

Rebbe Meir



People of the Book III
Rabbi Efrem Goldberg
November 26, 2014

Rebbe Meir



- ❧ One of the most important scholars in the development and transmission of the Oral Torah
- ❧ Lived in the second century in Israel
- ❧ Fascinating life story and history
- ❧ Lived in a tumultuous time and led a tumultuous life
- ❧ First, need to understand the historical context...

Fall of Judea



- ❧ After the fall of Beitar, the Romans sought to destroy the Jews of Judea.
- ❧ We find references to destruction and restoration of cities throughout Israel in the Talmud.
- ❧ Hadrian sought to destroy not only cities but the religious leadership.
- ❧ Decade after Bar Kochba rebellion which ended c. 148 CE was time of shmad, forced conversion.
- ❧ Rabbis were executed for teaching Torah.
- ❧ Rebbe Meir witnessed the murder of his illustrious teacher, Rebbe Akiva before his very eyes.



Fall of Judea

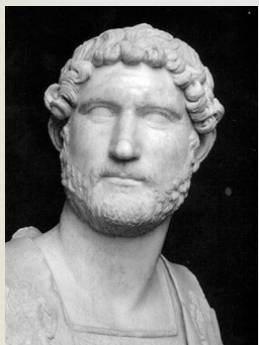


- ❧ Twenty four thousand students of Rebbe Akiva died in a plague.
- ❧ Rebbe Akiva sought to defy the Romans and give semicha to his 5 surviving students (sanhedrin 14a):
 - ❧ Rebbe Meir
 - ❧ Rebbe Yehudah bar Elai
 - ❧ Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai
 - ❧ Rebbe Yossi
 - ❧ Rebbe Elazar ben Shamua.
- ❧ Rebbe Akiva appointed Rebbe Meir to be the head of the group (Yevamos 62b). He wasn't able to complete the semicha and so after R' Akiva's death, R' Yehudah ben Bava did (Sanhedrin 14a)
- ❧ The Romans killed R' Yehudah ben Bava as he ordained Rebbe Meir

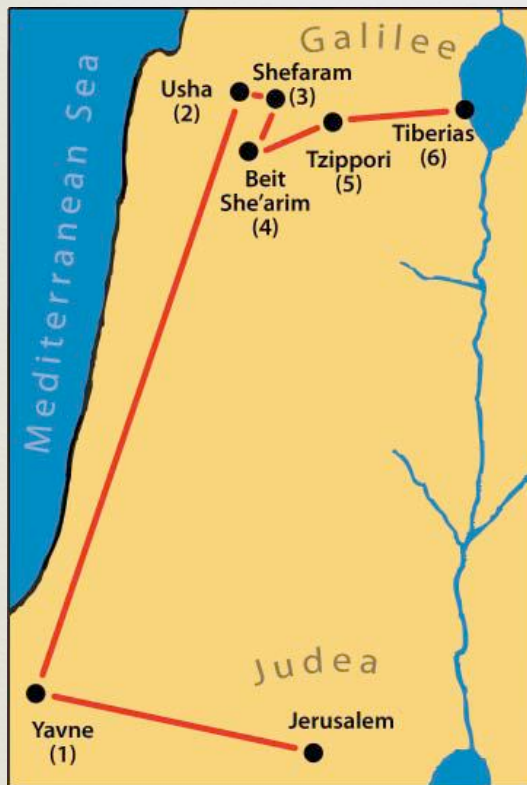
Fleeing to Babylonia



- ❧ These 5 great Rabbis fled to Babylonia which was part of the Parthian Empire.
- ❧ They found refuge with Rebbe Yehuda ben Bseira in Peki'in.
- ❧ The Torah community in Israel was forced to remain hidden until after the death of Hadrian.
- ❧ Hadrian died in 138CE and Antoninus Pius who relaxed the decrees of Hadrian and ultimately was a close friend of Rebbe Yehudah Ha'Nasi.



