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Prospectus Draft

**Major Questions:**

1. How do the stories the sages tell about themselves portray rabbinic institutions? What influence might telling such stories have had on those institutions?
2. How do the stories the sages tell about themselves fit into rabbinic literature? What influence might the integration of such stories into rabbinic literature have had on their institutions?

**Synopsis:**

The works of Rabbinic literature are products of the collaboration between many different stakeholders over generations working together to compose, edit and transmit texts about rabbinic traditions.[[1]](#footnote-2) Getting people to commit to these efforts and participate in these long-term projects would have required coordination and persuasion. If we could study the rabbinic institutions that produced these texts using the methods that researchers apply to contemporary organizations or to well-documented institutions of the past, we could familiarize ourselves with the common types of rhetoric they used to accomplish goals like negotiate decisions, persuade members of policies and build a common identity. We would then be able to compare this “organizational rhetoric,” such as the stories and tropes that get “retold” within rabbinic institutions, to the literature these institutions created. As a result, we would have greater understanding of how rabbinic literature was used, how its social context gave it meaning, and how it helped facilitate individual participation in institutionalized activities over a lifetime. Unfortunately, while rabbinic literature is rich in rhetoric and storytelling that depicts rabbis gathering to transmit texts, we have limited evidence from the historical contexts in which these volumes were conceived and produced.[[2]](#footnote-3) Scholars of rabbinic literature perform rigorous textual analysis and often adopt methods from contemporary literary and cultural studies to supplement this missing historical background,[[3]](#footnote-4) attempting to reconstruct texts, their contexts and the types of discourses that made sense of them. My thesis builds on these approaches by exploring strategies rabbinic institutions used for communicating with their members, the rhetoric that would have played a pivotal role in shaping rabbinic institutional life, from within the pages of their textual legacy. I argue that organizational rhetoric extends from the stories the rabbis tell about themselves, which portray a shared rabbinic past, to more subtle types of communication that can be found in the margins of the text, such as in the analogies between rabbinic stories and topics from their surrounding literary passages.

To illustrate this point, I explore a series of narratives depicting the absence of a sage from a rabbinic gathering. I will trace these “absence stories” across Tannaitic sources and into the Babylonian Talmud. These stories, like most rabbinic narratives, are relatively terse, but nevertheless depict the challenges facing the collaborative efforts to transmit rabbinic traditions with drama and humor. These stories also often employ idioms and figurative language to represent and characterize rabbinic institutions, such as comparing Torah traditions to “water” or referring to a “heavenly *yeshiva*.” I use Charlotte Linde’s theory of “institutional memory” to identify these stories as “retold tales” and how they act as paradigms for participation over the course of a lifetime of involvement, and use theories drawn from the field of organizational rhetoric to deepen the analysis and expand it to non-narrative representations.

Moreover, rabbinic absence stories are embedded within complex, layered texts, where the relevance of one passage to the next can be unclear. Nevertheless, contemporary scholarship reveals that literary analysis of stories seemingly unrelated to the central themes of a pericope can unveil intriguing parallels. I argue that this is a feature of rabbinic rhetoric which encourages its audience to seek analogies and discrepancies between the cases and rulings it depicts. Consequently, such stories help us identify the institution as a topic of interest within the literary text.[[4]](#footnote-5) Moreover, they imply that the process of arranging the text at different editorial stages reflects an awareness of the organizational rhetoric contained within these stories, expanding its significance to the surrounding themes, whether or not these are also in story form or otherwise represent rabbinic institutional life. I contend that analogies between the themes of a pericope and the institution as a topic likely played a role in the development of rabbinic institutions. These analogies suggest a type of rhetoric situated around the periphery of the text that relies on metaphor, providing hints throughout its primary discussion of normative rabbinic tradition regarding the institutions that created these literary works. Turning specifically to the Babylonian Talmud, it may even offer clues regarding the concentration of the rabbinic movement from a network of disciple circles into centralized academies.

Ultimately, through textual analysis and the application of concepts drawn from the contemporary fields of “Institutional Memory” and “Organizational Rhetoric,” I hope to shed light on the interplay between the textual poetics in rabbinic literature and the rhetorical strategies that facilitated the development of rabbinic institutions and the participation of its members.

