

Elie Wiesel In the Talmud: Rav and Shmuel

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Elie Wiesel:

As always, when we enter the world of the Talmud we issue an invitation. An invitation to join us on a journey. On a journey far away, in time, in space, in fantasy and imagination. And it's a journey to both the land of Israel and to Babylonia. There we find as always, two names always in opposition. Two men, always friends. And we find their glorious place in Talmudic literature being very special, very unique. Because it enlightens and disturbs at the same time.

The names that we shall evoke [00:01:00] tonight have been extolled throughout vast universe of Jewish learning for many centuries. Great scholars, strong leaders, sensitive educators, their impact on Jewish life will never be measured for they transcended their own era. Their prestigious schools were in Babylon, but their pupils can be found to this day all over the world. From Jerusalem to Brooklyn, from Morocco to Manhattan.

Rav and Shmuel. Whoever studied Talmud is familiar with their voices, with their lessons, with their arguments, as well as with their different lifestyles.

Now Rav and Shmuel, why not Rav against Shmuel instead? Their vigorous and endless [00:02:00] debates remind us of those that were conducted across schools and centuries, between Hillel and Shammai. Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael, Rabbi Yochanan, Reish Lakish, Abaye and Rava. What better proof does one need to affirm our profound belief that the Jewish tradition of intellectual pluralism and social tolerance is as old as the Jewish people itself?

Ideological adversaries, Rav and Shmuel rarely agreed on matters relating either to *halacha*, the law, or to *aggadah*, the legend. Yet they showed affection and respect to one another. Consequently, they remain inseparable in our collective memory. When Rav offers an opinion we are eager to hear Shmuel's too. One completes the other, one is enriched by the other. [00:03:00] Together they belong to the enchanting and colorful symphony of the Talmud; whose melodious tales and legal systems have accompanied our people from exile to exile, keeping our dreams and memories alive.

A story: Shmuel and a friend of his named Karna were standing near the so-called king's river that flows near the city of Nehardea in Babylonia. They stood talking quietly about current affairs. All of a sudden the river rose and became violent, even though the day was sunny and the sky blue. There was no wind, and yet the waves rose higher and higher.

Said Shmuel, and I quote him: "This is a sign that a great teacher is [00:04:00] coming into town, go and see him." Now could this be the origin of the expression to make waves? (audience laughter) Anyway, we must have heard of the school's great erudition from learned personalities, and students who had met him in Eretz, Israel in the Land of Israel. Karna understood the meaning of his friend's suggestion, he went to see the man whose reputation had preceded him.

Above all, he wanted to test his knowledge. That was the way of meeting people then. He asked him two questions, which Rav answered satisfactorily. However, there is a third question that Karna did not raise. Namely, why had Rav left the Holy Land? What had moved him, the great scholar to expatriate

himself? What had made him come or return [00:05:00] to Babylonia?

As for Shmuel, there is a question about him too. There is a question about everyone in the Talmud. In this case there is a question that cannot but disturb his admirers and pupils. And we are all his pupils and his admirers. In spite of his erudition, in spite of his rabbinic authority in Babylonia he was never ordained. And the question is, why not? His disciples received the title, but he did not. So, we cannot but ask -- why was Shmuel discriminated against?

Well you see, we are already confronted with at least two sets of questions for tonight's encounter. And there will be more, any Talmudic text inspires us to seek out more and more riddles and enigmas. There is [00:06:00] no religious literature that incites the reader, the student to be as daring and go as far with his or her interrogations or investigations. The mystery of the *Pardes*, the orchard of secret knowledge.

And the solitude of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the flight of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, and the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiba, the innocence of Rabbi Zeira, and the piety of Rabbi Hanina ben

Dosa. In years past we tried to explore the life of every sage through one or more episodes that at first puzzled us. Why did Rabbi Akiba crown bar Kokhba as the Messiah? Why did Rabbi Meir escape from Palestine? What made the son of Abuyah a renegade?

The Talmudic gallery is filled with captivating portraits of teachers and disciples, visionaries and dreamers, interpreters and decision makers, who have tried to cope with [00:07:00] crises and conflicts, threats and prosecutions. Willed and ordered by an infinite variety of enemies against Jews everywhere, anywhere. Their work, the Talmud is unique. It appeals to both the heart and the mind.

It opens invisible doors to ancient treasures, and to topical issues. Philosophy and jurisprudence, astronomy and gastronomy, mathematics and geography, literature and architecture.

Whatever exists outside the Talmud is reflected inside the Talmud. Those who hate the Jews inevitably hated the Talmud, and the other way around. Our enemies somehow saw in the Talmud a mysterious shield that protected our people.

Hostile kings would go to great lengths to discredit and/or destroy the Talmud. They would hire experts to falsify Talmudic

texts. [00:08:00] They would force rabbis to enter into disputations with apostates. They would issue decrees ordering exile or public burning for the Talmud. But the Talmud remained alive. More and more, and more alive. The Jewish people kept it alive.

"*Im-yesh et-naf'sh'kha l'da-at*" said Bialik in his poignant poem. "Your soul needs to know what kept the Jewish people alive during so many tempests of blood and fire. You wish to learn the secret of Jewish identity and endurance. Go to the *Bet Ha-Midrash*. Go to the house of study where the young boys and old men, fathers and sons are sitting hunched over large books. Immersing themselves in legends and laws, told and written far away. Long ago for us -- today, always.

There [00:09:00] can be no doubt that were it not for the Talmud, the Jewish people would have lost many more of its branches during its dispersion. Thanks to the attachment that the Talmud elicits from its eternal students, the Jewish people was able to surmount most of the time the temptations of comfort and the seductions of despair.

Talmud means study, but it means much more than that. It means commitment to values, to a constant search for values. Talmud means dialogue, and acceptance of dialogue. It means dialogue with the present and with the past. We may still argue with the Rambam, enter into dispute with ibn Ezra, and follow Don Isaac Abravanel. Talmud means celebration.

As we study it we celebrate language by pushing it to its limits, and also by condensing it to its limits. One Talmudic phrase [00:10:00] contains ten. One short sentence is a story, a novel in itself. Example: A woman came to the Rabbi Eliezer with a very special problem. He refused to help her. So she went to Rabbi Yehoshua, his friend and adversary and he was more amenable. What was the problem? Listen carefully. She explained it in one short sentence. *"B'ni hakatan mib'ni hagadol."* "My youngest son is the son of my oldest son."