Return to Israel

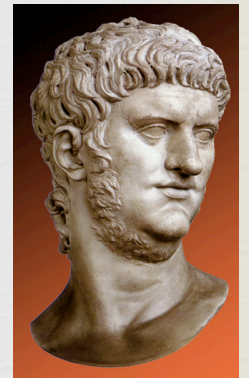


- ✧ Rebbe Meir and his colleagues return to Israel in 143 CE.
- ✧ They sought to restore the Sanhedrin but thought Yavneh and Judea remained too dangerous so instead did so in Usha. (Shir Ha'Shirim Rabba 2:16)

Rebbe Meir



- ❧ Descended from a Roman convert, a close relative of the Emperor Nero (Gittin 56a). The Emperor did not approve of his conversion.
- ❧ His real name was Nahori or Misha. The name Meir, meaning "Illuminator" in Hebrew, was given to him because he “enlightened” the eyes of scholars in Torah study and to know the light of Hashem.
- ❧ Rebbe Meir was a tall man (Nidda 24b)
- ❧ He was a student first of Rebbe Yishmoel and then Rebbe Akiva.
- ❧ He was a sofer, a scribe by profession (Gittin 67a)



Rebbe Meir



- ❧ He earned three ducats a week, one of which he used for his family, another for clothing and the third to support poor Torah scholars.
- ❧ He was brilliant and was considered a genius by his peers (Eruvin 13b)
- ❧ It was said of him, “whoever saw him studying the holy Torah, got the impression that he was tearing up mountains and grinding them to dust upon each other.”
- ❧ Nevertheless, his position was often in the minority. Yet, after engaging in rigorous debates he always followed the majority opinion. (Shabbos 134b)

Rebbe Meir



- ❧ He was almost placed in Cherem for his reluctance to publicly endorse the majority opinions. (Yerushalmi Mo'ed Kattan 3:1)
- ❧ Rebbe Meir was proud of his boldness and tenacity and saw them as earning the Torah for the Jewish people (Beitzah 25b)
- ❧ They qualities got him in trouble throughout his life but he never changed them.
- ❧ Rebbe Akiva saw early in his life that Rebbe Meir would live in a sea of travails. (Yevamos 121a)

Marriage to Beruriah



- ❧ Rebbe Meir was married to Beruriah, the eldest daughter of Rebbe Chananya ben Tradyon.
- ❧ R' Chananya ben Tradyon was one of the asarah harugei malchus who was wrapped in a Torah and burned alive.
- ❧ Beruriah's mother was executed by the Romans as well.
- ❧ Her brother was yotzei l'tarbus ra'ah, he left a Torah life.
- ❧ Her youngest sister was taken by the Romans and placed in a house of prostitution.
 - ❧ Rebbe Meir performed a miracle to secure her release (Avodah Zara 18a-b), hence Rebbe Meir Ba'al Ha'Nes

Marriage to Beruriah



- ❧ Beruriah was a scholar in her own right and was not intimidated to disagree with her husband (Eruvin 53b)
- ❧ They suffered terrible tragedy together of the loss of their two sons who died while Rebbe Meir was teaching Torah. (Yalkut Shimoni 964)

Fleeing to Babylonia



- ❧ According to Rashi, Beruriah committed suicide after a bizarre incident in which Rebbe Meir tested her by sending one of his students to seduce her. Rebbe Meir then fled from Israel in shame. (Avodah Zara 18b)
- ❧ According to Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon of Morocco, Beruriah and Rebbe Meir fled Roman persecution together and went to Babylonia.
- ❧ A third suggestion attributes his departure from Israel to his attempted revolution against the authority of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, the Nasi of the Sanhedrin. (Horiyos 13b)

Acheirim



- ❧ After Rebbe Meir and Rebbe Nosson failed in their coup, they were punished.
- ❧ Rebbe Nosson is referred to in the Mishna as yeish omrim, 'some say,' and Rebbe Meir is mentioned as Acheirim,' others say.'
- ❧ Rebbe Nosson apologized to Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel but Rebbe Meir refused to do so.

Acheirim



- ❧ Rebbe Meir became somewhat of an anonymous figure in the Mishna.
- ❧ On the one hand, Rebbe Yehudah Ha'Nasi spoke highly of him (Eruvin 13b)
- ❧ Third most quoted Tanna in the Talmud
- ❧ On the other, he refused to attribute teachings to Rebbe Meir who originated them (Horiyos 14a)
- ❧ 'Stam mishna,' an anonymous teaching is Rebbe Meir (Sanhedrin 86a)

Acheirim



- ❧ God Himself refuses to quote Rebbe Meir (Chagigah 15b)
- ❧ Rebbe Meir became a lonely person. He left Israel to wander in the exile of Asia minor.
- ❧ He was uncompromising in his opinions and beliefs
- ❧ Even after his death, Rebbe Yehudah bar Elai refused to allow Rebbe Meir's students into his yeshiva. (Nazir 49b) for fear that they had their teachers assertive nature.

