



Talmud Tales – Session 23 – A Balancing Act

BT Ketubot 62b-63a

R. Akiba was the shepherd of Ben Kalba Sabua. His daughter saw that he was modest and noble. She said to him, “If I become betrothed to you, will you go to the house of study?” He said to her, “Yes.”

She became betrothed to him secretly and sent him off.

Her father heard and drove her out of his house and forbade her from benefiting from his property.

He went and remained at the academy for twelve years. When he came back, he brought with him twelve thousand disciples. He heard a sage say to her, “How long are you going to lead the life of a life-long widow?”

She said to him, “If he should pay attention to me, he would spend another twelve years in study.”

He said, “So what I’m doing is with permission.” He went back and stayed at the academy another twelve years.

When he came back, he brought with him twenty-four thousand disciples. His wife heard and went out to meet him. Her neighbors said to her, “Borrow some nice clothes and put them on.”

She said to them, “‘A righteous man knows the life of his beast’ (Prov. 12:10).”

When she came to him, she fell on her face and kissed his feet. His attendants pushed her away.

He said to them, “Leave her alone! What is mine and what is yours is hers.”

Her father heard that an eminent authority had come to town. He said, “I shall go to him. Maybe he’ll release me from my vow.” He came to him. He said to him, “Did you take your vow knowing that your daughter would marry a great man?”

He said to him, “Even if he had known a single chapter, even if he had known a single law [I would never have taken that vow]!”

He said to him, “I am the man.”

He fell on his face and kissed his feet and gave him half of his property.

The daughter of R. Akiba did the same with Ben Azzai, and that is in line with what people say: “Ewe follows ewe; a daughter’s acts are like those of her mother.”

R. Joseph b. Rava was sent by his father to the academy of R. Joseph ben Chiyya. They [the family] contracted [agreed to support him financially] for six years. When he had been there three years, as the eve of Yom Kippur approached, he said, “I’ll go and see my family.” His father heard about it. He took an axe and went to meet him, saying to him, “Did you remember your whore (*zonat’cha*).”

There are those who say: “He said to him, ‘Did you remember your dove (*yonat’cha*).’”

They quarreled, and neither one ate a final meal prior to the fast.