# Mafsikim

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We studied Arvé Pesahim in high school. However, we didn’t get very far; I don’t think we ever got past the following, which occurs right at the beginning of the chapter:

*Rabban Shimon b Gamliel, R. Yehuda and R. Yose were reclining in Acre. The Sabbath arrived. Rabban Shimon b Gamliel said to R Yose: With your permission, let us interrupt [our meal] and respect the words of our colleague Yehuda? R. Yose responded: all your life you admire my words more than Yehuda’s, and now you admire Yehuda's words more than mine, “Will he rape the queen with me at home”* (Esther 7:8). *Let’s not interrupt lest the students see and establish the halakha for generations (in agreement with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda.)* – Pesahim 100a [1]

The showstopper for us was of course the quote from the book of Esther. No one could figure out how it was relevant or how to connect the three sages with Ahasuerus Haman and Esther.

A bit of background: There is a difference of opinion about when to say Kiddush if a meal starts late Friday afternoon and continues into Shabbat. R. Yehuda’s opinion is to say Kiddush in the middle of the meal and R. Yose opines that you finish the meal first and say Kiddush afterwards. [2]

The Gemarah is usually explained this way: Rabban Shimon b Gamliel follows the view of R. Yose and makes Kiddush after the meal. R. Yehuda was now present, therefore R Shimon b Gamliel asked R. Yose’s permission to act in accordance with the opinion of R. Yehuda. R. Yose emphatically refused. He feared (or according to most versions Rabban Shimon b Gamliel feared) that the students would think that R.Shimon b Gamliel was ruling according to R. Yehuda.

This explanation is difficult. Prior to this Shabbat, the students always saw Rabban Shimon b Gamliel follow the opinion of R. Yose. Next week they will see him again follow the opinion of R. Yose. This and this week alone, they’ll watch as Rabban Shimon b Gamliel honors R. Yehuda. Why assume that the students will make a mistake about this Halakha? [3]

There is also another question. Why were the sages and their students eating a meal at home at the start of Shabbat. Why weren’t they in Shul like the rest of us? Dr. Daniel Goldschmidt writes [4], that in those days the evening prayer was voluntary. Therefore (almost) no one attended synagogue on Friday nights. However, Rabban Gamliel, (Rabban Shimon’s father) is the one who ruled in a dramatic way that the evening prayer is obligatory. [5] You would think that his son, (R. Shimon) would agree with his father?

There is another interesting point that I think one can draw Dr. Goldschmidt’s article. Since it was obligatory to read the Shema and the four accompanying blessings in the evening, the participants must have read shema some time during the meal. This might an answer a well-known question on the first Mishna in Berakhot. The time that you recite the evening shema is the time that the Kohanim go in to eat their evening meal. Question: when do the kohanim recite shema? No problem, they paused and recited shema and its blessings at some point during their meal.

Rabbi Yehua lived in Usha. The Sanhedrin was also in Usha. Rabban Shimon b Gamliel the head ( Nasi) of the Sanhedrin, lived there as well.

Rabbi Yehuda is called מוריינא דבי נשיאהor מוריינא דנשיא. According to Rashi, this means that R. Yehuda was the halachic authority in the house of the Nasi; all their practices followed his decisions. [6]

Rabban Shimon b Gamliel followed R. Yehuda’s opinions. He interrupted his Friday afternoon meal to make Kiddush when Shabbat began. [8]

R Yose lived in  Zippori (Sepphoris) about 16 km away? In that town they surely followed R. Yose’s opinion they would not interrupt their meal to make Kiddush.

/\*Elsewhere, outside of Usha, it sounds like he would have followed R. Yose, which was maybe the majority opinion./more common opinion. \*/

But our story takes place in Acco (Acre). The Nasi asked R Yose if they could follow the opinion of R Yehuda, which was the opinion that the Nasi himself usually followed. R Shimon b Gamliel saw the meal in Acco sort of as an extension of a meal in the house of the Nasi, especially since R. Yehuda was present. R Yose refused. He explained his position this way: The Nasi doesn't usually have the opportunity to *follow* my words but now that we are in Acco, there's no longer reason to follow R Yehuda. (Maybe most places followed R. Yose’s practice.)

R Yose quotes from the book of Esther to support his argument.

Dr. Amos Hakham (p47) Daat Mikra esther summary of the end of chapter 7 writes:

We usually think that the drunk (foolish) king attributed an intent to haman that Haman didn’t have . . . But even if the king understood and knew that Haman was begging for his life from Queen Esther, he still had the right to punish Haman. In falling on the Queen’s couch, and probably holding on to her legs, Haman acted against the self-respect of the Queen.

Dr. Hakham continues, Odysseus faced a similar situation (in Book IV). He debated whether to clasp the knees of the princess as a suppliant, or whether to keep his distance and speak with courteous words . . . Odysseus finally decided to make his request from afar.

I guess Dr. Hakham is translating l’khbosh et hamalka as “sway the queen” or “convince the queen”. We can extend Dr. Hakham’s explanation a little bit (and maybe this extension is already included in Dr. Hakham’s words). Haman's fatal mistake consisted of trying to convince the queen to pardon him (and save his life) instead of addressing that request to the king. The sense of the Ahasuerus’ words is something like: "If I'm not here, I understand that you'll go and petition the queen for your life, but since I am here you should petition me because I'm the real authority."

R Yosi's argument is similar. "In Usha where I'm not present, it’s correct that you follow R Yehuda’s view. However everywhere else (since you always cherish my words), you should follow my ruling.

To summarize: R Yosi is playing the role of Asheverus. R. Yehuda is Esther and R. Shimon b Gamliel is acting like Haman in the sense that he’s recognizing R. Yehuda’s authority in a place that follows R. Yosi’s view.

Rabban Shimon b Gamliel accepted this argument and publicized a ruling like the opinion of R. Yose.