Do Judaism and Western Culture Clash? (Shabbat 33b)

**תלמוד בבלי, מסכת שבת לג:**

כשנכנסו רבותינו לכרם ביבנה היה שם רבי יהודה ורבי אלעזר ברבי יוסי ורבי שמעון… נענה רבי יהודה ברבי אלעאי ראש המדברים בכל מקום… ואמאי קרו ליה ראש המדברים בכל מקום דיתבי רבי יהודה ורבי יוסי ורבי שמעון ויתיב יהודה בן גרים גבייהו פתח רבי יהודה ואמר כמה נאים מעשיהן של אומה זו תקנו שווקים תקנו גשרים תקנו מרחצאות רבי יוסי שתק נענה רבי שמעון בן יוחאי ואמר כל מה שתקנו לא תקנו אלא לצורך עצמן תקנו שווקין להושיב בהן זונות מרחצאות לעדן בהן עצמן גשרים ליטול מהן מכס הלך יהודה בן גרים וסיפר דבריהם ונשמעו למלכות אמרו יהודה שעילה יתעלה יוסי ששתק יגלה לציפורי שמעון שגינה יהרג.

**When our Sages entered the vineyard in Yavne, Rabbi Yehuda, and Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Yosei, and Rabbi Shimon were there… Rabbi Yehuda, son of Rabbi Ila’i, who was the head of the speakers in every place, responded…** In this *baraita* Rabbi Yehuda is described as head of the speakers in every place. The Gemara asks: **And why did they call him head of the speakers in every place?** The Gemara relates that this resulted due to an incident that took place **when Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yosei and Rabbi Shimon were sitting, and Yehuda, son of converts,sat beside them. Rabbi Yehuda opened and said: How pleasant are the actions of this nation,** the Romans, as **they established marketplaces, established bridges,** and **established bathhouses. Rabbi Yosei was silent. Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai responded and said: Everything that they established, they established only for their own purposes. They established marketplaces, to place prostitutes in them; bathhouses, to pamper themselves;** and **bridges, to collect taxes from** all who pass over **them. Yehuda, son of converts, went and related their statements** to his household, **and** those statements continued to spread until **they were heard by the monarchy. They** ruled and **said: Yehuda, who elevated** the Roman regime, **shall be elevated** and appointed as head of the Sages, the head of the speakers in every place. **Yosei, who remained silent, shall be exiled** from his home in Judea as punishment, and sent **to** the city of **Tzippori** in the Galilee. **And Shimon, who denounced** the government, **shall be killed.**

אזל הוא ובריה טשו בי מדרשא כל יומא הוה מייתי להו דביתהו ריפתא וכוזא דמיא וכרכי כי תקיף גזירתא אמר ליה לבריה נשים דעתן קלה עליהן דילמא מצערי לה ומגליא לן אזלו טשו במערתא איתרחיש ניסא איברי להו חרובא ועינא דמיא והוו משלחי מנייהו והוו יתבי עד צוארייהו בחלא כולי יומא גרסי בעידן צלויי לבשו מיכסו ומצלו והדר משלחי מנייהו כי היכי דלא ליבלו איתבו תריסר שני במערתא אתא אליהו וקם אפיתחא דמערתא אמר מאן לודעיה לבר יוחי דמית קיסר ובטיל גזירתיה.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai **and his son,** Rabbi Elazar, **went** and **hid in the study hall. Every day** Rabbi Shimon’s **wife would bring them bread and a jug of water and they would eat. When the decree intensified,** Rabbi Shimon **said to his son: Women are easily impressionable** and, therefore, there is room for concern **lest** the authorities **torture her and she reveal our** whereabouts. **They went and they hid in a cave. A miracle occurred** and **a carob** tree **was created for them as well as a spring of water. They would remove their clothes and sit** covered **in sand up to their necks**. **They would study** Torah **all day** in that manner. **At the time of prayer, they would dress, cover themselves, and pray, and they would again remove their clothes afterward so that they would not become tattered. They sat in the cave for twelve years. Elijah** the Prophet **came and stood at the entrance to the cave** and **said: Who will inform bar Yoḥai that** the **emperor died and his decree has been abrogated?**

נפקו חזו אינשי דקא כרבי וזרעי אמר מניחין חיי עולם ועוסקין בחיי שעה כל מקום שנותנין עיניהן מיד נשרף יצתה בת קול ואמרה להם להחריב עולמי יצאתם חיזרו למערתכם הדור אזול איתיבו תריסר ירחי שתא אמרי משפט רשעים בגיהנם שנים עשר חדש יצתה בת קול ואמרה צאו ממערתכם נפקו כל היכא דהוה מחי רבי אלעזר הוה מסי רבי שמעון אמר לו בני די לעולם אני ואתה.

