



Talmud Tales – Session 16 – Answering a Fool

BT Shabbat 30b-31a

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: A person should always be patient like Hillel and not impatient like Shammai. It once happened that two men made a wager with each other, saying, ‘He who goes and makes Hillel angry shall receive four hundred *zuz*.’

Said one, “I will go and incense him.” That day was the Sabbath eve, and Hillel was washing his head. He went, passed by the door of his house, and called out, “Is Hillel here, is Hillel here?” Thereupon he robed and went out to him, saying, “My son, what do you require?”

“I have a question to ask,” said he. “Ask, my son,” he prompted. Thereupon he asked: “Why are the heads of the Babylonians round?” “My son, you have asked a great question,” replied he: “because they have no skillful midwives.”

He departed, tarried a while, returned, and called out, “Is Hillel here; is Hillel here?” He robed and went out to him, saying, “My son, what do you require?” “I have a question to ask,” said he. “Ask, my son,” he prompted.

Thereupon he asked: “Why are the eyes of the Palmyreans bleared?” “My son, you have asked a great question,” replied he: “because they live in sandy places.”

He departed, tarried a while, returned, and called out, “Is Hillel here; is Hillel here?” He robed and went out to him, saying, “My son, what do you require?” “I have a question to ask,” said

he. “Ask, my son,” he prompted. He asked, “Why are the feet of the Africans wide?” “My son, you have asked a great question,” said he; “because they live in watery marshes.” “I have many questions to ask,” said he, “but fear that you may become angry.”

Thereupon he robed, sat before him and said, “Ask all the questions you have to ask,”

“Are you the Hillel who is called the *nasi* of Israel?”

“Yes,” he replied. “If that is you,” he retorted, may there not be many like you in Israel.”

“Why, my son?” queried he. “Because I have lost four hundred *zuz* through you,” complained he.

“Be careful,” he answered.

Hillel is worth it that you should lose four hundred *zuz* and yet another four hundred *zuz* through him, yet Hillel shall not lose his temper.