



Talmud Tales – Session 15 – Honi, the Circle Maker

BT Taanit 23a

Our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: What message did the members of the Hewn-Stone Chamber [superior court] send to Honi the Circle-Drawer? “You shall also decree something and it shall be established for you and light shall shine upon your ways. When they cast you down, you shall say, there is lifting up. For the humble person he saves. He delivers him that is not innocent, yes, he shall be delivered through the cleanness of your hands” (**Job. 22:28-30**) —

‘You shall also decree something’ you have decreed below, and the Holy One, blessed be he, carries out your word above.

‘and light shall shine upon your ways:’ a generation that was shrouded in darkness did you illuminate through your prayer.

‘When they cast you down, you shall say, there is lifting up:’ a generation that had sunk down you lifted up with your prayer.

‘For the humble person he saves:’ a generation that was humiliated by its sin you saved by your prayer.

‘He delivers him that is not innocent:’ a generation that was not innocent you delivered by your prayer.

‘yes, he shall be delivered through the cleanness of your hands:’ you delivered it through the work of your clean hands.”

Said R. Yohanan, All the rest of the life of that righteous man he was troubled by this verse of Scripture: *'A song of ascents: when the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like those who dream'* (Psa. 126:1). Honi thought, 'Is there anyone who sleeps and dreams for seventy years?'

One day he was going along the road. He saw a man who was planting a carob tree. He said to him, 'As to that tree, how long does it take to bear fruit?'

He said to him, "It takes seventy years."

He said to him, "Is it absolutely obvious to you that you are going to live another seventy years?"

He said to him, "That man I found a world full of carobs. Just as my fathers planted for me, so I plant these for my children."

He sat down to wrap a piece of bread. Sleep overtook him. As he slept, a rocky formation closed around him and hid him from sight, and he slept for seventy years. When he woke up, he saw a certain man gathering carobs from the tree. He said to him, "Are you the one who planted the tree?"

He said to him, "I am his grandson."

He said to him, "It is to be inferred that I have slept for seventy years."

He saw his ass, who had produced generations of mules, and he went home. He said to them, "Is the son of Honi the Circle-Drawer still alive?"

They said to him, "His son is no longer, but his grandson is here."

He said to them, "I am Honi the Circle-Drawer." They didn't believe him.

He went to the house of study. He heard the rabbis saying, "Our traditions are as clear to us as in the days of Honi the Circle-Drawer. For when he would come to the house of study, any question that the rabbis had, he would work out for them."

He said to them, "I am Honi the Circle-Drawer." They didn't believe him or pay him any respect such as was owing to him. He was deeply hurt. He sought mercy and died.

Said Raba, "That is in line with what people say: either fellowship or death."