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**Talmudic *Aggadot***

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Shiur #08: The Purpose and Status of *Aggada* in Halakhic *Sugyot* of the Babylonian Talmud:

*Inuy* in Tractate *Yoma* (Part II)

Introduction

# In the [previous *shiur*](http://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-07-purpose-and-status-aggada-halakhic-sugyot-babylonian-talmud-inuy-tractate-yoma-part-i)*,* we studied the *sugya* dealing with *inuy* on Yom Kippur (*Yoma* 73b-76a). We discovered that it has two parts, a halakhic section and an aggadic section.

In the halakhic section, we saw the exegetical analysis of *inuy*, which determines that the only prohibitions included under the rubric of *inuy* would be eating and drinking (which are classified as one blanket prohibition of ingestion). The four other prohibitions mentioned in the *mishna* are not classified as *inuyim*, but rather as a fulfillment of the command to make Yom Kippur a “sabbath of rest” (*shabbat shabbaton*), as indicated by another *baraita* cited in the *sugya*. The central distinction between the two sources is that only *inuy* carries the ultimate penalty of excision (*karet*), being cut off from the Jewish People forever.

As for the aggadic section, we noted that it is essentially a massive compilation of arguments between the *Amora’im* R. Ammi and R. Assi, intertwined with aggadic *derashot* of various verses, followed by another aggadic compilation of various *derashot* concerning the manna that the Israelites ate in the desert. Ostensibly, the link between the two halves of the aggadic unit – disputes between R. Ammi and R. Assi, on the one hand, and the exegetical exploration of the manna, on the other – seems to be technical, an associative progression. The halakhic debate ends with the verse, “And He afflicted you and He starved you” (*Devarim* 8:3), and the very next words refer to the manna: “And he fed you the manna which you had not known…” The aggadic section begins with a verse from the continuation of that chapter, which also invokes *inuy* and mentions the manna as well: “Who feeds you manna in the desert… in order to afflict you” (Ibid. 8:16).

I would like to suggest that the connection between the two sections of the *sugya*, the halakhic and the aggadic, is far stronger than might appear at first glance. Throughout both sections, the central debate revolves around consumption, but at the margins the issue of copulation arises as well.

In the aggadic unit, many of the *derashot* use sexual relations as an analogy for consuming food and drink. We have already seen that in the halakhic section, three times in a row, the *gemara*’s editors challenge the approach of the *baraita*, which maintains that only abstention from eating and drinking may be classified as *inuy*. The *gemara* suggests that abstention from marital relations should also be included, and this is because various verses use the term *inuy* to refer to sexual relations.

When we consider the halakhic unit as the background for the aggadic unit, the two issues that arise in it – that of consumption and that of coition – directly connect to two of the prohibitions in the *mishna*: eating/ drinking and marital relations. Naturally, such a reading would acknowledge a certain statement made by the aggadic section concerning the *inuyim* of Yom Kippur, and this requires further analysis.

**Connection Between the Halakhic and Aggadic Units**

Let us assume that the link between the halakhic and aggadic sections of the *sugya* goes beyond the merely technical or associative; we must then explain what the relationship is. In the two sections of this *sugya*, we may observe different conceptualizations of *inuy* on Yom Kippur.

As we noted previously, the halakhic unit contains Tannaitic *derashot* that appear in *baraitot* of halakhic Midrash. These *derashot* portray a clear dichotomy between eating and drinking, on the one hand, and all the other prohibitions, on the other.

Only abstaining from food and drink is understood as a realization of *inuy* on Yom Kippur, of God’s directive: “You must afflict your souls.” In contrast, the other prohibitions that the *mishna* lists are forbidden on the basis of a broader command: “The verse says, ‘[A sabbath of] rest’ – so rest (*shvot*)!” Let us explore what *inuy* means according to this taxonomy.

The *derasha* in the *baraita* indicates that *inuy* is concrete discomfort or suffering that is imposed upon the body. Such concrete discomfort or suffering can undoubtedly be created by abstaining from food and drink, even for the span of only one day. The same cannot be said for the other prohibitions of the *mishna*, i.e. washing, anointing, having sexual relations, and wearing shoes. Abstaining from these activities for twenty-four hours does not create a sense of true deprivation. These are pleasurable activities, if not luxuries, for the body; abstaining from them for the span of a day does not directly cause pain.

