**Taanit 21a: Ilfa and R. Yochanan**

**Friday 4/23/21**

**אִילְפָא וְרַבִּי יוֹחָנָן הֲווֹ גָּרְסִי בְּאוֹרָיְיתָא דְּחִיקָא לְהוּ מִילְּתָא טוּבָא אָמְרִי נֵיקוּם וְנֵיזִיל וְנֶיעְבַּד עִיסְקָא וּנְקַיֵּים בְּנַפְשִׁין אֶפֶס כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֶבְיוֹן אֲזַלוּ אוֹתִיבוּ תּוּתֵי גּוּדָּא רְעִיעָא הֲווֹ קָא כָּרְכִי רִיפְתָּא אֲתוֹ תְּרֵי מַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת**

§ The Gemara relates another story that involves an unstable wall. Ilfa and Rabbi Yoḥanan studied Torah together, and as a result they became very hard-pressed for money. They said: Let us get up and go and engage in commerce, and we will fulfill, with regard to ourselves, the verse: “Although there should be no needy among you” (Deuteronomy 15:4), as we will no longer be complete paupers. They went and sat under a dilapidated wall and were eating bread, when two ministering angels arrived.

**שַׁמְעֵיהּ רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן דְּאָמַר חַד לְחַבְרֵיהּ נִישְׁדֵּי עֲלַיְיהוּ הַאי גּוּדָּא וְנִקְטְלִינְהוּ שֶׁמַּנִּיחִין חַיֵּי עוֹלָם הַבָּא וְעוֹסְקִין בְּחַיֵּי שָׁעָה אֲמַר לֵיהּ אִידַּךְ שַׁבְקִינְהוּ דְּאִיכָּא בְּהוּ חַד דְּקָיְימָא לֵיהּ שַׁעְתָּא רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן שְׁמַע אִילְפָא לָא שְׁמַע אֲמַר לֵיהּ רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן לְאִילְפָא שָׁמַע מָר מִידֵּי אֲמַר לֵיהּ לָא אֲמַר מִדִּשְׁמַעִי אֲנָא וְאִילְפָא לָא שְׁמַע שְׁמַע מִינַּהּ לְדִידִי קָיְימָא לִי שַׁעְתָּא**

Rabbi Yoḥanan heard that one angel said to the other: Let us knock this wall down upon them and kill them, as they abandon eternal life of Torah study and engage in temporal life for their own sustenance. The other angel said to him: Leave them, as there is one of them whose time of achievement stands before him, i.e., his time has yet to come. Rabbi Yoḥanan heard all this, but Ilfa did not hear the angels’ conversation. Rabbi Yoḥanan said to Ilfa: Did the Master hear anything? Ilfa said to him: No. Rabbi Yoḥanan said to himself: Since I heard the angels and Ilfa did not hear, I can learn from this that it is I whose time of achievement stands before me.

אֲ**מַר לֵיהּ רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן אֶיהֱדַר וְאוֹקֵי בְּנַפְשַׁאי כִּי לֹא יֶחְדַּל אֶבְיוֹן מִקֶּרֶב הָאָרֶץ רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן הֲדַר אִילְפָא לָא הֲדַר עַד דַּאֲתָא אִילְפָא מָלֵיךְ רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן**

Rabbi Yoḥanan said to Ilfa: I will return home and fulfill with regard to myself the contrary verse: “For the poor shall never cease out of the land” (Deuteronomy 15:11). Rabbi Yoḥanan returned to the study hall, and Ilfa did not return, but went to engage in business instead. By the time that Ilfa came back from his business travels, Rabbi Yoḥanan had been appointed head of the academy, and his financial situation had improved.

**אָמְרוּ לוֹ אִי אִתִּיב מָר וְגָרֵיס לָא הֲוָה מָלֵיךְ מָר אֲזַל תְּלָא נַפְשֵׁיהּ בְּאַסְקַרְיָא דִסְפִינְתָּא אֲמַר אִי אִיכָּא דְּשָׁאֵיל לִי בְּמַתְנִיתָא דְּרַבִּי חִיָּיא וְרַבִּי אוֹשַׁעְיָא וְלָא פָּשֵׁיטְנָא לֵיהּ מִמַּתְנִיתִין נָפֵילְנָא מֵאַסְקַרְיָא דִסְפִינְתָּא וְטָבַעְנָא**

His colleagues said to Ilfa: If the Master had sat and studied, instead of going off to his business ventures, wouldn’t the Master have been appointed head of the academy? Ilfa went and suspended himself from the mast [askariya] of a ship, saying: If there is anyone who can ask me a question concerning a baraita of Rabbi Ḥiyya and Rabbi Oshaya, and I do not resolve his problem from a mishna, I will fall from the mast of this ship and be drowned. Ilfa sought to demonstrate that despite the time he had spent in business, he still retained his extensive Torah knowledge.

**אֲתָא הָהוּא סָבָא תְּנָא לֵיהּ הָאוֹמֵר תְּנוּ שֶׁקֶל לְבָנַיי בְּשַׁבָּת וְהֵן רְאוּיִין לָתֵת**

**לָהֶם סֶלַע נוֹתְנִין לָהֶם סֶלַע וְאִם אָמַר אַל תִּתְּנוּ לָהֶם אֶלָּא שֶׁקֶל אֵין נוֹתְנִין לָהֶם אֶלָּא שֶׁקֶל**

A certain old man came and taught a baraita before him: If there is a man who, upon his deathbed, says in his will: Give a shekel to my sons every week, but this is a situation where, based on their needs, they are fit for the court to give them a sela, i.e., double the amount, they give them a sela. When the dying man mentioned a shekel, he presumably meant that they should be given a sum in accordance with their actual requirements, not that specific amount. But if he said: Give them only a shekel, the court gives them only a shekel and no more.

**אִם אָמַר אִם מֵתוּ יִרְשׁוּ אֲחֵרִים תַּחְתֵּיהֶם בֵּין שֶׁאָמַר תְּנוּ בֵּין שֶׁאָמַר אַל תִּתְּנוּ אֵין נוֹתְנִין לָהֶם אֶלָּא שֶׁקֶל אֲמַר לֵיהּ הָא מַנִּי רַבִּי מֵאִיר הִיא דְּאָמַר מִצְוָה לְקַיֵּים דִּבְרֵי הַמֵּת**

The baraita further states that if one said: If my sons die, others should inherit their portion in their stead, regardless of whether he said: Give them a shekel, or whether he said: Give them only a shekel, then the court gives his sons only a shekel per week, as their father clearly stated that he wishes to give his sons only a specific stipend and that he intends to leave the bulk of his property to others. Ilfa said to the old man: In accordance with whose opinion is this ruling? It is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Meir, who said: It is a mitzva to fulfill the statement of the dead. This entire baraita can be explained based on a principle that appears in a mishna: In all cases, one should try to execute the wishes of the deceased.