Now, I'm sure you will admit that Dostoevsky would have written 600 pages about this incestuous woman, seized by remorse and thirsty for confession. As for Freud? (audience laughter) There is much beauty in what we may call, the Talmudic approach. Or the Talmudic style. Our [00:11:00] sages revealed many hidden things, but always with tact and precision. There is no

vulgarity in the Talmud. Interested in everything, concerned with everyone, they forever took positions for or against. Nothing left our sages neutral, they were never indifferent.

Thus in studying Talmud today, as some of you have studied this afternoon with my young friend, Rabbi Lavey Derby. In studying Talmud we are given the exciting opportunity to discover the world in which our ancestors lived and worked. The period in which they built and rebuilt Jewish life and Jewish fervor, often on ruins, often with ruins. The Talmud to me is a triumph over a multitude of enemies. Over sweeping waves of progress and [00:12:00] modernism. But it is also and above all the triumph over oblivion. To study Talmud means to celebrate memory.

And this is what we have done here for the past 20 years. And this is what we shall do tonight. Tonight's lecture is devoted to the memory of Rabbeinu Shaul Lieberman, *zichrono livracha*. Some of you may have had the privilege of knowing him, or of studying with him. I had that privilege of being his student and his friend for 17 years. And as I have said, I must repeat -- all that I have, I received from him.

May I tell you how we met. We met somehow, it was related to Soviet Jewry. I had just come back from my first trip to Russia in 1965. [00:13:00] And an old, old friend, the marvelous Israeli journalist called Gershon Swet, from Jerusalem who lived in New York, invited me to come to his home. And there was a man whose work I had known, whose work I had admired for years and years. And we talked and he wanted to know very much about what I had written about the reawakening of Soviet Jewry.

He couldn't believe it, because he was a Russian Jew, was born in Motele near Pinsk. The same place where Weizmann was born. And of course, he the great Talmudic giant couldn't, couldn't believe that there were still Talmudic students and scholars in Russia, 50 years after the revolution. So I gave him all that I had amassed and accumulated in Russia. At the end of the evening, he said to me, [00:14:00] "I hear that you are giving lectures at the Y." I said, "Yes." "Can I come?" I said, "No." (laughter)

"What are you talking about?" I said, "Well..." "What are you talking about? You don't go and talk just like that?" I said, "No, no, I work very hard." "And when are you talking?" He said. "Next Thursday." Well, it was a Talmudic lesson. "Can I

come?" I said, "No, no." "I want to come." "Please," I said, "Mr. Lieberman, don't come." He insisted. So, he wanted to come.

Of course I worked hard. I didn't sleep for the whole week. To have Lieberman here, and dare to talk about Talmud? That's chutzpah Yudaikah. I worked very, very hard. Finally, Thursday came, *bede'hilu v'rehimu*, with fear and trembling I gave my lecture. And he was very, very generous, [00:15:00] very gentle. He was standing out there with my wife. And he said very nice things with other people around. He was very, very nice. (laughter) But he said, "Come and see me tomorrow."

Well, I was very glad. I went next day to the Seminary, and I came into his study. Which for the first time, I've been in his study. Thousands and thousands of books everywhere. And he said, "I heard what you said last night. Tell me, what you said at that-and-that place," he said. "Was it your *chiddush*? Because I felt it was your innovation." Said, "I think so." "Oh," he said, and he pulled out an old Midrash, and he showed it to me. "It's there. But you thought this was yours, it's there."

And I was very happy. I said, "I'm so glad. [00:16:00] You know, I'm not here to innovate, I'm here to learn. And nothing could please me more than to know that I am going in certain footsteps." He didn't believe me. He said: "All right. And the other *chiddush*," he said. "At the end of your lecture you said something else, is that yours?" That time I already knew what was coming. I said, "Maybe." Another Midrash, there it was. And again, I said "Thank you very much. I really am grateful for showing it to me."

He still didn't believe me. He said, "What are you speaking about next week?" Luckily, I said "Next week is about Hasidism." He wasn't a Hasid. He was anti-Hasidic as anti-Hasidic could be. And I was convinced at least there I can come and speak calmly, you know. (laughter) Without Lieberman present. "Can I come?" I said, "You and Hasidism? What would the world say, you?" "I want to come." He came, [00:17:00] and there I felt a little bit stronger. After all, I knew Hasidism and he was really alien-- one to another.

Afterwards, again. "Very interesting," he said. "Can you come and see me tomorrow?" I went back next day to see him. And he knew more about the Hasidic master that I was speaking than I

did. And again he said, "Is this yours? If you think it's yours, not yours." And when he saw how pleased I was to learn, somehow, we became very attached. And we remained very close. And he really, if I had a teacher. And I did have a teacher, he was my teacher, and later became our friend.

So therefore, it's only normal that tonight's lecture on Talmud, every year must be dedicated to his memory. Simply to prove once more that his students continue in his footsteps. And try to find beauty in our learning, [00:18:00] and much fervor in our study.

In studying the portraits of our two great sages, Rav and Shmuel tonight we shall remember, Shaul Lieberman. And we shall remember all those who before Rav and Shmuel, all those who were their predecessors and contemporaries. Both in Babylonia and in the land of Israel. We shall remember those who follow them. We shall remember those who remembered them. Memory is an act of generosity. Memory is an act of inclusion. But then, let's be fair. If we remember the distant past and its heroes, how can we forget the present? Then our friends who are waiting outside to be called inside. (audience laughter) [00:19:00]

So there we are. We are there in the land of Babylonia and the Land of Israel, meeting two men, Rav and Shmuel. Two names, two systems, two spiritual leaders, two friends and opponents. They were the Amoraim in Babylonia, and surely you know that the Amoraim follow the Tannaim. In the difference between them; *tanna* means "one who studies," and *amora* "one who speaks" or "who interpreted [00:20:00] their studies."

The Tannaim's era began with Hillel and Shammai in the early period of Herod's reign. As authors of the Mishnah they were innovators, creative thinkers, daring codifiers. In the course of generations they were followed by memorizers, who served as living libraries in various academies. They were known not for their independent thought, but for their ability to display total recall. It's amazing when you think about it; that every school had its librarian. And you could simply come and say, "What did Rabbi Akiva say on that matter?" (makes sound effect) It came out. (audience laughter) Well, today you would call it a computer, but I prefer them.

But then came the Amoraim, at first they would translate into Aramaic what the Tannaim would say in public. [00:21:00] Later they themselves were teachers. Still, protocol and seniority

limited their authority. An Amora, for instance, could not dispute the views of a Tanna. Rav and Shmuel were the first Amoraim. Under their guidance and inspiration Jewish scholarship attained unequalled heights. The erudition invested in their academies was enough to nourish teachers and students for the next five centuries, and probably more.