**They emerged** from the cave, and **saw people who were plowing and sowing.**Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai **said:** These people **abandon eternal life** of Torah study **and engage in temporal life** for their own sustenance. The Gemara relates that **every place that** Rabbi Shimon and his son Rabbi Elazar **directed their eyes was immediately burned. A Divine Voice emerged and said to them:** Did **you emerge** from the cave in order **to destroy My world? Return to your cave. They again went** and **sat** there **for twelve months. They said: The judgment of the wicked in Gehenna lasts** for **twelve months.** Surely their sin was atoned in that time. **A Divine Voice emerged and said** to them: **Emerge from your cave. They emerged. Everywhere that Rabbi Elazar would strike, Rabbi Shimon would heal.** Rabbi Shimon **said to** Rabbi Elazar: **My son, you and I suffice for the** entire **world,** as the two of us are engaged in the proper study of Torah.

בהדי פניא דמעלי שבתא חזו ההוא סבא דהוה נקיט תרי מדאני אסא ורהיט בין השמשות אמרו ליה הני למה לך אמר להו לכבוד שבת ותיסגי לך בחד חד כנגד זכור וחד כנגד שמור אמר ליה לבריה חזי כמה חביבין מצות על ישראל יתיב דעתייהו

**As the sun was setting on Shabbat eve, they saw an elderly man who was holding two bundles of myrtle branches and running at twilight. They said to him: Why do you have these? He said to them: In honor of Shabbat.**They said to him: **And let one suffice.** He answered them: **One** is **corresponding to: “Remember** the Shabbat day, to keep it holy” ([**Exodus 20:8**](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Exodus.20.8)), **and** one is **corresponding to: “Observe** the Shabbat day, to keep it holy” ([**Deuteronomy 5:12**](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Deuteronomy.5.12)). Rabbi Shimon **said to his son: See how beloved the mitzvot are to Israel. Their minds were** put **at ease** and they were no longer as upset that people were not engaged in Torah study.

שמע רבי פנחס בן יאיר חתניה ונפק לאפיה עייליה לבי בניה הוה קא אריך ליה לבישריה חזי דהוה ביה פילי בגופיה הוה קא בכי וקא נתרו דמעת עיניה וקמצוחא ליה אמר לו אוי לי שראיתיך בכך אמר לו אשריך שראיתני בכך שאילמלא לא ראיתני בכך לא מצאת בי כך דמעיקרא כי הוה מקשי רבי שמעון בן יוחי קושיא הוה מפרק ליה רבי פנחס בן יאיר תריסר פירוקי לסוף כי הוה מקשי רבי פנחס בן יאיר קושיא הוה מפרק ליה רבי שמעון בן יוחי עשרין וארבעה פירוקי

**Rabbi Pineḥas ben Ya’ir,** Rabbi Shimon’s **son-in-law**, **heard and went out to** greet **him. He brought him into the bathhouse and** began **tending to his flesh. He saw that** Rabbi Shimon **had cracks in** the skin on **his body. He was crying, and the tears fell from his eyes and caused** Rabbi Shimon **pain.** Rabbi Pineḥas **said to** Rabbi Shimon, his father-in-law: **Woe is me, that I have seen you like this.** Rabbi Shimon **said to him: Happy are you that you have seen me like this, as had you not seen me like this, you would not have found in me this** prominence in Torah, **as** the Gemara relates: **At first, when Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai would raise a difficulty, Rabbi Pineḥas ben Ya’ir would respond** to his question with **twelve answers. Ultimately, when Rabbi Pineḥas ben Ya’ir would raise a difficulty**, **Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai would respond** with **twenty-four answers.**

