

Mystery of the Missing Sage

One holiday, the Sage Shimon of Timnah failed to appear in the *beit midrash* where he regularly studied with his colleagues. When Rabbi Yehuda ben Bava asked why he was absent, he explained that a band of heathen marauders had descended upon his community, and they were busy appeasing these invaders so that they would not steal from them. They achieved this, he added, by slaughtering a calf, cooking it for them and serving them a satisfying meal.

This explanation did not find favor in the eyes of Rabbi Yehuda ben Bava, who suggested that this saving of money was offset by the blame they incurred for violating the holiday. The Torah's permission to cook on a holiday, he reminded him, was limited to cooking for Jews and not for others.

Attempting to understand Shimon of Timnah's rationale, the *gemara* first suggests that this cooking was permitted because the marauders would certainly not have objected to their Jewish cooks helping themselves to a little of the meat. The cooking was therefore done for the benefit of Jews as well.

This approach is rejected, however, because if Jews had been able to partake of that calf's meat, Rabbi Yehuda ben Bava would not have challenged his colleague's action. We must therefore conclude that the animal in question was *treifah* and forbidden for Jewish consumption. This leaves but one justification for the holiday cooking of Shimon of Timnah — that a part of that *treifah* animal could be fed to animals which belonged to Jews.

The conflict between these two sages thus boils down to whether a Jew may cook on a holiday to feed his animals. This issue is actually debated by Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yossi the Galilite, with the former contending that the Torah permitted cooking to feed one's animal and the latter arguing that it is forbidden.

What is the logic, asks the *gemara*, for the view which permits cooking for your animal while prohibiting it for serving to a non-Jew? The answer is that feeding your animal is your responsibility, while another human can fend for himself.

The halachic ruling, however, is that cooking for an animal on a holiday is forbidden (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 512:3*) though it is permitted to trouble yourself to feed your animals on Shabbat and holidays.

Beitza 21

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A Bold People

“Chutzpah” is a Hebrew word that has already become a part of the English language. Is boldness, however, a truly Jewish characteristic?

Jews are the boldest of peoples, said Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish; and Rabbi Meir saw a connection between this characteristic and being chosen from amongst the nations to receive the Torah.

Maharsha explains that there are two sides to the coin of boldness. A bashful person, says the Sage Hillel (*Pirkei Avot 2:6*) cannot succeed in Torah study. Only if one is bold enough to ask, to challenge and to debate can he truly learn Torah. On the other hand, however, if boldness is not tempered, it can prevent one from having a true respect for Divine authority. Their natural boldness, therefore, qualified the Jews to receive the Torah, to whose profound wisdom they would do justice with their capacity to search for truth without reservations. This Torah would then channel their boldness into a positive drive for intellectual and spiritual perfection and instill in them humility in their relationship to Heaven.

This controlling effect of Torah on Jewish boldness was once cited by a leading European rabbi to a ruler of the Austro-Hungarian Empire who looked with favor upon Jews abandoning their Torah and assimilating. “Torah is what controls the boldness of my people,” he told the emperor. “As long as we abide by our Torah and express our boldness in search of its wisdom, we are the most loyal of citizens to your majesty. But if we abandon this control, who knows if our grandchildren will not someday be involved in a bold challenge to your grandchildren!”

Beitza 25b

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