So let us have a closer look at them. What do we know about Rav and Shmuel? Except for their deep commitment to study and practice the two men differed in most areas, both personal and ideological. Rav spent his formative years in Palestine, Shmuel in [00:22:00] Babylonia. Rav was born wealthy, Shmuel became wealthy. Rav was moody, Shmuel was stable and controlled. But both loved poetry. Both composed prayers, many beautiful prayers that we still recite to this day.

Born in the second century before the Common Era in the Babylonian village-- I'm sorry in the second century in the Common Era-- in the Babylonian village Kafri near Sura. Rav, whose full name was Abba bar Aybo, came from an aristocratic family that traced its lineage to King David. He was close to Rabbi Hiyya, his uncle, who was also his teacher. It was Rabbi Hiyya who brought him to Palestine and introduced him to

[00:23:00] Rabbi Yehudah the Prince, who took a liking to him and invited him to his table. Going so far as even asking him once to say grace after the meal. Which was a great honor. Flattered, Rav had to fight hard to regain his composure.

Perhaps that was due to his timidity. He was young, and shy, and a stranger. Rabbi Hiyya had therefore to teach him table manners, how to behave in class, when to speak, when to keep silent, how to address the master in order to help the discussion rather than disrupt it. He taught him for instance always to be totally relevant when putting a question to Rabbi Yehudah. Confusion of issues or themes is dangerous to intellectual inquiry. Eventually, he came to be accepted as one of Rabbi Yehudah's favorite pupils.

[00:24:00] And in time, he became a member of Rabbi Yehudah's so-called editorial committee, in preparing the Mishnah. Surely that was a great honor, and to have a responsibility. For it was up to that group of scholars to decide what to include and what to omit. What to preserve and what to discard. The Mishnah was to become a collective depository of Jewish memory and learning for generations and generations of sages. And the

Mishna of course, when you study it, you realize that it is an extraordinary work of art.

The process of the Mishnah formation lasted 300 years. And encompassed such tragedies as the destruction of the Temple, the Hadrianic persecutions, [00:25:00] and the Bar Kokhba rebellion. And mind you, and that is extraordinary for us; the Temple's destruction did not stop the editorial work of the Mishnah. Now the Mishnah, as the whole process of learning was all the time based on debates and on more debates, of the 523 chapters of the Mishnah only six contain no controversies.

So, if we are grateful to Rabbi Yehudah the Prince for undertaking such a monumental task -- we are equally thankful to Rav. This disciple, the student for helping him collect laws, present them in a clear order, and remain truthful to all sections, all sides, [00:26:00] all participants in all the discussions. Why was he called Rav? In truth, he already had the nickname, Abba Arikha. Abba the Tall One, he must have been strikingly tall, so much so that his disciple Rav Yehudah, who was also tall, reached only to his shoulder.

Some scholars objected to the nickname, feeling it implied the lack of respect to the teacher. Said Rabbi Yochanan, and I quote him: "You call him Abba Arikha? Abba the Tall One. That's what you call him? I remember we were both students at the academy of Rabbi Yehuda the Prince, and already then he was recognized as the great scholar. He was sitting while I stood 17 rows behind him. He and Rabbi Yehudah were engaged in a fiery debate. Sparks were in the air [00:27:00] as the arguments flew back and forth. And I heard everything and understood nothing. And you call him by a nickname?"

The generally accepted view is that he was called by his title Rav, rather than by his name because of the high position he had attained among scholars. Just as Rabbi Yehuda the Prince was called Rabbi, Rabbi Abba was called Rav. However, there is another explanation, there always is in the Talmud worth mentioning. Actually, he was called Reb Abba. But since there was another Reb Abba, they dropped the *alef*. Now the name was Reb Ba, and the abbreviation of *resh* and *bet* is Rav.

Whatever the reason, Rav was Rav. A teacher, a master, an authoritative [00:28:00] voice in the stormy world of learning. Though he was not one of the Tannaim, he and he alone among

Amoraim occasionally felt entitled to argue with the tannaic decision. "*Rav tana hu u'palig.*" says the Talmud. Rav could oppose even one of the Palestinian Tannaim, the teachers.

In a way he was part of both schools, the one in Palestine and the one in Babylonia. He visited Palestine but then returned to Babylonia. After staying there a while he went back again to Palestine. In the end he left it again, and this time for good. But why did he leave the Holy Land the first time? The reasons are not clear. Before his departure, his uncle and protector Rabbi Hiyya, had interceded on his behalf with Rabbi Yehuda the Prince to ordain him as rabbi. Rabbi Yehudah agreed, [00:29:00] but not entirely.

The formula "*yoray yoray yadin yadin,*" which is on the parchment of every *smicha* of every ordination to this day -- actually originates in those customs. Rabbi Hiyya asked about his nephew in the presence of the teacher. "*Yoray?*" "May he teach?" And the ordaining Rabbi answered, "*Yoray.*" "He may teach." "*Yadin?*" "May he judge?" And the answer was "*Yadin.*" "He may judge."

So he got the formula from Rabbi Yehudah the Prince. However, Rabbi Yehudah limited it to certain areas. Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, the Prince did not empower Rav to deal with *hatarat bechorim* --with purely ritual matters, such as cases involving firstborn [00:30:00] animals that may not be consumed unless they are blemished, for they are holy and destined for sacrifice.

Now why was Rav denied full ordination? Perhaps because of the general policy in Palestine to discourage people from becoming *yordim* by going to Babylonia. Rav was hurt by his incomplete ordination, that is clear. We know this from his appeal to Rabbi Yehudah's grandson, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi's -- to correct the injustice and grant him full ordination. And the appeal was rejected. "I cannot go beyond what my grandfather gave you." Said the new religious leader of Palestinian Jewry. But Rav should not have been too unhappy, after all his friend and rival Shmuel received no ordination at all.

Now what about Shmuel? [00:31:00] Shmuel was born in the heart of Nehardea a famous city in Babylonia which had a tradition of scholarship dating back to the first Jewish refugees in the time of King Jehoiachin. Before the destruction of the First Temple.

His father, Abba bar Abba belonged to the upper middle class. He was wealthy and influential; a trader in silk. He was also known for his piety. One day he met Rabbi Yehudah ben Betera, who wished to purchase silk, but realized all of a sudden that he had no money on him.

