by the body, is a purely spiritual entity, incapable of sinning. To this, Rabbi Yehuda responds with our fable, pointing out to Antoninus that as the king joined the lame man with the blind man and judged them both as one person, so God unites the soul and the body and judges them together, making them accountable for their behavior in this world.

Wrapping Up

Tell me what you believe...

Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

K-3rd GRADES:

- 1)
What were the blind and the lame watchmen supposed to be doing? Why do you think they thought it was OK for them to go and pick the fruit?
- 2)
What did the lame watchman mean when he said to the king, "Do I have feet to walk with?" What did the blind watchman mean by his answer?
- 3)
What did the king see when he had the lame man sit on the blind man's shoulders?
- 4)
If you were the king, what would you have done to these two watchmen?

4th-6th GRADES:

- 1)
What do you think the watchmen thought to themselves to justify picking the fruit?
- 2)
What caption would you have written under this illustration to show what the blind and the lame watchmen were thinking?
- 3)
Is the blind man equally guilty? Why or why not?
- 4)
What does this story tell us about taking responsibility for our actions?

7th-12th GRADES:

1)

Playing the “Blame Game” still goes on in our days, too. Can you think of some other Jewish texts that deal with this theme? (Perhaps look at Levit. 19, the Holiness Code; Cain’s conversation with God after killing Abel in Gen. 4:8-16; or Prophet Nathan’s confronting King David in II Samuel 12:1-14.)

2)

Describe a situation where someone tried to pressure you into doing something you knew was wrong or might get you in trouble. How did you respond? What can you do about peer pressure to do things that could be harmful or are illegal?

3)

Do you think the king was just in judging the two men equally, or do you think one had more responsibility than the other? Give your reasons, or even act out this case.

Fables from the Jewish Tradition 5

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

Idea Maps

(Stephens, E. and J. Brown. *A Handbook of Content Literacy Strategies*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc., 2000)

An idea map presents a graphic representation of a specific idea or concept. It focuses on a central idea and then examines components or ideas related to it. The central focus is a visual image created as a symbol for the content. This helps students to construct meaning from a text.

Steps:

1)

Teacher reads excerpt from literature. Then, she/he demonstrates an idea map with whole class. They discuss other images/symbols that could have been used with the excerpt.

2)

Students read another excerpt and create/locate a symbol.

3)

Students share with partner or small group. Volunteers can share with entire class.

4)

After students have read a text and created/located a symbol, these can be used for class discussion. A volunteer can show their idea map and have the class determine what part of the text was used as a basis for the symbol.

An example from William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily”:

When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant—a combined gardener and cook—had seen in at least ten years.

The teacher provides symbols from the excerpt that was read. Discuss how these are symbols for what is in the text. Discuss other symbols that could be used. Then, re-read “The Two Watchmen” and invite students to draw a symbol or picture of something in the fable. For example: *And what did the king do? He had the lame watchman climb onto the blind watchman’s shoulders and judged them both as if they were one man.* For this passage, students might draw two figures, one on top of the other.