# 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. As did Rabban Shimon b Gamliel was the Nasi (president) of the Sanhedrin. The seat of the Sanhedrin was in Usha.

Rabbi Yehuda is called, מוריינא דבי נשיאהor מוריינא דנשיא

According to Rashi this means that he was the halachic authority in the house of the Nasi; all their practices followed his decisions. [6]

R Yose lived in Tzipori.

Thus, in the Nasi's home, in R Yehuda's territory (Usha), one followed R Yehuda's opinions. Rabban Shimon b Gamliel would have followed R. Yehuda every week (whether R Yehuda was at the meal or not he was present or not) and would have interrupted his meal to make Kiddush. [8] Elsewhere, outside of Usha, it sounds like he would have followed R. Yose, which was maybe the majority opinion./more common opinion.

This might also explain why R. Shimon b Gamliel didn’t go to shul on Fri nights? Because R. Yehuad held reshus?

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. (And R Yehuda was present.) In other words, R Shimon b Gamliel saw the meal in Acco as some sort of extension of a meal in the house of the Nasi. R Yose, however, refused. He explained his position this way: The Nasi doesn't usually have the opportunity to *follow* his words but now that they are in Acco, there's no reason to follow R Yehuda. 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 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 keep his distance from her.

We can argue along the lines of Dr. Hakham’s explanation (and maybe this is included in Dr. Hakham’s words), that Haman's mistake consisted of begging for his life from the queen instead of pleading from the king. The sense of the king's 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 since you admit that you cherish my words over R. Yehuda’s, then everywhere else it is I that is the authority and you should follow my ruling.

R Yosi is in playing the role of Asheverus. Esther is R. Yehuda. R. Shimon b Gamliel is identified with Haman since he is putting more weight on R. Yehuda’s ruling rather than R. Yosi’s.

This was a good argument and R Shimon b Gamliel accepted it.