In the absence of credit cards, the rabbi decided to leave without the merchandise, but the rich merchant insisted. "Take it," he said. "Isn't your word worth more than money?" Answered the old sage: [00:32:00] "Because you have faith in words, you will have a son, who like the prophet Samuel will have faith in words." And that is why Abba bar Abba named his son Samuel, or Shmuel.

There is a legend in the Midrash that a woman endowed with magic powers, who understood the language of birds tried to seduce Abba bar Abba. For she had heard from the birds that he would sire a great man, Shmuel. Abba bar Abba managed to resist her charms. But her predictions proved correct. His son became a great man in Israel. So great that his father was often referred to not by his own name, Abba bar Abba, but by his son's. Avi Shmuel, Shmuel's father.

Now Shmuel's father, Abba the son of Abba was also known [00:33:00] for his honesty. As we know, he was a trustee of orphans' funds, which in the Talmud was a great privilege. It happened that Shmuel was not at home when his father died. And so he was not told where his father had hidden the orphans' monies. As a result, some people suspected Shmuel of misusing them.

So Shmuel went to the cemetery and turned to the dead. And I'm quoting the entire dialogue: "I am looking for Abba," said Shmuel. "There are many men called Abba here," they told him. "I am looking for Abba Son of Abba." "He's not here," they told him. "He is in the heavenly Yeshiva studying Torah." And so Shmuel went up into the heavenly Yeshiva. And that is where he found his father. [00:34:00] Strangely, his father was laughing and weeping at the same time. And Shmuel said, "Father, why are you weeping?" And he said, "Because you will soon join me here." "Then why are you laughing?" "Because your position here is very strong," said the father.

"Father," said Shmuel. "Where are the monies that belong to the orphans?" "In the mill," said the father, "you will find three layers of monies. The upper and lower ones are ours. The

middle one is theirs." "Why did you do that?" And the father answered. "I wanted to protect the orphans' monies. Were thieves to come, they would steal the upper layer. Ours alone. Should the soil damage the lower layer, ours alone would be damaged."

[00:35:00] One day, we are told before he died, Abba bar Abba gave his son money to distribute among the poor. As Shmuel went into the street he saw a beggar eating meat and drinking wine, which were costly items in those times too. So he went back into the house shouting, "Father, father!" He said. "This poor man is rich!" And the father said: "No. But go and give him more money. Because apparently, he needs more."

Shmuel was versed not only in Torah, but also in secular sciences. In fact he enjoyed a wide reputation as a physician, ophthalmologist, mathematician, economist, and astronomer.

Among other accomplishments he prepared a calendar for Babylonian Jews for the next 60 years. His system was scientific and precise, as well his methods and inventions

[00:36:00] in medicine. His specialties were stomach and eye ailments. He invented unusual diets for his patients with

nervous stomachs. And concocted a special ointment for his patients with eye problems.

Together with Rav he reigned over Babylonia, which was for a while divided in two. One area was ruled by Rav and the other by Shmuel. And in spite of the difference in their tempers and views, they got along well. They even agreed on many issues. When Reb Shela died in Nehardea, Shmuel was asked to succeed him as head of the *Sidra*, as the Yeshiva was then called. Shmuel refused. Why? Rav had already been there. And he, Shmuel felt that the Rav, his senior was more qualified. [00:37:00] But Rav too refused, he did not want to hurt Shmuel.

Later when both became heads of prestigious academies, Rav in Sura, and Shmuel in Nehardea. The accepted principle was that in their debates, Rav always prevailed in religious matters of *issur veheter*, what is permitted and what is not. Whereas Shmuel's opinions prevailed always in matters involving finances.

Shmuel was known for his extraordinary memory, he himself made no secret of the fact that he remembered many things far back, very far back. For instance he once said casually, and I quote

him: "I remember the midwife who brought me into this world."

(audience laughter) And he continued, [00:38:00] "And I remember the *moyel*, the man who performed my circumcision." Now, such a man must have been indisputably precocious. He must have been later an exceptionally gifted student, and there is evidence that he was.

In a discussion in the Talmud over the question of washing before meals, whether the person who is feeding another must also wash or not. The following episode is told. I quote: "Shmuel's father found Shmuel crying." He was very young then. "'Why are you crying?'" He asked him. And he said, 'Because my teacher hit me.' 'Why did you teacher hit you?' 'Because he told me that I fed his son and did not wash my hands.' 'Why didn't you?' 'What?' Asked Shmuel: 'He is eating and I should wash?' And he added, 'Isn't it enough [00:39:00] that the teacher was ignorant? Did he have to hit me too?'"

Not only did the father wisely change Shmuel's teachers, he himself began teaching him. And he also gave him tests and exams. But when once he asked him four questions related to sacrificial slaughter and Shmuel was wrong four times. The young man was sent to the great teachers of the time, including

Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira, whose school was in Netzivin .
Shmuel also studied with Levi ben Sisi, and the exilarch, the
king of the Jews, the president of the Jews in diaspora, called
Jeconiah.

At one point Shmuel visited Palestine where he studied also
under Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi. We know this because he treated
Rabbi Yehudah's eye ailment. And we know what happened and how
it happened. The Talmud tells us [00:40:00] that Shmuel wanted
to put something in his eye, but Rabbi Yehudah refused, fearing
that it would hurt too much. So Shmuel suggested applying some
cream to his eyelids. Still Rabbi Yehudah refused. So Shmuel
put the cream under the rabbi's pillow. And we are told that
the aroma was so strong that it cured him.

Still when Shmuel wanted Rabbi Yehudah to ordain him, for
ordination could be obtained only in Palestine. He met with a
refusal. The reasons for the refusal again is not clear. Some
theorize that Shmuel was too learned in astronomy and the
techniques of calendar calculations. And Rabbi Yehudah may have
been afraid that his views could carry too much weight in the
matter.

And at that time in those centuries [00:41:00] it was very important to decide who has the authority on establishing the calendar. For that authority meant establishing the holidays and the entire year. But others believe that he, Shmuel did not get the ordination because he had acquired too much secular science. Secular knowledge, too much for his own good.

So which version is correct? We have no way of knowing. All we know is that Rabbi Yehudah himself expressed his regret in the form of a platitude. He simply said: "Sorry. It is one of those things." Comments Rashi: "Maybe the time was not ripe, or there were not enough rabbis present." Does this mean that the head of the academy lacked the authority to ordain on his own? That he needed the consent of senior faculty? [00:42:00] The fact remains that Shmuel was not ordained.

