**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Rabbinic Tales: In the Talmud and in Chasidut**

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**Shiur #45: The Story of R. Pinchas ben Yair, and Chasidic Stories (2)**

In the previous *shiur*, we reviewed a story in the *Bavli* (*Chullin* 7a) – a story whose redaction and molding brought together some shorter traditions from Eretz Yisrael about R. Pinchas ben Yair – climaxing in the encounter between R. Pinchas ben Yair and Rebbi. R. Pinchas ben Yair, a *chasid* who is focused throughout the story on a mitzva and the consciousness of “performing the will of his Maker,” discovers that Rebbi keeps white mules in his home – dangerous animals that are apparently a status symbol of sorts. This show of status and wealth is entirely foreign to him. The confrontation between them concerning these animals ends with a split between them because of R. Pinchas ben Yair’s criticism of Rebbi’s lifestyle and choices.

Having reviewed the story, we may now ask: what is the conclusion? Who is the “preferred” character in the story – R. Pinchas ben Yair or Rebbi? Which model is the story trying to promote?

At first glance, it seems that R. Pinchas ben Yair is correct in all the arguments he puts forward; in addition, his behavior throughout the story, and the high standard that he sets in his actions and his conduct, are most impressive. Nevertheless, the message of the story is not so simple and unequivocal. The third part leaves us not only with the shining image of R. Pinchas ben Yair, but also with Rebbi’s tears, and with mixed feelings. R. Pinchas ben Yair’s arguments, and all the descriptions of him in the story, point to someone of very high spiritual and moral caliber. On the other hand, Rebbi – one of the most important of the *Nesi’im*, a great Sage and the redactor of the Mishna – is not just an ordinary person. R. Pinchas ben Yair’s refusal to be appeased and to compromise so as to bridge the conflict between them attests to a high degree of rigidity, apparently a part of the spiritual intensity with which he lives, devoting all his time and energies, constantly and exclusively, to “performing the will of his Maker.” Rebbi’s weeping, ultimately, is an expression of his humanity – which has disadvantages, but which is also what opens the heart of the reader.

An interesting point arises here. R. Pinchas ben Yair’s constant occupation with communal needs distances him, paradoxically enough, from the community. He lives in a world of constant dedication and devotion to an ideal, and other people, even if they are as great as Rebbi, cannot stand in his presence. It is no coincidence that he is compared to Moshe Rabbeinu, who was closer than any other human to God, and whose life was devoted to Am Yisrael, taking care of their needs and even arguing with God on their behalf, to maintain their very existence. In his case, too, there was a great distance separating him from the rest of the nation. Perhaps the “mountain” that rises up between R. Pinchas ben Yair and Rebbi, at the end of the story, also hints to Moshe – whose ascent to Mount Sinai created a great chasm between himself and the people.[[1]](#footnote-1) The corollary of this almost “angelic” and inhuman existence, then, is a certain distance and alienation from the public at large – and even from great individuals, as expressed, for example, in the episode of Miriam and Aharon discussing the Cushite woman. Moshe has difficulty understanding the mundane weaknesses and the earthly desires of the public that he leads. He takes devoted care of them, but he is not actually close to them; he has no simple, natural communication with them. Likewise, R. Pinchas ben Yair takes care of those who accompany him on his journey, but it seems unlikely that there is any communication between him and them.

A close reading of the story in the *Bavli*, in comparison with the earlier narratives in the *Yerushalmi*, showed us that it is not merely a compilation of three shorter stories, but rather a new creation that stands on its own, with elements of literary design that serve the content. The first two parts of the story shape R. Pinchas ben Yair as a special figure, a *chasid* whose entire life is spent in a constant state of “performing the will of his Maker,” and they prepare the ground for his confrontation with Rebbi in the third and final part. The mountain that appears between them at the end is an inverse closing of the circle that started with the river in the first part: R. Pinchas ben Yair easily navigates physical obstacles and natural phenomena when he is on the way to perform a mitzva, but at the same time, he creates obstacles whose presence is felt, like phenomena of the physical, natural world, between himself and those who do not live in the same ideal reality as he does.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The story conveys no direct criticism of R. Pinchas ben Yair, and as noted above, it takes no side in the conflict between the two parties. R. Pinchas ben Yair’s high religious and moral standards are worthy of admiration – and indeed, they are admired even by Rebbi, who suffers as a result of those standards. The story does show, however, that living that sort of life comes with a price – like the leadership of Moshe – and there is room for other models of leadership.