This interpretation is consistent with the hypothesis raised in the *baraita*: “I might think that one should sit in the sun or in the cold in order to experience discomfort.” There is a suggestion that the command of *inuy* should be understood as actively causing bodily discomfort. Although the *baraita* rejects this possibility, it does not appear to reject the conceptualization of *inuy* that stands behind it.

In this *baraita*, *inuy* is compared to the prohibition of labor. In the Torah, the verses clearly connect them, prescribing the penalty of excision for one who violates Yom Kippur’s sanctity either by eschewing *inuy* or by engaging in forbidden labor (*Vayikra* 23:29-30). In light of this, the *midrash* goes one step further by using the latter to define the former.

In the first *baraita* cited in the Babylonian Talmud, the connection to the prohibition of labor defines *inuy* as a command fulfilled by abstaining from something, not by proactively doing something, such as sitting down in the glare of the noonday sun. Following the same path, in the second *baraita* the relationship to prohibition of labor confines *inuy* to formalistic categories that Halakha acknowledges in other contexts, i.e. prohibitions of consumption.

In both cases, the ideological principle that drives the creation of the dichotomy between eating/drinking and the other prohibitions is the distinction between abstaining from those activities that are so integral to one’s bodily functions that abstaining from them even for a day causes actual suffering and abstaining from those activities that are merely enjoyable or comfortable.

However, the aggadic section presents a totally different conceptualization of *inuy*. This approach is expressed, first and foremost, by the citation of verses and their attendant *derashot* dealing with the manna, some of which refer to the experience of eating the manna as *inuy*. Indeed, the first *derasha* in this section — the first of the disputes between R. Ammi and R. Assi cited previously — cites a verse that defines the diet of manna as *inuy*: “Who feeds you manna in the desert, which your fathers had not known, in order to afflict you.”

However, there is an undeniable conceptual gap between the *inuy* described in this *derasha* and the *inuy* of abstaining from food and drink. A person who fasts experiences actual pain and suffering, as fasting involves withholding the body’s most basic needs. *Inuy* such as this was undoubtedly not the experience of the Israelites in the desert when they ate the manna for forty years. Moreover, the manna was not tasteless, as the final dispute between R. Ammi and R. Assi clearly establishes:

The cucumbers and the melons [and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic]” — R. Ammi and R. Assi [argue]. One said: They found in the manna the taste of every kind of food, but not the taste of these five. The other said: Of all kinds of food they felt both taste and substance, but of these the taste only, without the substance.

Manna had a taste; indeed, it had virtually every taste. However, as R. Ammi and R. Assi expound, eating it did not provide the full sensory experience, as the manna did not convey the taste or substance of the five specific foods mentioned in the verse.

Eating normally provides a full sensory experience, not only via the taste buds, but through the other senses as well. The sight of the food stirs the digestive juices long before the food is ingested, and the sense of touch is equally integral as one encounters the texture of each food. However, in the case of the manna, there was something missing, as the *derasha* states: “but of these the taste only, without the substance.” Thus, eating the manna did not give the Israelites the enjoyment of normal eating, and their gastronomic desires were therefore frustrated.

We may thus define the *inuy* that the aggadic section describes not as causing bodily suffering, but rather as withholding the satisfaction of bodily desires. Eating the manna fills one up and prevents the suffering of starvation, as it provides the essential nutrients that the body requires, but it does not satisfy the desire to eat earthly food, which alone can provide the full range of sensory enjoyment, including the experience of seeing and feeling what one eats.

Evidently, the aggadic section’s definition of *inuy* would include sexual abstinence, which also constitutes withholding a bodily desire. At the same time, one may draw a conceptual line between the prominent examples in the aggadic section — eating, drinking, and having sexual relations — and the other three prohibitions in the *mishna* — washing, anointing, and wearing shoes. These last three would seem to occupy a still lower level of exigence. Washing, anointing, and wearing shoes are bodily pleasures or creature comforts, but they do not satisfy carnal desires. The most basic earthly drives of any human being are for food and sexual relations. Thus, it is understood that when the aggadic unit redefines *inuy* by employing *derashot* about the manna focusing on eating, it includes in its different parts – even if only through allusion and euphemism – the realms of intimate relations.