Relationship with Acher



- ❧ Rebbe Elisha ben Avuyah was a great scholar and teacher. He lost his faith, became an apostate and was then referred to as 'acher,' 'another person.'
- ❧ He was one of the primary teachers of Rebbe Meir.
- ❧ He lost his faith when he saw Jews killed even while doing mitzvos and after witnessing the execution of scholars by the Romans. (Chulin 142a)
- ❧ Moreover, he entered the Pardes, the mystical orchard and it shook his faith. (Chagigah 15a)

Relationship with Acher



- ❧ Rebbe Meir did not forsake his teacher. They continued their high level Torah discussions together.
- ❧ Bruriah had taught him to differentiate between the sins and the sinners (Berachos 10a)
- ❧ He was unconcerned that Acher would negatively impact him as he was confident he could “eat the inner contents of the fruit, while casting away the peel.” (Chagiga 15b)
- ❧ Rebbe Meir tried to bring his Rebbe back to an observant and faithful life.
- ❧ Some suggest that Rebbe Meir himself was called Acheirim because of his continued relationship with Acher (Maharsha Horiyos 14a)

Relationship with Acher



- ❧ Chazal were not afraid to quote R' Elisha ben Avuya as in Avos 4:26 & Mo'ed Kattan 20a.
- ❧ Rebbe Yehuda Ha'Nasi was criticized by Heaven because he spoke ill of Acher. (Chagiga 15b)
- ❧ "He had been a scholar so formidable that he was the mentor of Rebbe Meir, and Rebbe Meir's influence is felt throughout the pages of the Mishnah and the Talmud. In Jewish life, a child can save a parent, and a student can save a teacher from the oblivion of being forgotten."

Rabbi Berel Wein

Teachings of Rebbe Meir



- ❧ Wealth is only good if it brings serenity of spirit to its owner. (Shabbos 25b)
- ❧ One shouldn't allow his daughter to marry someone ignorant of Torah and boorish in behavior. (Pesachim 49b)
- ❧ One must train one's son in a profession and teach him to pray to God for his sustenance and success. (Kiddushin 82a)
- ❧ If slander succeeds and survives, it must contain an element of truth within it. (Sotah 35a)

Teachings of Rebbe Meir



- ❧ Look not at the container, but rather at its contents. (Avos 4:25)
- ❧ One enters the world with clenched fists, ready to grab everything, and departs the world with open hands, having taken nothing with him. (Koheles Rabbah 5:21)
- ❧ Happy is one who was raised in Torah and toiled in its study and support and brought satisfaction to one's Creator, and grew to have a good name, and left this world having a good name. (Berachos 17a)
- ❧ Great is the power of repentance for it not only saves the person himself, but it can be instrumental in saving the whole world.

Advocacy



- ❧ Rebbe Meir advocated for and complimented converts (Yalkut Shimoni Shir Ha'Shirim 985)
- ❧ He criticized those who unnecessarily delayed their conversion to Judaism (Yevamos 48b)
- ❧ He debated Roman authorities and explained Judaism to them. (Kohelles Rabbah 1:28)

Contribution



“It is obvious that without Rebbe Meir and his great erudition and perseverance, the Mishnah that Rebbe Yehudah Ha’Nasi produced would not have been possible. Rebbe Yehudah Ha’Nasi built muscle and skin onto the skeleton of the Mishnah previously formulated by Rebbe Meir.”

Rabbi Berel Wein

Formula for World to Come



- ❧ “Anyone who dwells in the Land of Israel, proclaims the Shma morning and evening, and speaks Hebrew, is destined to be in the World to Come.” (Sifrei, Haazinu 32:43)
- ❧ Rebbe Meir died at an old age on the 14th of Iyar, Pesach Sheni.
- ❧ He requested that he be buried in Israel by the seashore so that the water that washes the shores should also lap his grave. (Yerushalmi, Kelaim 9:4)
- ❧ Our tradition is that he is buried in Teverya.



Rebbe Meir - People of the Book III

For Further Study



- ❧ Rabbi Berel Wein – The Oral Law of Sinai
- ❧ Rabbi Mordechai Judovits – Sages of the Talmud

