



מדרש פרקי דרבי אליעזר – פרק א'
PIRQEI D'RABBI ELIEZER – CHAPTER 1
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The following befell Rabbi Eliezer, son of Hyrqanos. His father had many ploughmen who were ploughing arable ground, whereas he was ploughing a stony plot; he sat down and wept. His father said to him: O my son! Why dost thou weep? Art thou perchance distressed because thou dost plough a stony plot? In the past thou hast ploughed a stony plot, now behold thou shalt plough with us arable soil. He sat down on the arable ground and wept. His father said to him: But why dost thou weep? Art thou perchance distressed because thou art ploughing the arable land? He replied to him: No. (Hyrqanos) said to him: Why dost thou weep? He answered him: I weep only because I desire to learn Torah. (Hyrqanos) said to him: Verily thou art twenty-eight years old—yet dost thou desire to learn Torah? Nay, go, take thee a wife and beget sons and thou wilt take them to the school. He fasted two weeks not tasting anything, until Elijah—may he be remembered for good—appeared to him and said to him: Son of Hyrqanos! Why dost thou weep? He replied to him: Because I desire to learn Torah. (Elijah) said to him: If thou desirest to learn Torah get thee up to Jerusalem to Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai. He arose and went up to Jerusalem to R. Jochanan ben Zakkai and sat down and wept. (R. Jochanan) said to him: Why dost thou weep? He answered him: Because I wish to learn Torah. (R. Jochanan) said to him: Whose son art thou? But he did not tell him.

(R. Jochanan) asked him: Hast thou never learnt to read the Shema, or the Tephillah, or the Grace after meals? He replied to him: No. He arose and (R. Jochanan) taught him the three (prayers). (Again) he sat down and wept. (R. Jochanan) said to him: My son, why dost thou weep? He replied: Because I desire to learn Torah. He (thereupon) taught him two rules (of the Law) every day of the week, and on the Sabbath (Eliezer) repeated them and assimilated them. He kept a fast for eight days without tasting anything until the odor of his mouth attracted the attention of R. Jochanan ben Zakkai, who directed him to withdraw from his presence. He sat down and wept. (R. Jochanan) said to him: My son, why dost thou weep? He rejoined: Because thou didst make me withdraw from thy presence just as a man makes his fellow withdraw, when the latter is afflicted with leprosy. (R. Jochanan) said to him: My son, just as the odor of thy mouth has ascended before me, so may the savor of the statutes of the Torah ascend from thy mouth to Heaven. He said to him: My son! Whose son art thou? He replied: I am the son of Hyrqanos. Then said (R. Jochanan): Art thou not the son of one of the great men of the world, and thou didst not tell me? By thy life! he continued, This day shalt thou eat with me. (Eliezer) answered: I have eaten already with my host. (R. Jochanan) asked: Who is thy host? He replied: R. Joshua ben Chananjah and R. Jose the Priest.

(R. Jochanan) sent to inquire of his hosts, saying to them: Did Eliezer eat with you this day? They answered: No; moreover has he not fasted eight days without tasting any food? R. Joshua ben Chananjah and R. Jose the Priest went and said to R. Jochanan ben Zakkai: Verily during the last eight days (Eliezer) has not partaken of any food.