The message of the story is a nuanced one on the spiritual and human levels, and by virtue of its fine literary quality, it manages to convey ideas and feelings in more condensed form and with more powerful effect than direct, abstract writing would accomplish. Here we encounter the qualities of the literary medium and understand *Chazal’s* choice to recount stories within the halakhic context.

**The broader context in the *sugya***

The story of R. Pinchas ben Yair in the *Bavli* appears in response to a question posed by the Gemara: “What is meant by ‘animals of *tzaddikim’*?” (*Chullin* 7b). In what context is this question being asked? It comes in the wake of a statement, or formula, that recurs three times over the course of the halakhic *sugya* preceding the story: “Since the Holy One, blessed be He, does not bring about mishaps through animals belonging to *tzaddikim*, He certainly does not bring them about through *tzaddikim* themselves!”[[3]](#footnote-3) With this statement the Gemara concludes, with regard to certain instances where a question arose concerning the *kashrut* of some food eaten by certain *tzaddikim*, that it is impossible that they would have stumbled and eaten something that was forbidden. The story also makes a halakhic statement affirming the *kashrut* of the food in question – at least according to some opinions. Later, I will quote parts of the *sugya* and explain this further.

These discussions are part of a long *sugya* dealing with the first *mishna* in the *Massekhet*, which lists those who can perform *shechita* that is considered kosher. In this context, the *sugya* arrives at the question of *shechita* by “Cuthites” (Shomronim). The discussion begins on 3a with the words of Abaye and Rabba, whose interpretation of the *mishna* leads them to approve *shechita* performed by a Cuthite under specific conditions with Jewish supervision, and continues up until 6a. Over the course of the discussion, *shechita* by “*mumarim*” (Jews who do not observe the *mitzvot*) of different types also comes up.

At the end of the discussion, we find a statement conveyed by an *Amora* named Bar Kapara, who reports that Rabban Gamliel and his *beit din* forbade Cuthite *shechita*. A discussion develops that includes testimony about R. Yochanan and R. Asi eating meat that had been slaughtered by a Cuthite. The Gemara asks whether they were aware of Rabban Gamliel’s prohibition, and nevertheless ruled differently, or whether they had not heard his decree and therefore ate forbidden meat by mistake:

R. Chanan said that R. Yaakov bar Idi said that R. Yehoshua ben Levi said in the name of Bar Kapara: Rabban Gamliel and his *beit din* were counted with regard to *shechita* by a Cuthite, and they prohibited it. […]

Come and hear: R. Natan bar Yitzhak said that R. Asi said: I saw R. Yochanan eating [meat] that had been slaughtered by a Cuthite, and R. Asi, too, ate of the *shechita* of a Cuthite.

R. Zeira wondered about this: [Was it because] they did not hear it from him, for had they heard it from him they would have accepted it, or did they perhaps hear it and not accept it?

[Afterwards he resolved the matter for himself:][[4]](#footnote-4) It is more likely that they heard but did not accept it. For if it enters your mind that they did not hear it, but had they heard it they would have accepted it, then how could it come about that they ate food that was forbidden [according to their own standards, for they would have accepted the ruling had they known of it]? Since the Holy One, blessed be He, does not bring about mishaps through animals belonging to *tzaddikim*, He certainly does not bring them about through *tzaddikim* themselves!”

The conclusion of the Gemara, then, is that it cannot be that *Amoraim* such as R. Yochanan and R. Asi would have stumbled unintentionally into sin, and therefore we must assume that they disagreed with the decree and regarded the *shechita* of Cuthites as permissible.