אמר הואיל ואיתרחיש ניסא איזיל אתקין מילתא דכתיב ויבא יעקב שלם ואמר רב שלם בגופו שלם בממונו שלם בתורתו ויחן את פני העיר אמר רב מטבע תיקן להם ושמואל אמר שווקים תיקן להם ורבי יוחנן אמר מרחצאות תיקן להם אמר איכא מילתא דבעי לתקוני אמרו ליה איכא דוכתא דאית ביה ספק טומאה ואית להו צערא לכהנים לאקופי אמר איכא איניש דידע דאיתחזק הכא טהרה אמר ליה ההוא סבא כאן קיצץ בן זכאי תורמסי תרומה עבד איהו נמי הכי כל היכא דהוה קשי טהריה וכל היכא דהוה רפי צייניה

Rabbi Shimon **said: Since a miracle transpired** for me, **I will go** and **repair something** for the sake of others in gratitude for God’s kindness, **as it is written: “And Jacob came whole to the city of Shechem**, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram; and he graced the countenance of the city” ([**Genesis 33:18**](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Genesis.33.18)). **Rav said,** the meaning of: And Jacob came whole, is: **Whole in his body, whole in his money, whole in his Torah.** And what did he do? **And he graced the countenance of the city;** he performed gracious acts to benefit the city. **Rav said:** Jacob **established a currency for them. And Shmuel said: He established marketplaces for them. And Rabbi Yoḥanan said: He established bathhouses for them.** In any event, clearly one for whom a miracle transpires should perform an act of kindness for his neighbors as a sign of gratitude. **He said: Is there something that needs repair? They said to him: There is a place where there is uncertainty with regard to ritual impurity and the priests are troubled** by being forced **to circumvent it,** as it is prohibited for them to become ritually impure from contact with a corpse. There was suspicion, but no certainty, that a corpse was buried there. Therefore, they were unable to definitively determine its status. Rabbi Shimon **said: Is there a person who knows that there was a presumption of ritual purity here?** Is there anyone who remembers a time when this place was not considered ritually impure, or that at least part of it was considered to be ritually pure? **An Elder said to him: Here ben Zakkai** planted and **cut the *teruma* of lupines.** In this marketplace Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, who himself was a priest, once planted lupines that were given to him as *teruma*. On that basis, the conclusion can be drawn that it was definitely ritually pure. Rabbi Shimon, like Jacob, **also did so** and took steps to improve the city and examined the ground (*Tosafot*). **Everywhere that** the ground **was hard, he pronounced it ritually pure** as there was certainly no corpse there, **and every place that** the ground **was soft, he marked it** indicating that perhaps a corpse was buried there. In that way, he purified the marketplace so that even priests could walk through it.

אמר ההוא סבא טיהר בן יוחי בית הקברות אמר ליה אילמלי (לא) היית עמנו ואפילו היית עמנו ולא נמנית עמנו יפה אתה אומר עכשיו שהיית עמנו ונמנית עמנו יאמרו זונות מפרכסות זו את זו תלמידי חכמים לא כל שכן יהב ביה עיניה ונח נפשיה נפק לשוקא חזייה ליהודה בן גרים אמר עדיין יש לזה בעולם נתן בו עיניו ועשהו גל של עצמות:

**A certain Elder said** in ridicule and surprise: **Ben Yoḥai purified the cemetery.** Rabbi Shimon got angry and **said to him: Had you not been with us, and even had you been with us and were not counted with us** in rendering this ruling, what **you say is fine.** You could have said that you were unaware of my intention or that you did not agree or participate in this decision. **Now that you were with us and were counted with us** in rendering this ruling, you will cause people to say that Sages are unwilling to cooperate with one another. **They will say:** If competing **prostitutes** still **apply makeup to each other** to help one another look beautiful, **all the more so** that **Torah scholars** should cooperate with each other. **He directed his eyes toward him and** the Elder **died.** Rabbi Shimon **went out to the marketplace** and **he saw Yehuda, son of converts,**who was the cause of this entire incident. Rabbi Shimon, **said: This** one **still has** a place **in the world? He directed his eyes toward him and turned him into a pile of bones.**

* **Beginning:** In the 3-way argument, who comes out as winner? Who is right? How can silence be considered an opinion? Is Yehuda son of converts at fault? What is behind the opinion of Rabbi Shimon vs. Rabbi Yehuda?
* **Middle**: What “symbols” shed light on what Rabbi Shimon did during his escape and hiding in the cave? What changes in the intervening 12 months ‘back’ in the cave? What is the connection between the cave story and the 3-way argument?
* **End:** How should we interpret the interaction between Rabbi Shimon and his son-in-law R’ Pinchas? What kind of transformation do we see in Rabbi Shimon from the beginning of the story to the end?