

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

### WHY A PASSAGE IS PLACED WHERE IT IS IN THE BAVLI?

Dear Friends,

As we begin to study the theory of how the Bavli was put together, we do well to listen to the insights of one of the greatest Talmud scholars of the last century, Avraham Weiss. He felt, that as a general principle, "It stands to reason that sugya material which is found in only one place was created in its present place as part of the Talmud and within the framework of the Mishnah where it is found and to which it is connected in some way." In other words, there are set stories out there that the sages could have placed anywhere in the Talmud but they did it in this place for a reason. So let us revisit a passage which occurs nowhere else in rabbinic literature:

Our Rabbis taught: Once all Israel went up on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and they did not have water to drink. Nakdimon ben Guryon approached a certain governor, [and] said to him: Lend me twelve wells of water for the pilgrims, and I will give you twelve wells of water. And if I do not give [them] to you, I will give you twelve talents of silver. And he set a time for him.

When the time arrived and the rain had not fallen, he sent to him in the morning: Send me either the water or the money you owe me. He sent to him: I still have time, [for] the entire day is mine.

At midday he sent to him: Send me either the water or the money that you owe me. He sent to him: I still have time left in the day.

In the afternoon he sent to him: Send me the water or the money that you owe me. He sent to him: I still have time left in the day. That governor sneered at him [and] said: All year long rains have not fallen, and rains will fall now? He entered the bathhouse joyfully.

As the lord entered the bathhouse joyfully, Nakdimon entered the Temple in sadness. He wrapped himself and stood in prayer. He said before Him: Master of the Universe! It is revealed and known before You that I did not do [this] for my [own] honor, nor did I do [it] for the honor of my father's house. Rather, I did [it] for Your honor, so that water would be available for the pilgrims. Immediately the sky became covered with clouds and rain fell until the twelve wells filled and overflowed.

As the lord left the bathhouse, Nakdimon ben Guryon left the Temple. When they met each other, he said to him: Give me the money for the extra water which you owe me. He said to him: I know that the Holy One blessed be He, did not shake His world except on account of you. But I still have a claim against you that I may collect me money from you, for the sun has already set and the rains fell in my possession.

He went back and entered the Temple, wrapped himself and stood in prayer, and said before Him: Master of the Universe! Make it known that You have loved ones in Your world." Immediately the clouds dispersed and the sun shone. At that time the lord said to him: If the sun had not broken through, I would have had a claim against you that I could have collected my money from you [but now, I cannot]. (B. Taanit 19b-20a)

The mishnah to which this story is attached is the famous one of Honi drawing a circle in the dust and vowing that he will not step outside that circle until God brings the rain.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Contrast Nakdimon with Honi? How are they the same? How do they differ?
2. Identify what Nakdimon does correctly that allows him to merit such great rewards. Note that he is a lay person, not a sage. In essence, he is a rich Jewish leader; a Federation president. How could Nakdimon serve as a role model for lay leadership today?
3. What festival does this story revolve about? What time of year is it during this story? Is there any symbolism there?
4. **MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION:** where else might this story have been placed within the Talmud? Why here? What is the compositor of the Talmud trying to say with this editing?