The Gemara then continues its discussion of the prohibition on meat slaughtered by Cuthites and describes a particular instance involving R. Zeira and R. Asi. The instance described is not about *shechita*, but it is connected to the previous discussion because it also relates to consumption of a food whose halakhic status is in question in the mind of the Sage in question, and here too we find the formula concerning "animals of *tzaddikim*":

R. Zeira and R. Asi happened upon an inn in Ya’ei. They were served eggs that were shriveled [after being cooked] in wine. R. Zeira did not eat [them]; R. Asi ate. R. Zeira said to R. Asi: “Is the Master then not concerned over [the possibility of] a mixture of *demai* [food that was not tithed – i.e., a mixture of eggs and wine that was not tithed]?”

He said to him: “It did not enter my mind.”

R. Zeira said: “Is it possible that the Sages made a decree concerning mixtures containing *demai*, and R. Asi ended up unwittingly eating forbidden food? [Surely not;] since the Holy One, blessed be He, does not bring about mishaps through animals belonging to *tzaddikim*, He certainly does not bring them about through *tzaddikim* themselves!”

R. Zeira emerged, studied the matter, and found that it is taught in a *beraita* [Tosefta *Demai* 1:24]: One who purchases wine to put into fish gravy […] is obligated to tithe it, [since its status regarding tithing is unclear; it is treated] as *demai*. And needless to say, [he is obligated to tithe it] if it certainly has not been tithed. And [the foods mentioned – fish gravy etc.] are permitted [to be eaten, without tithing] because they are a mixture.

Here, too, the assumption that "since the Holy One, blessed be He, does not bring about mishaps… animals... He certainly…" leads to the conclusion that there must be halakhic license to eat the food in question – here, a mixture that has the status of *demai*. After further discussion about mixtures of *demai*, the *sugya* moves on (6b – 7a) to another topic in the realm of the laws pertaining to food, which again is unrelated to *shechita*: the halakhic status of Beit Shean regarding the commandments that apply only in Eretz Yisrael. The following is a partial excerpt:

R. Yehoshua ben Zeruz, son of the father-in-law of R. Meir, testified before Rebbi that R. Meir ate the leaf of a vegetable in Beit Shean [without tithing], and [on this basis] Rebbi declared all the produce of Beit Shean permitted…

R. Yirmiyahu said to R. Zeira: But R. Meir ate only a single leaf! (I.e., his snack qualified as eating incidentally, or in passing – in which case the produce is exempt from tithing in any case.)

He said to him: He ate it from a bundle [of produce], and it is taught in the Mishna: vegetables that are [typically] bundled up are subject to tithing from the moment they are bundled.

But perhaps he did not notice [that it came from a bundle and therefore needed tithing]?

[That cannot be the case.] Since the Holy One, blessed be He, does not bring about mishaps…. He certainly….

What is the meaning of “the animals of *tzaddikim*”?

R. Pinchas ben Yair was on his way to engage in redeeming captives… (*Chullin* 6b-7a)

Rebbi exempts all produce grown in Beit Shean from the obligation of tithing on the basis of testimony concerning R. Meir, who ate the leaf of a vegetable without tithing. Following a brief discussion, R. Yirmiyahu questions R. Zeira concerning the validity of this anecdotal evidence: the consumption of a single leaf that one happened to come across would in any case be exempt from the requirement of tithing. R. Zeira responds that the leaf came from a bundle, and as such was in fact subject to the requirement of tithing. At this, R. Yirmeya (or perhaps the Gemara itself) asks whether R. Meir might have eaten without tithing not because he consciously decided that it was not required, but rather because it did not occur to him to do so, and R. Zeira (or the Gemara itself) responds with the formula concerning the "animals of *tzaddikim*.” Here, too, the statement has halakhic ramifications: if R. Meir *consciously* chose to eat the leaf without tithing, we may conclude (like Rebbi) that produce grown in Beit Shean is exempt from the requirement of tithing.

Following these three halakhic discussions, which are all built on a similar pattern and all include the formula, "Since the Holy One, blessed be He, does not bring about mishaps through animals belonging to *tzaddikim*, He certainly does not bring them about through *tzaddikim* themselves!" as a starting assumption for halakhic decision-making, the *sugya* addresses the definition of "animals of *tzaddikim*,” and brings the story of R. Pinchas ben Yair.

