



Talmud Tales – Session 29 – Misplaced Security

BT Baba Batra 22a

R. Dimi from Nehardea brought a load of dried figs in a boat [to sell them]. Said the exilarch to Raba, “Go, see, if he is a scholar rabbi, then reserve the market for him.” Raba said to R. Adda bar Abba, “Go, smell his jar [test his learning].”

He went and asked him, “If an elephant swallowed a twig basket and expelled it with his excrement, what is the law [as to whether or not it is still a utensil, therefore subject to uncleanness, or is it simply excrement]?”

He didn’t know. He said to R. Adda, “Are you Rava?”

He struck him on his sandal and said to him, “Between me and Rava is there a considerable distance! Nonetheless, I can be your master, and Rava, the master of your master.”

So they did not assign a market [stall] to him, and his figs were a total loss.

He came before R. Joseph and said to him, “Look, master, at what they did to me!” He said to him, “He who did not hold back vengeance for the wrong done to the king of Edom will not hold back the vengeance for the wrong done to you, as it is written, ‘Thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Moab, yes, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime’ (Amos 2:1).

So R. Adda bar Abba died.

R. Joseph said, “I am the one who punished him, because I cursed him.”

R. Dimi of Nehardea said, “I am the one who punished him, because he made me lose my figs.”

Abbaye said, “I am the one who punished him, for he used to say to the students, ‘Instead of chewing on bones in Abbaye’s household, go, eat fat meat at Rava’s.’”

Rava said, “I am the one who punished him, because when he went to the butcher to buy meat, he would say to the butcher, ‘Serve me before Rava’s servant, because I am better than he.’”

R. Nahman bar Isaac said, “I am the one who punished him.”

For R. Nahman bar Isaac was head of the public assembly. Every time he went to give his public address, he would review his tradition with R. Adda bar Abba. Then he would go to the public assembly.

One day R. Pappa and R. Huna b. R. Joshua took hold of R. Adda bar Abba, because they had not been at the concluding address [of Rava on tractate Bechorot]. They said to him, “Tell us about the traditions concerning tithing cattle — how did Rava say them?” He said to them, “This is what Rava said,” and “that is what Rava said.”

In the meantime, dusk came, and R. Nahman bar Isaac was still waiting for R. Adda bar Abba.

Said the sages to R. Nahman bar Isaac, “Come on, it’s late, why are you still in session?”

He said to them, “I am sitting and waiting for the bier of R. Adda bar Abba.”

In the interim, a rumor spread that R. Adda bar Abba had died.

It stands to reason that it was R. Nahman bar Isaac who had punished him.