



## 1.1 רב (רב אבא בר איבו)

הטיות נפוצות: אבא.  
 כינויים: אבא אריכא. 'בר פחתי' = בן גדולים.  
 דור: 1.

### Biography:

Rav (Rav Abba bar Eibo) was born in Bavel in the city of Kafre, near Sura, to a very well known and distinguished family. The Talmud Bavli records that he was descended from Shim'a, the brother of King David. The Yerushalmi says that he was descended from King David himself through his son Sh'fatyah ben Avital. It appears that the Bavli tradition is more likely, since Rav mentioned himself that Rebbe was from the House of David – meaning he himself was not. Rav's father, Eibo, was Rabbi Chiyya's half-brother on his father's side, and his mother was the half-sister of Rabbi Chiyya from his mother's side.

Rav came to *Eretz Yisrael* together with his uncle, Rabbi Chiyya, and his cousins, and he studied with Rebbe together with all the great students of Rebbe. He was one of the youngest members of the group. He also had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of *Tannaim* such as Rabbi Elazar bar Rabbi Shimon, Rabbi Elazar bar Rabbi Yosi, Rabbi Yishma'el bar Rabbi Yosi, and Sumachus! Rav was, apparently, already in *Eretz Yisrael* twenty years before Rebbe's death.

Rav, together with his cousin Rabbah bar Channah, was always with Rabbi Chiyya, who cared for their needs and their education. Rav was also involved in helping Rabbi Chiyya with his properties and his business. Rabbi Chiyya was Rav's main teacher, and he acted with great respect for him at all times. Rabbi Chiyya brought Rav to Rebbe, and he even ate at Rebbe's home a number of times. Rabbi Chiyya taught him Rebbe's custom.

Rav wanted to go to Bavel for purposes of marriage, and Rabbi Chiyya asked Rebbe to grant Rav halachic authority of the highest degree. Even though Rabbi Chiyya had already granted *s'michah* to Rav, there was an enactment of Rebbe that all halachic authority was to be coordinated through the *Nasi*, since an unqualified individual once caused a good deal of difficulty in this regard. Rebbe agreed to grant Rav halachic authority, but not of the highest degree. Rav went to Bavel and was there for a short time and returned to Israel to Rebbe's *y'shivah*. From that point on, he was very close to Rebbe, was appointed to Rebbe's *Bet Din* as the youngest judge, and was also appointed to be a reader before Rebbe, which was considered a particularly high honor. Rav moved with Rebbe from Bet Sh'arim to Zippori. Rabbi Yochanan ben Napacha testified that when he was young, in Rebbe's last years, he sat seventeen rows behind Rav, and that he used to see sparks flying from Rebbe to Rav and back, and he didn't understand a word of what was being said.

After Rebbe died, Rav stayed in *Eretz Yisrael*, and wanted to receive the highest level of halachic authority that Rebbe had withheld from him, but Rabban Gamaliel the son of Rebbe did not agree. During the days of Rabbi Y'hudah N'si'ah who was *Nasi* after Rabban Gamaliel, Rav went down to Bavel – twenty five years after Rebbe died – after finishing his training in general sciences and other disciplines that would qualify him to lead the community in Bavel. When Sh'muel, who was much younger than Rav, heard that Rav arrived in Bavel, he sent Karna to check Rav's knowledge, and discovered his greatness. Rav was only a short time in N'arde'a, but there he got to know Abba bar Abba, Sh'muel's father, Sh'muel himself, Rav Shela and Karna.

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Rav was Rav Shela's *m'turg'man* for one day, but Rav Shela was not happy with his work, so Rav settled in N'harde'a without a position. Despite the fact that Rav Shela recognized Rav's greatness and knew that Rav was his superior in Torah, and Rav did not always agree with Rav Shela's opinions, Rav never took any steps whatever to impact negatively on Rav Shela's position in any way. Once, he did disagree publicly with Rav Shela's halachic decision when he felt that the mistake was severe, but with Sh'muel's help, Rav Shela admitted his error and revoked his decision.