**The encounter between halakha and *aggada* in the *sugya***

The *sugya* contains a halakhic portion and an aggadic portion that follows on its heels. The halakhic portion branches off from the main discussion of the *mishna*, which concerns the question of who is considered fit to perform *shechita*; following the issue of *shechita* by Cuthites, there are two further discussions regarding foods whose halakhic status is in question. In each of the three discussions, there is some form of halakhic approval – at least according to some opinions – that is grounded, inter alia, on the recurring statement: "Since the Holy One… animals of *tzaddikim*…,” asserting that it can safely be assumed that the Sages would not have been led into a situation in which they ate forbidden foods (or, foods they ruled to be forbidden) by mistake. Thus, concerning meat slaughtered by Cuthites, the Gemara concludes that it is permitted according to R. Yochanan and R. Asi – despite Rabban Gamliel's prohibition – since it cannot be that they would have eaten meat, even unwittingly, from *shechita* that was not kosher. Hence, it must be that they knew of Rabban Gamliel's prohibition, and disagreed with it. Concerning the mixture of *demai*, the *sugya* likewise arrives at the conclusion that such a mixture is exempt from tithing: if R. Asi ate from it, then it must be permissible. In the same way, Rebbi's conclusion concerning produce grown in Beit Shean, based on the testimony describing R. Meir eating it, is that since he could not have eaten forbidden food unwittingly, it must be that produce grown there is exempt from tithing.

Thus, the halakhic portion of the *sugya* rests, to a considerable degree, on the recurring assumption concerning the animals of *tzaddikim* and the attendant conclusion concerning *tzaddikim* themselves. However, this represents a far-reaching position in relation to what we find in other sources within Rabbinic literature. Moscovitz[[5]](#footnote-5) brings examples from both *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* elsewhere – including the *sugya* in the *Yerushalmi* that parallels part of the *sugya* in the *Bavli* (*Demai* 1:3, 24d) – showing that the Sages are indeed capable of stumbling or making mistakes even in the halakhic realm, and even in the same halakhic contexts treated in our *sugya* in the *Bavli*. Nevertheless, the *sugya* in the *Bavli Chullin* (as well as some other *sugyot*) chooses to rely on the formula concerning "animals of *tzaddikim*" as a basis for halakhic rulings, and on this basis presents halakhic positions on the questions of *shechita* of Cuthites, mixtures of *demai*, and the status of Beit Shean.

Another point that arises from Moscovitz's fundamental study on the *sugya* is that, while there are no Tannaitic sources or statements attributed to *Amoraim* that offer as broad, generalized, and far-reaching a formula as that in our *sugya*, similar statements *can* be found in the anonymous voice of the Gemara (“*stama de-Gemara*”), parts of which may be attributed to the post-Amoraic redactors of the *Bavli*.[[6]](#footnote-6) However, as Moscovitz demonstrates, even Sages of this group do not subscribe uniformly to this fundamental negation of the possibility of Sages transgressing by mistake.[[7]](#footnote-7)

And then we come to the aggadic story of R. Pinchas ben Yair. What is the connection here between the *halakha* and the *aggada*?

At first glance, the story seems to offer an illustrative example of the first part of the formula: "Since the Holy One, blessed be He, does not cause a mishap….” The Hebrew formulation allows for two different interpretations: either that God prevents a mishap from occurring *to* the animal itself, or that He prevents mishaps occurring *through* the animal, i.e., that the animal could cause to humans.[[8]](#footnote-8) In any event, R. Pinchas ben Yair's donkey neither suffers a mishap nor causes one: it avoids eating food that has not been tithed, and the owners of the inn do not transgress the laws of tithes through it. This demonstration of the first part of the formula in reality might serve to reinforce the reliance on it in the halakhic portion of the *sugya*. This is one aspect of the encounter between *halakha* and *aggada* that happens here. At the same time, attention should be paid to the fact that all three times the halakhic *sugya* invokes the formula – as well as in the story illustrating the point – the "mishap" in question involves consumption of a forbidden food. This observation in and of itself serves to limit the scope to which the formula may be applied: what we have here is not a sweeping negation of the possibility of the Sages ever committing any transgression by mistake. Rather, the Sages (and their animals, like R. Pinchas ben Yair's donkey) can safely be assumed not to make mistakes when it comes to forbidden foods, even where the prohibition is a relatively light one.[[9]](#footnote-9)

