# Mafsikim

Chaim Katz Montreal

We were taught Arvé Pesahim in high school but as far as I remember, we didn’t get too far. I think we we spent a very long while on the second page of the chapter before eventually moving on or before they replaced our Talmud class with a Haskhafa class. The showstopper was here:

*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.* – Pesahim 100a [1]

The teacher coundn’t explain the quote from the book of Esther. No one could figure out how it was relevant or who exactly was playing the role of Haman or of Esther.

A bit of background: There is a difference of opinion about when to say Kiddush if you start a meal Friday afternoon and continue eating into Shabbat. R. Yehuda’s opinion is to say Kiddush in the middle of the meal (after moving the table away) 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 normally followed the view of R. Yose, the lenient view, and made Kiddush after the meal. R. Yehuda was now present [3], therefore R Shimon b Gamliel asked R. Yose’s permission to act in accordance with the stricter opinion of R. Yehuda. R. Yose emphatically refused because he feared (or according to some versions Rabban Shimon b Gamliel feared) that the students would mistakenly assume that the Halakha was in accordance with R. Yehuda.

This explanation is difficult. Prior to this Shabbat, the students always saw Rabban Shimon b Gamliel observe the practice of R. Yose. Next week they will watch him follow the practice of R. Yose. This and this week alone, they’ll notice that Rabban Shimon b Gamliel interrupts the meal as per R. Yehuda. Why assume that the students will make a mistake about this Halakha? Also, we don’t find in Talmudic times that there was a motivation to observe a stricter practice in order to satisfy all the divergent opinions.

Some wonder why the sages and their students were eating a meal at that time. Why weren’t they in the Synagogue saying the evening prayers with everyone else? Dr. Daniel Goldschmidt explains [4], that in those days the evening prayer was voluntary. Therefore, no one attended synagogue on Friday nights.

This is an interesting suggestion for a couple of reasons. Firstly, no one thought to go to shul to say the evening prayers voluntarily. No one worried about satisfying the stricter opinion. Secondly the argument over the status of the evening prayer, [5] was between Rabban Shimon b Gamliel’s father and R. Yehoshua. Although Rabban Gamliel ruled that the evening prayer is obligatory, it looks like a generation later his ruling was overturned and even his son didn’t follow it. [5]

As an aside, there is another interesting take-away from the story. We know that it’s obligatory to read the Shema and the four accompanying blessings every evening. When did the participants in the meal read the shema if they didn’t go to shul first? They must have paused during the meal to read the shema.

There’s a well-known question on the first Mishna in Berakhot. The Mishna says that the time to recite the evening shema is the time that the Kohanim go in to eat their evening meal. When did the kohanim recite shema? Obviously, 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.