In the meantime, until Rav Shela's passing, Rav made his living from all sorts of odd jobs. For instance, he was responsible over the weights and measures in the marketplace by appointment of the Resh Galuta. When Rav Shela passed away, they offered Rav to be *Rosh Y'shivah* in N'harde'a, but he refused because he felt that N'harde'a was Sh'muel's place. Instead, he went to build his own *y'shivah* in Sura, to the south near his birthplace. He also acted to strengthen Jewish life in many small towns in Bavel on the way, and the Talmud Bavli records many such initiatives of Rav. Finally, he arrived in Sura and established his *y'shivah*, and he also succeeded in his business and became very wealthy.

Many great *Talmide Chachamim* gathered around Rav, such as Rav Kahana, Rav Asi and Rav Yirmiyah bar Abba. Additionally, Rav developed many, many fine students. The number of regular students in his *y'shivah* surpassed 1200!

He was called simply "Rav" – without his name – as he was the

teacher and halachic authority for the entire community in exile in Bavel. He was also referred to as "Abba" = "father" – not only because it was his name, but also because he was considered the father of the entire community.

During Rav's period, the Babylonian Jewish community developed significantly. Rav and Sh'muel led the two *y'shivot* and came to be known as "Our Masters in Bavel." Rav became close to the ruling government, and despite his extreme humility, he was afraid of no one when the community needed his help. After most of Rebbe's students passed away in *Eretz Yisrael*, Rav was considered the leader of the entire generation. Because he was also in contact with the last of the *Tannaim* during Rebbe's time, Rav also enjoyed the status of almost a *Tanna*, and sometimes even disputed issues with *Tannaim*, as the Talmud says: רב תנא ופליג, and his name sometimes even appears in *b'raitot*. In matters of ritual observance, the *halachah* was always decided like Rav, against Sh'muel. He was exceptionally righteous, and even his greatest students never reached his level in this area of life. He was also very tall, good looking, strong, and had a beautiful voice!

Rav suffered a great deal from his wife, who apparently was a very contrary woman, and was always ignoring his requests of her. Nevertheless, Rav honored and respected her. They had two sons, Rav Chiyva who became a great Torah scholar, and Eibo, who Rav guided into business. Rav had several daughters. One married Rav Chanan bar Rava, another married the son of the Resh Galuta and had two sons: Ravna Ukva and Ravna N'chemyah. From a third

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daughter he had grandsons named Chizkiyyah and Eibo.

Rav died at a ripe old age, over 90 years old. When he died, the entire community mourned him. Sh'muel tore his garments in thirteen places and mourned Rav for a full year. It became a custom in Bavel to use earth from his grave for healing remedies. A good deal of

the Talmud Bavli is based on his teachings. After Rav's death, no new *Rosh Y'shivah* was appointed in deference to Sh'muel who became the Master of the exilic community in Bavel. Rav Hamnuna was appointed to manage the *y'shivah*, which came to be known as "Rav's *Bet Midrash*." Seven years after Rav's death, Sh'muel passed away, and Rav Huna was appointed *Rosh Y'shivah* in Sura.

#### Story or Statement:

The Talmud says: 'Rav found a valley and fenced it in.' (*Eruvin* 6a). The meaning of this is that when Rav went from N'harde'a to Sura to find his own place and set up his own *y'shivah*, he found many Jewish villages where Jewish life was very poorly kept. He made enactments and customs to strengthen them. The Talmud says that Rav found a "valley" - meaning a place with no boundaries or guidance, and "fenced it in" - meaning he protected these places with his enactments.

#### Questions:

1. When a Rabbi finds a community with poor quality Jewish life, is the only way to take care of it to add additional strictures to prevent severe transgressions, or are there other ways to accomplish a better level?

2. Is it possible that through additional strictures on a community a Rabbi may cause damage and not improvement? How?

3. What does a leader need to be able to improve the quality of communities? What makes them listen to him?