However, Moscovitz notes[[10]](#footnote-10) that the illustration of the principle in the story of R. Pinchas ben Yair does not sit quite right. First, R. Pinchas ben Yair is not a Sage like any other; he is a *chasid* – in other words, he holds himself to a far more stringent standard – and it is therefore not self-evident that his behavior can serve as the basis for a general statement concerning all the Sages, as in the halakhic *sugya*. Second, even if his donkey were to have eaten from the produce fed to it, this would not have been a "mishap,” since the Mishna (*Demai* 1:3) explicitly exempts produce with the status of *demai* from tithing if it is intended for animal feed. Indeed, the redactors of the *sugya* were conscious of this question; they raise it in the midst of the story and resolve it by suggesting that the produce had originally been intended for human consumption and was therefore subject to the requirement of tithing before it was ultimately fed to the animal. Moskovitz argues that this resolution is unsatisfactory, since barley was usually used for animal feed rather than for human consumption. He regards the third part of the story as a digression related to the second part, about R. Pinchas ben Yair, rather than to the main topic. Concerning the first part, he is less certain,[[11]](#footnote-11) proposing that the story in the *Bavli* in its original form existed as a collection of stories about R. Pinchas ben Yair that was included in the *sugya* in its entirety, just as there is an entire collection of short stories about R. Pinchas ben Yair in the *Massekhtot* of *Demai* and *Shekalim* in the *Yerushalmi*.

It seems that we can shed new light on the encounter between *halakha* and *aggada* in our *sugya* by taking a deeper look and questioning whether the story about R. Pinchas ben Yair's donkey is in fact the main connection between them – as asserted by both Moscovitz and Ofra Meir.[[12]](#footnote-12) First, beyond the seemingly simple fact that the story illustrates the nature of "animals of *tzaddikim*,” which neither stumble into inadvertent sin nor cause others to do so, there are other interesting links between the story and the halakhic portion of the *sugya*. Some of them are to be found in the second part of the story: both R. Zeira and R. Asi in the halakhic portion, and R. Pinchas ben Yair in the second part of the story, happen upon an inn where food is served that contains *demai*. The food defined as *demai*, which is forbidden to eat, is refused by R. Pinchas ben Yair's donkey, and on this basis, we may assume such food would also not have been consumed by either of the Sages. In any case, the food that was served to the Sage in the halakhic portion was not forbidden as *demai* (since it was a *mixture* containing *demai*, rather than a quantity of food defined as *demai*).

In these details, the story in the *Bavli* differs from its parallel in the *Yerushalmi*, which describes the "piety" of the donkey and its avoidance of forbidden foods. These details, which are unique to the version in the *Bavli* and connect the story to the halakhic discussion in the *sugya*, strengthen the hypothesis that the story was remolded by the redactors, based on materials originating in Eretz Yisrael – such as the stories mentioned previously from the *Yerushalmi* – in such a way as to strengthen the connection between the halakhic discussion in the *sugya* and the aggadic portion.

However, I wish to argue that the connection to the halakhic discussion goes beyond the second part of the story, focusing on R. Pinchas ben Yair's donkey, which is an example of the "animals of *tzaddikim*.” In the third part, which is the climax of the story according to the interpretation offered above, we encounter Rebbi. He, too, might be defined as a "*tzaddik*" – no less than the Sages who are mentioned in the halakhic portion of the *sugya*: R. Yochanan, R. Asi, R. Zeira, and R. Meir. Moreover, Rebbi himself is mentioned in the halakhic discussion concerning Beit Shean. He, too, has animals. However – and this comes as a surprise – they are of a completely different nature than R. Pinchas ben Yair's donkey. Rebbi's white mules are dangerous; they can kill a person. From the point of view of the statement, "Since the Holy One, blessed be He, prevents a mishap (*takala*)…," we might define them as embodying a major potential "mishap" in and of themselves. Admittedly, the "mishap" here refers to physical damage, whereas the original meaning of the term as it appears in the formula refers to a spiritual stumbling. The story does not make use of the word *takala,* but since it is already hovering in the background, in the halakhic discussion, it is possible that the story hints to a play on the word *takala*, which *Chazal* do occasionally use in the sense of “damage.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