And we know that he tried to console his old teacher. "Do not be sad," he told Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi. "I read the Book of Adam, the first man, which according to tradition contains the names of all the leaders to the end of all times." "When it came to my place in history, it said, 'Shmuel, the astronomer will be called *chakham*. Sage but not rabbi. In other words, it is not your fault. It was God's decision, not yours."

And Shmuel then added: "The Book of Adam also says that Rabbi Yehudah will be cured by Shmuel." Now, it would seem that even Adam already [00:43:00] knew about his medical degree. It would also seem that in those times, Rabbi and doctor did not go together. There were no Herr Doktor Rabbiners in those times.

Yet Shmuel's prestige among scholars was high in Babylonia. With or without his rabbinic title his official position was secure, his leadership undisputed. When Rav died in Sura no one succeeded him as long as Shmuel was alive. Which means another seven years until the year 254 of the Common Era. People loved him so deeply, we are told that they carried him on their shoulders to prevent him from getting tired walking. And so while we understand the various theories of why he was not ordained, actually we should ask ourselves, why did he care? Why did he wish to be called rabbi? [00:44:00] Were rabbis enjoying such a good time then, as they do now? (audience laughter)

Well, let us look back at the situation of the Jewish people in that period. The time from the middle of the second to the middle of the third centuries. In Rome emperors rapidly succeed

one another, most of them murdered. Marcus Aurelius, Caracalla, Geta, Elagabalus, Alexander Severus, Maximinus, Gordian the First, Gordian the Second, Balbinus, Pupienus, Gordian the Third.

The Sassanids ruling Persia, and Neoplatonism is at its height in Greece. The bishop of Rome becomes the first pope of Christianity whose persecuted martyrs are now called saints. The whole world is in a state of constant upheaval. The Roman Empire is ravaged by the great plague. The year 248 [00:45:00] has a special meaning for Rome. It marks the celebration of its one-thousandth anniversary. But there will be no more occasions for national celebrations in Rome. The empire's glory is fading, its decline irreversible. The old victors must yield their place to new victors, the conquerors of Judea will in turn be conquered.

What remains of their victories? Statues and monuments soon to be destroyed. And a chapter or two in history books, soon to be changed. Some of the emperors were relatively good to the Jews, most were not. One of the worst was Marcus Aurelius. His one regret was not to be able to impose heavy taxes on Jews for the air they were breathing.

Severus on the other hand was good. This unknown Syrian who at [00:46:00] 17 became emperor, showed a good measure of tolerance and understanding to the Jews and their belief. The second Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi and he were close friends. As a result, the Jews of Judea lived in peace during the 13 years of his reign.

As for the Jewish communities in Babylonia, their lot was no worse. The Parthian king, Artabanus looked upon them with favor and kindness. They enjoyed internal autonomy. The *reysh galuta*, the prince of captivity, or the exilarch was the leader in matters relating to politics and criminal affairs. His standing was high, he was fourth to the king.

Consequently, he a descendant of David, incarnated Jewish royalty in the midst of exile. He had servants, and bodyguards, [00:47:00] and musicians who played when he went to bed, and when he rose. In fact, some sages criticized him for playing music and thus forgetting the destruction of the Temple. Some cities became famous centers of learning. Others were known for their commerce. A city called Mahuza was so Jewish, and so

exclusively Jewish that certain rabbis wondered aloud why its gates did not have *mezuzot* on them.

The communities were so Jewish that in matters of *yichus*, of family status, Babylonian families were considered safer than Judean-Palestinian families. There was no intermarriage in Babylonia. There was a great deal of intellectual intercourse between Babylonia and Palestine all the time. The best of the students went to study with the last Tannaim in Palestinian [00:48:00] academies.

They must have felt that this was the end of an era, a golden era. The conclusion of the Mishnah was a turning point in Jewish history and the Babylonians knew it. Some managed to catch a glimpse of Rabbi Yehudah, others went to Rabbi Yochanan. Later when the Babylonian academies became superior to the Palestinian ones -- Palestinian scholars went to Babylonia. "*Talmud Torah keneged kulam.*" The study of Torah was to all of them more important than any other factor in life.

And so we are back to our good friends tonight, Rav and Shmuel. Rav was born in 175 and died in 247 of the Common Era. At the age of 20 he joined his uncle Reb Hiyya on his first journey to

Palestine. Where he stayed five years working for his uncle in Tiberias, and studying under Rabbi Yehudah [00:49:00] in Sepphoris. When he took leave from his uncle, Reb Hiyya gave him this blessing and I quote him: "I pray to God to protect you from something that is more bitter than death."

Rav immediately understood what he meant. Forgive me, I have to quote him. He meant a nasty wife. "For it is written," says the Talmud, "that a bad woman--" but only a bad woman, don't worry. "A bad woman is worse than death." Now, unfortunately for Rav, his uncle's blessing did not work. In Babylonia he married a woman who made his life miserable. An example, there are many, but here is one. Whenever he asked her to prepare one kind of food, she prepared the opposite. And this went on for years.

[00:50:00] Until his son had an idea. He would tell his mother that his father wanted to eat the opposite of what he really wanted. And of course, everything was all right. Surprised, Rav told his son, "You know something, your mother has changed for the better." When Hiyya told his father the truth Rav was pleased that his son was so clever, but asked him not to do it

again. "It is not good to lie," he said. "Not even for a good meal."

To his son Aibu, he said: "Since I cannot teach you *halacha*," the law, "let me teach you business." See, nothing is new. Even then, even there, students had the choice between law school and business administration. (audience laughter) Only either way, [00:51:00] they had the same teachers.

Rav had an astonishing talent for economics. Listen to the advice he gives his son, the businessman. "When you arrive in a village do not linger. Start selling right away." He also said: "Whatever you have sell immediately. And you will not regret it, except for wine. Wait, but not too long. It may turn sour." Another piece of advice and I quote it: "When you make a deal -- first take the money. Then deliver the merchandise."

Listen to some of his sayings: "Do not humiliate the Gentile in the presence of a convert until the 10th generation of his or her conversion." And I like that. Then he said: "Do not marry two women. And if you do, marry a third one." (audience

laughter) And he explained why. [00:52:00] "If two will conspire against you the third one will betray them."

And then, and this is important, he said: "Whoever gives credit to authors or teachers when repeating their words hastens redemption." He also said: "A scholar must have a small, very small part of pride and ego. Exaggerated humility may stifle the inventive spirit." He was afraid of the words "*vi'avatem vi'goyim*," "and you shall be lost among other nations." He was afraid, because he thought it could be possible. Assimilation was a temptation, even an option already then.