The meaning of *inuy* in the aggadic section is further enriched by another *derasha* that appears with regard to the manna, when the *gemara* (75b) expounds a verse describing the Israelites’ experience in the desert:

Our Rabbis taught: "Man was eating the bread of the mighty (*lechem abirim*)” (*Tehillim* 78:25) — According to the view of R. Akiva, this means the bread that ministering angels eat. When these words were reported to R. Yishmael, he said to them: Go forth and tell Akiva: Akiva, you are mistaken. Do the ministering angels actually eat bread? Was it not said long ago (*Devarim* 9:9): “I did neither eat bread, nor drink water”? How, then, do I interpret *lechem abirim*? Read it as bread that was absorbed by the two hundred and forty-eight parts (*eivarim*).

R. Akiva equates the manna to the bread consumed by the ministering angels. It appears that the point of comparison is that angelic eating does not involve the sensory enjoyment inherent to human eating, as we explained above. However, R. Yishmael disputes the very idea that angels eat in any shape or form.[[1]](#footnote-1) In contrast, R. Akiva understands this “eating the bread of the mighty” along the lines of consuming the manna, which did not fulfill sensory desires but merely provided the necessary sustenance to survive, such that it would be relevant for angels as well.

If we read Rabbi Akiva’s *derasha* in its broader context in the *sugya*, we may learn from it about the ideal contained in God’s command concerning *inuy* on Yom Kippur. The aim of *inuy*, as understood by aggadic sources, is to spend Yom Kippur on a plane that is similar to that of the angels. Even if angels have some corporeal needs, as R. Akiva indicates, they certainly do not have anything that approximates human desire.[[2]](#footnote-2)

We may thus summarize the meaning of the *sugya* as follows: The halakhic section and the view it reflects follow the *baraitot* of halakhic Midrash, which define *inuy* as causing suffering to the body by withholding its most basic needs – eating and drinking. However, the aggadic section of the *sugya* challenges this view to a certain extent, viewing the anticipated *inuy* of Yom Kippur in another way. *Inuy*, following this approach, is not causing bodily suffering or withholding basic needs, but rather subsuming one’s desires. In this context, consumption and coition are inextricably linked, and they may be severed under no circumstances.

There are two additional noteworthy points to be made concerning this *sugya*, in keeping with the above analysis.

First of all, let us consider the transition from the halakhic section to the aggadic section, which is quite clever. The halakhic section concludes with a *derasha* from R. Yishmael expounding a verse concerning the manna, which invokes *inuy*:

In the name of R. Yishmael, they say: It says here, “You must afflict your souls,” and it says below, “And He afflicted you and He starved you.” Just as the affliction referred to there is starvation, the affliction referred to here is starvation.

However, this *derasha* only cites the opening of the verse (*Devarim* 8:3): “And He afflicted you and He starved you.” The very next words are, “And he fed you the manna, which you had not known.” The *derasha* avoids tying the *inuy* to the manna itself, and instead equates *inuy* to starvation. Indeed, even when reading the verse in its entirety, we may understand the manna as a subsequent entry in the list of experiences of the Israelites in the desert, not necessarily as defining “And he starved you.”

In contrast, the aggadic unit opens with a *derasha* on another verse from the same chapter that also mentions *inuy*. However, this verse does not speak of starvation; instead, it explicitly associates affliction with eating the manna: “Who feeds you manna in the desert… in order to afflict you.”

This indicates a firm relationship between the conclusion of the halakhic unit and the opening of the aggadic unit. However, a close reading of the transition immediately indicates to the reader the sharp distinction between the two sections in terms of defining *inuy*.

Moreover, the editorial comments of the *gemara* serve to further sharpen the relationship between the sections, as they challenge R. Yishmael’s *derasha,* which concludes the halakhic section and immediately precedes the opening of the aggadic section:

And why do we not derive it from, “And He saw our affliction,” concerning which the master says that this is separation from the way of the world [marital relations]? We derive Heavenly affliction from Heavenly affliction; we do not derive Heavenly affliction from man-made affliction.

The *inuy* of preventing husband and wife from living together normally is the work of men – namely, Pharaoh and the Egyptians – so it cannot be compared to the *inuy* mandated on Yom Kippur, which is decreed by Heaven. Immediately after drawing this distinction, the *sugya* cites the first aggadic *derasha* that defines eating the manna as *inuy*, as mentioned above. However, eating the manna is no regular *inuy*; it is defined quite explicitly in the verses as *inuy* from Heaven.

Thus, the *sugya* presents a consistent tone, going from the definition of *inuy* on Yom Kippur as “Heavenly affliction” at the end of the halakhic section to another *inuy* that comes from Heaven, which initiates the aggadic section.

