

QUOTED IN THE BOOK OF LEGENDS,  
BIALIK + RAVNITZKY  
(R. = RABBI)

205. It happened that while R. Meir was expounding in the house of study on a Sabbath afternoon, his two sons died. What did their mother do? She put them both on a couch and spread a sheet over them.

At the end of the Sabbath, R. Meir returned home from the house of study and asked, "Where are my two sons?" She replied, "They went to the house of study." R. Meir: "I looked for them there but did not see them."

Then she gave him the cup for *Havdalah*,<sup>8</sup> and he pronounced the blessing. Again he asked, "Where are my two sons?" She replied, "They went to such-and-such a place and will be back soon." Then she brought food for him. After he had eaten, she said, "My teacher, I have a question." R. Meir: "Ask your question." She: "My teacher, a while ago a man came and deposited something in my keeping. Now he has come back to claim what he left. Shall I return it to him or not?" R. Meir: "My daughter, is not one who holds a deposit required to return it to its owner?" She: "Still, without your opinion, I would not have returned it."

Then what did she do? She took R. Meir by his hand, led him up to the chamber, and brought him near the couch. Then she pulled off the sheet that covered them, and he saw that both children lying on the couch were dead. He began to weep and say, "My sons, my sons, my teachers, my teachers. My sons in the way of the world, but my teachers because they illumined my eyes with their understanding of Torah."

Then she came out with: "My teacher, did you not say to me that we are required to restore to the owner what is left with us in trust? 'The Lord gave, the Lord took. May the Name of the Lord be blessed' " (Job 1:21).<sup>9</sup>

- MIDRASH ON PROVERBS

221. On one occasion, while R. Judah, R. Yose, and R. Simeon were sitting together, Judah the son of proselytes happened to sit with them. R. Judah began the discussion by observing, "How noble are the works of this [Roman] nation! They laid out streets, they built bridges, they erected baths." R. Yose remained silent, but R. Simeon ben Yohai spoke up and said, "All that they made, they made to serve themselves: they laid out streets to settle harlots in them; baths, to pamper themselves; bridges, to levy tolls. Now, Judah the son of proselytes went off and kept retelling the sages' words, until they were heard by the [Roman] government, which decreed: Judah, who acclaimed, shall be acclaimed [as spokesman for the Jews]; Yose, who remained silent, shall be exiled to Sepphoris; Simeon, who vilified, shall be put to death.

As a result, R. Simeon and his son hid out in the house of study, where every day R. Simeon's wife would bring them bread and a jug of water, with which they sustained themselves. But when insistence on carrying out the decree became intense, R. Simeon said to his son, "Women's resolution is frail—your mother, put to the torture, may reveal the place where we are hiding."

So they went and hid in a cave. A miracle occurred—a carob tree and a well were created for them. They would remove their garments and sit up to their necks in sand, and study the entire day. When it was time for prayer, they put on their garments, wrapped themselves in their prayer shawls, and prayed. Afterward, they again removed their garments, so that they would not wear out.

They dwelled twelve years in the cave. Then the prophet Elijah came and, standing at the entrance to the cave, announced, "Who will inform the son of Yohai that Caesar is dead and his decree annulled?" So they went out, and, seeing people plowing and sowing, R. Simeon exclaimed, "These men forsake life eternal and engage in life temporal!" Whatever they cast their eyes upon was immediately incinerated. At that, a divine voice went forth and said, "Have you come out to destroy My world? Return to your cave!"

So they returned and remained there twelve months

longer. Finally they said, "Even the punishment of the wicked in Gehenna is no more than twelve months." A divine voice then came forth and said, "Leave your cave!" They went out and sat down at the entrance to the cave, where they saw a trapper attempting to catch birds by spreading his net. When R. Simeon heard a divine voice say, "Mercy, mercy," the bird escaped; and when he heard the voice say, "Death," the bird was trapped and stayed caught. At this, R. Simeon declared, "Without the will of Heaven, even a bird may not be trapped, all the less so a human being," and they left the cave for good. Wherever R. Eleazar bruised anyone's feelings, R. Simeon would heal them, saying, "My son, it is enough for the world if only you and I [occupy ourselves with Torah]."

— FROM TALMUD