His general philosophy was that man should aspire to independence above all, in all things and not need welfare. To his disciple, Rav Kahana he said, and I quote him: "Remove the skin of a carcass," *P'shot n'veilta b'shuka*, [00:53:00] "Remove the skin of the carcass in the street and sell it. And do not say 'I cannot do it for I am a *kohen*,'" a priest or a great man. "No work is undignified, no position unworthy. For there is nothing worse than needing someone else's help."

What he taught he practiced. When he returned to Babylonia from Palestine he had no teaching position for some time. To earn

some money he accepted an offer to work for the exilarch, the president of the Jews, as market inspector. As such he went around from one business district to the next, making sure that the scales have not been tampered with. Then the exilarch asked him to also supervise the setting of prices and he refused, claiming he was not qualified for such a task.

The president reacted angrily to his refusal and sentenced him to jail. [00:54:00] So he could think it over. But he did, and remained obstinate in his refusal to impose on poor people prices which were probably too high. As a result of the heavy taxes merchants had to pay to the Parthian government, and to their own leader, the exilarch.

Fortunately Shmuel's friend Karna was a judge, interceded on his behalf, and Shmuel was set free. He took another job in Nehardea. He translated for Rabbi Shela who at first didn't realize who he was. When he did, he was sure that Rav really considered this work unworthy of him, but he did not. Later he even accepted invitations to serve as a street preacher.

He was a stubborn man. Listen to a few examples. A man came to see him, Rav, and asked him a question: [00:55:00] ``If a Jewish

woman has a child with a pagan or a slave, what is the child?"

"`Jewish,'" said Rav. `The mother's religion determines the child's.' `If so,' said the man, `give me your daughter. I wish to marry her.' `Never,' said Rav. Who then understood that the man was the son of a pagan.

A scholar named Shimi bar Chiya was probably present at the dialogue. For he used a Midian proverb to express his astonishment. "`If the law is the law,' he said, `why doesn't he, Rav abide by it?' `Even if this man were like Yehoshua, Joshua, I wouldn't give him my daughter for a wife.' Said Rav angrily. And Shimi the scholar answered, `If he were Joshua he wouldn't need you. He would marry someone else's daughter. But he's not Joshua. And if you [00:56:00] reject him who will want him for a son in law?'"

The argument was good. The argument was sound, but Rav was stubborn and stuck to his position. In another case, he showed more compassion. Rabbah bar Hana hired workers to pour wine into his barrels. When they broke one he confiscated their robes as a kind of indemnity. The workers complained to Rav who ordered Rabbah bar Hana to give them back their clothes. Then they told Rav, "We are poor. We worked all day. We are

hungry." They are going home empty-handed. "Our families are hungry." So Rav decided that they were entitled to payment as well. And Rabbah bar Hana had to comply.

And yet among 10 cardinal virtues ascribed to him by the *Geonim* it is also his humility that stands out. He was never arrogant or condescending. He respected other people's [00:57:00] right to privacy. He never looked at passerby in the street. And he was concerned with language. He never indulged in small talk. And at services, he never disturbed his fellow worshipers.

He loved prayer. And in this domain, Rav's voice still reverberates. It has reached us across the centuries. His prayer, "*hayom harat olam*," "today is the birthday of the universe" is still being recited in our houses of prayer during the blowing of the shofar. Listen to it again, I'm sure you have listened to it last Rosh Hashanah. But you will sense once more its beauty and majesty.

"*Hayom harat olam.*" "Today is the birthday of the universe. On this day all creatures stand before thee in judgment, some as children, some as servants. If you look upon us as children, then pity us as a father [00:58:00] pities his children. But

should you look upon us as servants, then we turn towards you with humility and hope. Until your kindness will penetrate your judgment on us, all revered and holy almighty God.”

Rav was mystically inclined. Rashi says about him that he could visit cemeteries and guess how people had died and when. But he was also practical. He paid much attention to problems related to marriage. And he was very strange in problems of marriage. Let me give you one example. His concept of marriage was a very personal one, we read in the treatise of Yoma, and I quote: “That whenever Rav would come to a place called Darshish, he would ask around. “Is there a woman here ready to marry me for one night?”

Polygamy? [00:59:00] Oh no, we don't believe that. Because he would divorce her next day. What was the idea behind it? Our commentators believe simply that if a man has a woman at hand, simply at hand, he wouldn't touch her. He will not be bothered by wrong compulsions, impulses, impulses and desires. Still, I feel the story stretches. In matters of marriage, no Talmudic scholar has demonstrated such affection, such empathy with young couples. His rulings in that area are daring, almost revolutionary. Until then it was incredibly simple to get

married. Boy met girl in the street, in the market, in a friend's house, or at a party. [01:00:00] And that was enough for the boy. In the presence of two witnesses he simply said "*Harei at m'kudeshet li,*" and that was it. And countless tragedies were caused by such impulses.

They also occurred in more normal circumstances, for young girls were not consulted as to whether they really wished to marry their husbands-to-be. In many cases that didn't even see them beforehand. And when they did under the *chuppah*, it was late, too late. Sometimes they were given away while they were still children. After all, father knew best. To protect the young women and also their future husbands, Rav issued several far-reaching rulings. A father is not allowed to marry off his daughter if she is still a minor.

In parenthesis, commenting on this law, the Tosafists of the 12th century say as follows, and I quote them [01:01:00] with their marvelous humility and charm. "And they say we live in times when fathers do marry off their young daughters. Why? Because exile is becoming harsher and harsher. People live in constant uncertainty. A father who has a dowry for his young child would not wait until she grows up. For he might in the

meantime lose his dowry. Then what? Without money his daughter might remain an old maid."

Still Rav's law stands in order to protect minors. He also allowed the daughter to offer or withdraw her consent. He insisted that an informal courtship had to precede the wedding, that the boy and the girl had to get acquainted, lest they live in a constant state of regret and remorse. And remember all this took place [01:02:00] some 1800 years ago.

When I studied these laws I remembered a story, that I feel I may repeat. For I have said it here some 16 years ago. It's a marvelous story about these kinds of situations. The story is about the famous philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn. Moses Mendelssohn, who as everybody knows was very great, but also very ugly. And when he came to be 18, his parents decided he must marry but who is worthy of Mendelssohn? Only the richest, the prettiest, the nicest, the wisest, the most intelligent girl in town. And they found her.

