

Mandel Teacher Educator Institute
Cohort 7 Seminar 5, November 13th, 2016/ 12 Heshvan

Planning, Teaching and a Philosophy of 'Good' Learning
Tractate Bava Metzia 85b

1. Background information

a. Characters

Resh Lakish

Second half/end of 3rd century. Israel. Was head of a group of bandits or gladiators before he became a talmudic scholar. Is described as “Oker Harim” (one who uproots mountains): someone who shows an outstanding creativity in the study of the Law.

Rabbi Hanina

Middle of 3rd century. Left Babylon to come to live in Israel. Very famous for his knowledge and his skills as a teacher. Lived a long life. It is told that at the age of 80, he used to stand on one foot while putting on the shoe on his other foot. People from his own town did not like him because he used to rebuke them. (Tractate Shabbat 119b).

Rabbi Hiya

Second half of 3rd century. Left Babylon to come to live in Israel. Known to have been very much involved in community life in various places by appointing leaders and educators, e.g. he taught his students in the street, against the ruling of the leader of his generation (Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi).

b. Thesaurus

“*Marking the burial vaults*”- people were buried in natural caves. According to Jewish law, those born in families of priests (Cohanim) are not allowed to be in proximity of a grave or a dead body. Resh Lakish was marking the burial vaults so that the priests would not get close to these graves.

“*Mishna*” - The six orders of the Mishna: a compilation of Jewish laws covering all aspects of religious, civil and personal law. They are edited in 6 volumes (called also “orders”) and are labeled by their major topic (Seeds, Festivals, Women, Damages, Holy things, and Purity). In the 3rd century, the Mishna was still taught as an oral tradition only, that is, without being written in texts.

2. Close reading: Explanation

a. Please read the story with your Havruta partner, using the "Literal Translation". List questions which would help you better understand the story (e.g. missing information in the text, potential motivations and purposes of characters' actions).

b. Structural note

Please note the order of three parts of the story as they appear in the text:

- a. Resh Lakish marking the burial vaults.
- b. The dispute between R. Hanina and R. Hiya
- c. R. Hiya's initiative

However, the *chronological* order of the events related in the story is as follow:

- a. R. Hiya's initiative
- b. The dispute between R. Hanina and R. Hiya
- c. Resh Lakish marking the burial vaults

3. Generate interpretation(s): Understanding

Together with your Havruta partner:

- a. Take the time to dwell on the details of the story that seem to be important. You may want to re-read the story a few times.
- b. Help each other articulate what you understand this text to reflect and/or to value as big ideas: about teaching, about planning for teaching and about learning. Make sure to ground your interpretations in textual evidences.
- c. Support and challenge each other's interpretations.
- d. Finally, articulate to each other what's your own take on the ideas the text raises and seems to be valuing.

Please be ready to share at least one of your interpretations with the larger group.