These animals are harmful. In addition, if Rebbi's white mules were to cause harm to someone, this would also be a "mishap" on the halakhic level – i.e., trouble that is caused to him as a result of his animal. Moreover, the story goes on to offer further possibilities of "mishaps" of the halakhic variety that might be caused by Rebbi's animals: when Rebbi understands that R. Pinchas ben Yair is opposed to him keeping white mules, he offers all sorts of suggestions for resolving the problem, but each in turn is rejected because of some halakhic problem that will result: "You shall not place a stumbling block before the blind,” "causing suffering to animals,” "wanton destruction,” etc.

It seems, therefore, that the third part of the story actually undermines the principle that "the Holy One, blessed be He, does not cause a mishap to come about through the animals of *tzaddikim*." If we look at the story as a whole, the picture that arises from it is a complex one. There are "animals of *tzaddikim*" that will never cause anyone to stumble – like the donkey of R. Pinchas ben Yair, whose behavior also reflects on its owner. On the other hand, there are the dangerous beasts owned by Rebbi, which also fall under the definition of "animals of *tzaddikim*.” While they do not reflect their righteous owner (Rebbi himself), because they are dangerous and harmful while he is not, through them he is portrayed – unlike R. Pinchas ben Yair – as a less "perfect" or "ideal" figure, one who has his weaknesses.

How are we to understand the picture arising from the *sugya* as a whole? First of all, attention should be paid to the fact that the *halakha* and *aggada* in this *sugya* are on two different levels. In the halakhic discussions, the *sugya* invokes the recurring formula, "Since the Holy One, blessed be He…,” and draws halakhic conclusions arising from the discussion: R. Yochanan's approval of *shechita* of Cuthites (in certain circumstances); the view allowing for consumption of mixtures containing *demai*; and the position that no tithing is required for produce grown in Beit Shean. On the other hand, the *sugya* contains an awareness of the fact that the formula is not an "exact fit,” and that it even comes with some risk on the conceptual and educational levels. It is these levels that are addressed by the *aggada*, here as in many other places. By presenting a complex picture regarding *tzaddikim* and their animals, it constricts what would otherwise be the sweeping scope of the formula and serves to balance the impression that might otherwise arise from the halakhic *sugya* in this context.

It seems that after invoking the formula repeatedly in the halakhic discussions, the redactors of the *sugya* wanted to introduce a question mark – a different perspective on it. This might have been because of the educational ramifications of the assumption that the Sages never stumble and never make mistakes, or because the matter is in fact a matter of controversy among Rabbinic sources themselves – as noted above, and as the redactors of the *sugya* were no doubt aware. The comparison of Rebbi's "animals" with R. Pinchas ben Yair's donkey gives voice to this more nuanced position. Moreover, the encounter and conflict between R. Pinchas ben Yair and Rebbi, which exposes the "weakness" and “mistakes” of the latter in relation to the "perfect" image of the former, leaves the reader with the question of which is the proper model for spiritual leadership, and whether *tzaddikim* who could never cause others to stumble are indeed the ideal we should strive for. The empathy that the story creates towards Rebbi, backed up by the important status of the Oral Law in Jewish history, points – as least as a possibility – to the more complex figure, rather than the simple, perfect figure of R. Pinchas ben Yair.