They found her, she was the daughter of the banker, I think, Oppenheimer. And the two parents met and they decided that the children really are good for one another. The great philosopher

and the rich daughter? It's perfect, and everything is all right. And they [01:03:00] set the date for the wedding. A few months later, wedding day came. Many people came to the wedding, after all, who would refuse an invitation by the Oppenheimers or the Mendelssohns. There were many, many rabbis, and many bankers, and many good people, and many musicians. Hundreds and hundreds of people were at the wedding.

You know, in those times the groom was in one room, the bride in another room. The groom with his friends, the bride with her friends. And the bride and her friends were listening to a *batkhan* to a minstrel, troubadour. While he, the groom had to say a *droscha*, had to say a sermon, give a lecture. And he lectured. After a while they took him out and they came with him to visit his bride to do the unveiling. You know, this is a biblical oath, because this is what Isaac did to Rivka, to Rebecca. And when he came in accompanied by his parents, by his family, by his uncles, by his aunts, by everybody. And he lifted a veil. He was dazzled [01:04:00] by her beauty. But she saw him and she fainted.

So people said: "Well you know, after all, the bride, the wedding day. She must be emotional, and nothing, nothing." He

went back to continue his lecture. And when she came to she simply said to her mother, "Never." The mother called the father. "What is it my daughter?" She said, "Never. This man is a monster. Never." In the meantime, Mendelssohn went on lecturing. After an hour, or two, three you realize something is wrong.

So he said to his father, after all, he was clever. He said, "I imagine she doesn't want me." Father said, "True, she doesn't want you." So he said, "Father, go back to her and [01:05:00] give her one message. I understand, and I don't insist. But since we have this situation, I have only one request. I would like to be alone with her for a few minutes."

Well, you know it's against the law, *yichud* before the wedding. But it was *sh'at hadchak*, as we say. It's important, okay. So he came in, and she was... And he said, "I wanted to see you. I want to tell you a story, that's all. What do we know? We know we know from the Talmud is that before a soul descends from heaven onto Earth, a *bat kol*, a heavenly voice is heard. 'This soul,' meaning Mr. So and So, the son of Mr. And Mrs. So and So will marry Miss So and So, a daughter of Mr. And Mrs. So and So. As I was walking from one heaven, one sphere to another down,

you know. I asked my accompanying-- my companion the angel, 'Tell me, I hear the name. Could I see her?' Angel said, 'Oh, no, it's forbidden.'"

[01:06:00] "Being a philosopher, I said 'In that case I am not going. You can't force me.' The angel said, 'All right, I'll show you.' And he showed me a woman, my bride to be. When I saw her, I fainted. She was so ugly, the ugliest that I've ever seen. I've seen some ugly people. So I said, 'I don't want to.' The angel said, 'It's impossible.' 'What do you mean?' 'Decree has been issued, once it's out you must.' 'I am not going.' And then the angel began crying. He said, 'You know what's happening to angels who are sinners who cannot deliver?'

And the angels began telling me the punishment which is reserved for angels. And I felt so sorry for my angel, because after all I tricked him. But I didn't want to marry such an ugly girl anyway. I said, 'You know, I have an idea. I'll go and I'll marry her under one condition. Her ugliness [01:07:00] will be mine.'" And you know something, she believed him. (audience applause)

Rav, nevertheless was a great humanist. Trying to prevent suffering from spreading in the world. But what about his own suffering? If he suffered he never complained, not about himself.

He did make occasional comments about troubles with women in general. He said, "Anything is better than a bad woman." He would grumble but never did he refer to his own situation. He projected an image of someone at peace with himself, or someone with a good family life.

He had two sons, and three daughters, one of whom married into the exilarch's family. One son, Hiyya was an excellent student. The other Aibu was not, Rav did not mind nor did he favor [01:08:00] one over the other. He helped them with his advice. He gave both practical lessons. To Hiyya he said: "Do not reside in a town whose leaders are physicians." The reason? They are so busy with their patients that they probably neglect communal affairs, or the other way around.

Rav placed much emphasis on the welfare of the community. At one period of his life he was a wandering teacher who sought out places known for the lack of intellectual or ethical standards. If at the end he chose Sura as the seed for his Academy, it is

because the region did not enjoy too good a reputation. But thanks to him it changed quickly. Thanks to him it grew into the center for advanced Jewish learning, even surpassing Nehardea where his friend, Shmuel was rising higher and higher.

Shmuel was very different from Rav. [01:09:00] More versatile, but less extroverted, he nevertheless cultivated good personal relations with the secular authorities. A close friend of King Shapur the First. He stressed the importance for Jews to abide by the law of the land. He is the one who proclaimed: "*Dina d'malkhuta dina*" "One may not negate or oppose the existing legal system."

What if the legal system is immoral? What if certain rules are illegal? In Shmuel's time they were not. But remember the setting, otherwise you cannot understand what he said.

Babylonian Jewry was caught between the battles and the ambitions of three superpowers. The Parthians, the Romans, and the Persians. Some communities belonged to one empire, others to another.

The Parthian king, Artabanus was an admirer of Rav. To whom he occasionally sent presents. We are told that [01:10:00] once he

sent him a jewel. And Rav sent him back a *mezuzah*. So the king called Rav, he said: "I am sending you something of great value. And what are you sending me?" And Rav said: "Majesty, you sent me something which I must protect. I am sending you something which will protect you."

But just as Artabanus had affection for Rav, King Shapur had a certain affection for Shmuel. When King Shapur attacked Cappadocia, its 12,000 Jews defended the capital city with untold bravery. All were killed in battle. And strangely enough Shmuel refused to mourn over their death. To be more precise, he did not mourn over their death publicly. Surely, he felt it unwise to antagonize Shapur, the king.

[01:11:00] By then a number of religious decisions had been adopted by the Amoraim to ensure peaceful coexistence with the new regime which fanatically persecuted its opponents, and all those who refused to worship fire. Both Rav and Shmuel agreed that on Hanukkah, the lamps may be lit inside the home, but not in the windows as they should be, *pirsumei de-nisa*, so as not to provoke the magi, the Zoroastrian leaders.

If the Jews were left in peace, or at least were less persecuted it was due to Shmuel's friendship with the king. He was so close to him that some people nicknamed him, Ariyuk, the Aryan one. Others called him King Shapur, to emphasize his identification with the Persian ruler. But in scholarly and academic circles here already one nickname, Shakud. [01:12:00] "The assiduous student," one who is constantly immersed in study.