Second, we have seen previously the editorial comments of the *gemara* about defining *inuy* according to the *baraitot*, which try to include in the definition of *inuy* abstinence from sexual relations as well. If we take a broad, global view of the *sugya*, considering its split into two sections, we may observe the editorial comments of the *gemara* as the conceptions of the aggadic section bleeding into the halakhic section.

With a degree of caution, we may suggest (although we cannot determine with certainty) that the editors who integrated the aggadic unit into the *sugya* as it stands today are the ones who injected this aggadic conception of *inuy* into the halakhic section. This is accomplished by raising these anonymous challenges, which strengthen the relationship between the two sections of the *sugya*.

However, we cannot help but notice the fate of the questions posed by the editors of the *gemara* in the halakhic section – they are summarily rejected!

Now let us return to one of the questions that we presented at the beginning of the *shiur* – the status of aggadic passages integrated in halakhic *sugyot*. We must ask how the sages who crafted this *sugya* saw the relationship between its parts. Even if we cannot answer this question with certainty, it appears that we may make an educated guess. The questions of the editorial comments of the *gemara* indeed raise already in the halakhic section of the *sugya* the view of the aggadic section and turn the reader’s attention to it; however, the same editors also reject the question repeatedly. In other words, even according to these editors, the halakhic plane remains unaltered; the absolute dichotomy between eating/drinking and the other prohibitions is intact. In their view, the penalty of excision would be incurred only by someone who either eats or drinks on Yom Kippur, not someone who is sexually active. The anonymous challenges in the halakhic section merely allow the worldview of the aggadic section to spill over into the pool of halakhic thought; however, its essential nature is undiminished.

We may see the contribution of the aggadic section to the *sugya* in another area. When the aggadic section is read in the context of the halakhic section and understood as presenting an alternative view of the definition of *inuy*, it appears that it does not interfere in the normative domain of the obligation, but rather proposes a different standard or expectation than that which is offered in the halakhic section. This standard is in the domain of religious enthusiasm, not the normative halakhic realm. The aggadic domain does not dare to challenge halakhic definitions; it therefore should not lead one to the conclusion that anyone who has sexual relations on Yom Kippur would incur the penalty of excision. However, it does suggest another spiritual direction for those who undertake *inuy* on Yom Kippur – a different focus and a different ideal, perhaps a loftier one.

According to the aggadic section, *inuy* is not to be understood as causing oneself bodily pain and suffering, but rather as abstaining, disengaging, and cleansing oneself from bodily desires and lusts for one day out of the year. This focus is best illustrated by the *midrash*, which compares the manna to the food of the angels.

Indeed, the challenge presented by the aggadic section of *inuy* on Yom Kippur is to temporarily become like or experience the existence of the angels, devoid of every bodily need or desire.

As for the essential question of the relationship between the aggadic section and the halakhic section in the Talmud, we may attempt to reach a conclusion, at least in terms of the *sugya* we are discussing. In this *sugya*, the aggadic component does not influence the halakhic debate in the normative domain of practical ruling. In the case, this is reflected in the punishment that is inflicted on transgressors: the *sugya* does not attempt to claim, in its aggadic part, that *karet* would be inflicted on those who have sexual relations on Yom Kippur, in contrast to the halakhic part that designates *karet* only for those who eat or drink. What the aggadic component proposes as an alternative is only in the sphere of spirituality and experiential religion, within the soul of the adherent who observes this *mitzva*. This view is a challenge or a recommendation, but it does not attempt to be a normative binding obligation.

Although we must recognize that these findings are limited to this specific *sugya*, the opening passage of Tractate *Yoma*’s eighth chapter. Nevertheless, they may indicate a direction in the intent of the editors of various *sugyot* throughout the Babylonian Talmud that interweave halakhic and aggadic material.

Translated by Yoseif Bloch

1. R. Yishmael’s proof is that Moshe reported that when he was with God after ascending Mount Sinai, he neither ate nor drank for forty days; all the more so those who reside with God on a permanent basis, the ministering angels, would not need food or drink. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In fact, even R. Yishmael, who argues with R. Akiva, may be enlisted to support our approach. R. Yishmael maintains that eating the manna required no excretion, as the manna contained nothing extraneous, but only nutrients necessary to sustain life. Thus, the manna had no supplementary material included merely to shape and to intensify the sensory experience of eating. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)