The statement that the *aggada* is making in this *sugya* may even be broader. It is difficult to prove on the textual level, and therefore I offer this merely as a suggestion. There seems to be a thematic connection between one of the subjects that arises in the encounter between R. Pinchas ben Yair and Rebbi – the question of eating at Rebbi's table – and halakhic discussions in the *sugya* concerning the *kashrut* of different foods. In the wake of the *mishna*, the *sugya* deals with different categories of people whose *shechita* is not recognized as kosher, such as the Cuthites and various *mumarim*. The discussion is halakhic, and as such is formal in nature. But the third picture in the story adds an emotional aspect. The offense and sorrow caused to Rebbi by R. Pinchas ben Yair's refusal to eat with him cry out from this portrayal. Perhaps R. Pinchas ben Yair is correct in objecting to Rebbi's lifestyle, which he perceives as morally problematic. And there may be justified reasons for ruling out *shechita* by different *mumarim*. However, it seems that by means of the *aggada*, the *sugya* seeks at the very least to raise awareness of the fact that when one refuses to eat at someone else's table, there are emotional and social ramifications that should be taken into account. The *aggada* wants to draw attention to this – perhaps as another consideration within the halakhic discussion of the *kashrut* of someone's food, or at least as a sensitivity to the feelings that may develop even in a case where, halakhically and practically, the food must be rejected. Food is not just food, as we know. For all of humanity, there is a great deal of social meaning surrounding food, which we should always keep in mind.

(Translated by Kaeren Fish)

1. In the version of the story that appears in the *Yerushalmi*, he is surrounded by fire – which might hint to the fire that burned atop Mount Sinai at the time of the giving of the Torah. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is interesting to look at the parallel confrontation in the *Yerushalmi* (*Massekhet Demai*). Rebbi, in his capacity as *Nasi*, seeks leniencies in the laws of *shemitta*, out of concern for the common people who are having trouble growing produce. R. Pinchas ben Yair, with his idealistic perspective, challenges him, pointing to a paradox in Rebbi’s concern for the people: he keeps expensive animals in his home, and this increases the economic burden on the people. Both are concerned for the needs of the people, each from his own perspective. R. Pinchas ben Yair lives as a *chasid* and believes in not compromising on *halakha* – apparently out of a belief that impeccable observance will bring salvation from on high. Rebbi, on the other hand, is more connected to the reality of this world, and tries to solve problems through available, regular, human means. As part of this reality, he continues to believe in the status of the *Nasi* and his household, which must be maintained even at a time of economic hardship. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This statement, its appearances in the Talmud, and references to it in Rabbinic literature are all discussed at length and in depth by L. Moscovitz, “‘The Holy One Blessed be He … Does Not Permit the Righteous to Stumble’: Reflections on the Development of a Remarkable BT Theologoumenon,” in: *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada*, ed. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, TSAJ 114 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 125–180. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. These words do not appear in the manuscripts. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Moscovitz (above, fn. 3) points out how sources in Rabbinic literature in general, and the parallels in the *Yerushalmi* to the various parts of our *sugya* in particular, address the assumption underlying this statement – i.e., the idea that the Sages do not make mistakes. He shows that in various places Chazal themselves do not accept this assumption, certainly not in the sweeping sense in which it is embraced in the *sugya* in *Chullin* – and do not use it as the basis for halakhic rulings. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Moscovitz, ibid., pp. 144-153. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid, pp. 153-172, esp. p. 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. ibid., p. 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Admittedly, as noted above, the formula does appear in some other *sugyot* in the *Bavli*. One of them (*Gittin* 7a) describes a Sage being "saved" from eating a forbidden food, while the other two appearances – which are actually the same source, quoted in two different places in the Gemara – concern a Sage being "saved" from mistakenly elevating a slave to the status of a *kohen*. However, as Marcovitz demonstrates (ibid., pp. 141-142), in terms of the wording of the *sugya* as it appears in the various manuscripts, the appearance of the formula in these *sugyot* is at the very least questionable. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., pp. 137-140. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See also his suggestion in fn. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Meir, cited in the previous *shiur* (fn. 3), maintains that "Although it is the second story, it is the only one that explains the reason all three stories appear in the *sugya*. It comes in response to the question of what is meant by ‘animals belonging to *tzaddikim*.'” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See for example, *Bavli Bava Kama* 50a. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)