Shmuel seemed happily married. He was a wealthy man, he never needed to work for a livelihood. Having inherited his father's silk business, he never had to worry about sustenance for his family. He was sure of himself. And maintained relations with intellectual scientists, and even religious leaders outside the Jewish community. Compared to Rav, who said and I quote him: "Whoever learns anything from a Persian, magi, deserves death."

Shmuel was an extreme liberal. He learned from anyone and everyone and managed to transform what he learned into useful material for his Jewish teachings. Open minded, rational, perceptive, Shmuel knew much of human foibles' short tolerance for them. And as a general rule, tried to emphasize the universality of Jewish ethics. [01:13:00] He, for instance

would say: "Cheating is prohibited, and that includes everyone. One may not even cheat pagans. Human beings are sacred and their life is holy whatever they are, and whoever they are."

"Whoever dwells too long in fasting is a sinner." He said, one should never overdo anything. "Exaggerated joy is as perilous as exaggerated melancholy. Everything in human existence is incomplete. Perfection is divine. All humans can do is to aspire to attain it." Said Shmuel. Why couldn't Saul's kingdom last? Because it was faultless. Perfect systems are dictatorships, and dictatorships cannot, should not last. Shmuel seems to have been well-informed about political structures for he declared, and I quote him, "When someone [01:14:00] becomes a leader or a treasurer of his community he inevitably gets rich."

If you don't believe him, read your daily newspaper. Infinitely considerate with women and small children, Shmuel always took their sides in legal debates, he felt they needed to be defended by him. "Social victims must be helped by human beings, not referred to God alone." He did not look to miracles as substitute for human kindness. In general Shmuel was too pragmatic a man, and his mind was too scientific to attach much

importance to the supernatural. He stated with amazing conviction that the only difference between this world and the Messianic times will be that the Jewish people will no longer be dominated by other nations.

Still he believed in [01:15:00] "*Hashgakha pratit*," in heavenly supervision or intervention. Said he, and I quote. "A heavenly voice is heard every day stating, 'This girl will marry that man, this field will belong to that person.' Occasionally he would let his humor show. Whenever he had a bad dream, he would say 'Dreams are silly.' Whenever he had a good dream he would say the same thing with a question mark. 'Dreams are silly?'"

When tragedy struck home he kept his pain to himself. He lost his sons, his two daughters were taken prisoners. One of them recalled in the Talmud as Mary bar Abba, was raped and made pregnant by a pagan, whom she eventually converted to Judaism. Shmuel never allowed his private sorrow to influence his public attitudes. [01:16:00] Collective agony, communal pain may evoke collective responses. Private pain must remain private.

From all we have learned until now both Rav and Shmuel seem noble figures, always forgiving and forever understanding.

Devoted to their people and committed to study. And the image is correct. However, they both had their weaknesses. They were human after all. Rav was hypersensitive, if hurt he could strike back. Once at the beginning of their friendship, Shmuel tried to cure his stomach ailment and caused him much pain. Was this the reason why Rav remarked, and I quote him with pain: "Rav said, 'Whoever torments me will survive his children.'"

And the fact remains that Shmuel lost his two sons. Now how could Rav be so rigorous, and so unforgiving, and so harsh in his response? [01:17:00] Now, like most Talmudic masters, Rav was not a monolithic character. He was not always humble, not always gentle, not always careful with his words. As for Shmuel, he was not forever avoiding honors. When Rabbi Yehudah refused to ordain him he took it well. But deep down he was hurt.

He revealed his pain much later. After Rav had passed away. How do we know that? Listen: "As long as Rav reigned in Sura, Yochanan from Palestine would write him letters which began with the words 'To our colleague in Babylonia.' Shmuel later tried to prove his own erudition to Rabbi Yochanan, and he sent him long

range calendars and opinions and innovations to no avail. Rabbi Yochanan did not call him colleague.”

And there too we do not understand, why didn't Rabbi Yochanan call him colleague? [01:18:00] Why didn't Rabbi Yochanan give him the pleasure of calling him Rabbi? And then why did Shmuel, the great Shmuel, one of the most renowned Amoraim attach such importance to titles? He too was human. And namely, I find that very appealing. Instead of diminishing them, their humanity elevates them both. The more human the person, the greater the person.

We learn that at the end of his life Rav became melancholy, sad. We even are told that in some instances he forgot certain laws. And at the end of his life he spoke a lot about old age. But the death of great masters concerns and involves the entire community. And so, as we grow nearer to the conclusion of our story tonight, let us accompany Rav and Shmuel on their last journey.

Rav and Shmuel, [01:19:00] two different names, two different systems, two different schools, two different destinies. But two shared passions, the passion of Torah, learning, and the

passion for Israel, the people of Israel. When Rav died in Sura, people wept all over Babylonia. The Jews felt orphaned, all except one. We are told that a certain Bar Kasha of Pumbedita for some reason refused to join in the general mourning. And nobody knows why. Maybe he simply wanted publicity.

In Nehardea, Shmuel tore 13 of his garments in mourning. And he commented: "Gone is the man whom I feared until now." In other words, gone is the man whose judgment was superior [01:20:00] to mine. Gone is the man who forced me to study harder, and to work harder on myself. With Rav gone and with no disciple to succeed him as Resh Sidrah or Rosh Yeshiva in Sura, Nehardea, the place of Shmuel, for a while remained the center of Babylonia, but not for long.

Shortly after Shmuel's death in 254 or 257 of the Common Era, Nehardea was destroyed by a wicked new emperor, Odaenathus. As for Sura, the place of Rav, the academy survived as a flourishing school of learning for another five or 800 years.

Now, what do Rav and Shmuel mean to us? [01:21:00] They mean continuity in Jewish learning, and they mean indestructibility of the Jewish spirit. True there were teachers before them and there were teachers after them, but those two remain irreplaceable. For what it means is, all teachers are irreplaceable. Rav and Shmuel were great teachers in Babylonia, just as Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yochanan were great teachers in the land of Israel.

There is logic to Jewish history. There is beauty in Jewish destiny. The fact that Jewish knowledge was passed on from Moses to Joshua, from Joshua to the Elders. From the Elders to the Judges, from the Judges to the Prophets. From the prophets to the sages. To the Tannaim [01:22:00] to the Amoraim. To the Savoraim, to the Geonim, to the Rishonim.

There is creative beauty in the continuous movement of their ideas and stories. There is eternity in their words, words that refuse to die. There is depth and faith in Jewish memory, and in Jewish memory there is hope. There is hope as well.

(applause)

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