

Sources for Shabbat Shuva, 5762

Shmuel Herzfeld

Beitzah, 15b

The Sages taught in a baraita: There was an incident involving Rabbi Eliezer, who was sitting and lecturing about the halakhot of the Festival throughout the entire Festival day. When the first group left in the middle of his lecture, he said: These must be owners of extremely large jugs [pittasin], who apparently have huge containers of wine awaiting them as well as a comparable amount of food, and they have left the house of study out of a craving for their food. After a while a second group departed. He said: These are owners of barrels, which are smaller than pittasin. Later a third group took its leave, and he said: These are owners of jugs, even smaller than barrels. A fourth group left, and he said: These are owners of jars [laginin], which are smaller than jugs. Upon the departure of a fifth group, he said: These are owners of cups, which are smaller still. When a sixth group began to leave, he became upset that the house of study (Beit Midrash) was being left almost completely empty and said: These are owners of a curse. He cast his eyes upon the students remaining in the house of study. Immediately, their faces began to change color out of shame, as they feared he was referring to them and that perhaps they should have departed along with the others instead of staying. He said to them: My sons, I did not say that about you but about those who left, because they abandon the eternal life of Torah and engage in the temporary life of eating. At the time of the remaining students' departure at the conclusion of Rabbi Eliezer's lecture, he said to them the verse: "Go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

This story is difficult to understand and many points require clarification. One major point to clarify is the meaning of the phrase: "*He cast his eyes upon the students remaining in the house of study.*"

Rashi understands the story to mean that the students who remained in the Beit Midrash interpreted their teacher's expression as one of deep disappointment in their behavior. If their rebbe became so upset with the sixth group for being so late to leave for their holiday meal, for sure he would be upset with them for leaving even later!

This interpretation implies that Rabbi Eliezer was not upset at the students for leaving, but for taking so long to leave! In response, Rabbi Eliezer reassures his students that he is not upset at them but at the other students who left and thereby forsook eternal life for the sake of fleeting pleasures.

Rav Yitzchak Abuhav argues that this is a difficult explanation. For how can the students have thought that their teacher would be upset at them for staying and studying Torah. Should they have left him to teach to an empty classroom?

Therefore, Maharsha offers an alternative explanation of the sequence of events. Maharsha suggests that the students assumed that Rabbi Eliezer “placed his eyes upon them” because he also suspected them of wanting to leave the class. However, they misunderstood his eyes. Really, he had “placed his eyes” upon them with great love because they had stayed in his class to study Torah while the other students had left.

Beitzah, 15b

The Gemara clarifies this baraita. The Master said above: Because they abandon eternal life and engage in temporary life. The Gemara wonders at this: But isn't the joy of the Festival itself a mitzva and therefore part of eternal life? The Gemara answers: Rabbi Eliezer conforms to his standard line of reasoning, as he said: Physical joy on a Festival is merely optional. As it is taught in a baraita that Rabbi Eliezer says: A person has no way of fulfilling the mitzva of a Festival correctly apart from either eating and drinking, thereby fulfilling the mitzva of joy in a completely physical manner, or sitting and studying Torah, thereby emphasizing only the spiritual; and those who did not engage in Torah study to the fullest extent acted inappropriately. Rabbi Yehoshua says: There is no need for such a dichotomy; rather, simply divide it: Half to God, Torah study, and half to yourselves, engaging in eating, drinking, and other pleasurable activities. Rabbi Yohanan said: And both of them derived their opinions from one verse, i.e., the two of them addressed the same apparent contradiction between two verses, resolving it in different ways. One verse states: “It shall be a solemn assembly for the Lord, your God” (Deuteronomy 16:8), indicating a Festival dedicated to the service of God, and one verse states: “It shall be a solemn assembly for you” (Numbers 29:35), indicating a celebratory assembly for the Jewish people. How is this to be reconciled? Rabbi Eliezer holds that the two verses should be understood as offering a choice: The day is to be either entirely for God, in accordance with the one verse, or entirely for you, as per the other verse; and Rabbi Yehoshua holds that it is possible to fulfill both verses: Split the day into two, half of it for God and half of it for you.

Maimonides: “Even though eating and drinking are included in the positive commandment (of joy on the holiday), one should not eat and drink the whole entire day. Rather this is the appropriate measure: All of the people get up early in the morning [to go] to the synagogues and study halls to pray, and to read in the Torah about the topic of the day. [Then] they go back home, eat, and go to the study hall, [where they] read and study until midday. And after midday, they pray the afternoon prayers and return to their homes to eat and drink for the rest of the day, until the night” (*Shevitat Yom Tov*, 6:19).

Shulchan Aruch: “It is a holiday mitzvah to spend half the time in the House of Study and half of the time eating and drinking” (Orach Chaim, 529:1).

Mishnah Berurah: “We rebuke those *chazzanim* that detain people in synagogue for more than half of the day” (529:1:1).

R. Yitzchak Zilberstein: *The Rema (128:4) writes that outside the land of Israel even on a Festival, the Kohanim only bless the congregation at mussaf. The reason is because that the priestly blessing needs to be given with great joy and therefore it is offered when the people are leaving the service and so they are happy that they are able to go home and celebrate the holiday. We see from this ruling of Rema that it is not appropriate to delay the congregation that wants to go home in order to celebrate the holiday—and so too, on Shabbat. Therefore, it is the rabbi’s responsibility to find an appropriate time for the community to study and to entice them with sweet words to return to the synagogue to study (Chishukuei Chemed, Beitzah, 15b).*