**The “Internal” Study of Rabbinic Literature: Atomization and Integration**

Recent literary approaches have transformed the way contemporary scholars study rabbinic texts and how they discuss the history of their production. These approaches heavily inform my analysis of rabbinic absence stories. Using this lens, scholars first establish the literary character of Rabbinic works, looking to the "internal" aspects of the text and identifying textual practices before drawing any conclusions about an “external” historical context.[[5]](#footnote-6) This generally includes a mix of poetic analysis and source criticism, including identifying consistencies and inconsistencies in form and content and using the gaps between them as a basis for analysis. Moreover, scholars generally accept the understanding that rabbinic literature is composed of earlier texts of varying lengths that were taken apart for source materials and reintegrated into new compositions.[[6]](#footnote-7) This process often imparted alternative meanings and variations in wording to the transferred texts.[[7]](#footnote-8) However, it also leads to conflicting methodological considerations about the relationship between texts at the “macro-“and “micro-“ levels of composition, and when to read texts “synchronically” or “diachronically.”[[8]](#footnote-9)

Source critical methods enable the identification of literary strata within rabbinic texts, allowing readers to distinguish between different source types and establish relative chronologies when possible.[[9]](#footnote-10) Such approaches suggest that rabbinic literary works developed over time and cannot be attributed to a single author or unitary voice.[[10]](#footnote-11) This perspective at times also encourage the “atomization” of texts into smaller units, analyzing them at the “micro-level,” and emphasizes the need to demonstrate the relevance of texts to each other, even within the same work.[[11]](#footnote-12)

On the other hand, by focusing on the gaps in the text, scholars began to focus on the creative role of anonymous author-editors, leading to more integrated readings of texts within larger literary frameworks at an increasingly “macro-level” of composition and arrangement. At the most basic levels, the Mishnah and Tosefta develop out of a casuistic literary tradition,[[12]](#footnote-13) where legal scenarios are presented in a series of related cases and rules that elicit complex thinking about legal categories.[[13]](#footnote-14) Scholars also note that many rabbinic statements and cases are cast in a tetralemma structure,[[14]](#footnote-15) or in formats similar to those found in rhetorical schools of antiquity, like progymnasata.[[15]](#footnote-16) They have identified dramatic flow and coherence to argumentation and have also identified larger poetic structures in various kinds of texts,[[16]](#footnote-17) and have found over-arching editorial agendas in tractates.[[17]](#footnote-18) As a result, the field of rabbinics plays a delicate balancing act between analysis of “separate sources” each with a different provenance, and the “final form” of the text, reflecting the voices of anonymous author-editors at different levels of composition.[[18]](#footnote-19)

**Blurring the Genres of *Halakhah* and *Aggadah***

One factor in this process that is particularly relevant to our study of absence stories is the blurring traditional genre categories of “*halakha”* and “*aggada.”*[[19]](#footnote-20) Scholars argue that legal rhetoric includes storytelling,[[20]](#footnote-21) and demonstrate that apparently unrelated stories within various texts engage meaningfully with the legal texts they accompany. Moreover, narratives that clearly function as part of the legal discussion, such as case stories and transmission stories, often connect to surrounding texts in ways that exceed that function. [[21]](#footnote-22)Moreover, the term "dialectic," once reserved for talmudic legal debates, now describes the dynamic interplay of Talmudic stories as well.[[22]](#footnote-23) These findings fill in some of the gaps of the arrangement of rabbinic works and inform my understanding of the how absence narratives relate to their textual context.

**The Editing of the Babylonian Talmud**

Special mention also needs to be made for the editing practices of the Babylonian Talmud, often termed the "*stam*,"[[23]](#footnote-24) which are particularly evident within its pages as compared to other volumes of rabbinic literature.[[24]](#footnote-25) The *stam* introduces a distinctive form of argumentation, primarily found in the text's extended Aramaic dialectics, and contributes numerous glosses to earlier materials which come from different source. But there is ongoing debate regarding the nature and function of the *stam* and its relationship to the contributions compared to those of the *amoraim*. Nevertheless, when attempting to draw “external” historical conclusions from the Babylonian Talmud, contemporary readers often attribute the differences between amoraic source materials and the *stam* to distinct rabbinic institutional cultures.[[25]](#footnote-26)

**Methods for “internal” textual analysis**

Establishing the relationship between rabbinic absence narratives and their textual surroundings is a complex task, requiring both analyzing the stories themselves and asking how they fit into the “flow” of each distinct rabbinic work before us. However, part of the artistic appeal of non-linear rabbinic works is the demanding exercise in seeking out the relevance between each text and its broader literary context.[[26]](#footnote-27) I contend that this is an intended feature of much of rabbinic literature, and that the question of relevance would have provided intrigue for rabbinic audiences.[[27]](#footnote-28)

I further contend that one major reason for this style of composition is its use of casuistic literary practices. Mishnaic style texts usually present each series of cases using generic casuistic or apodictic formulae. However, they also often include more narrative styles of formulation and case stories about specific events.[[28]](#footnote-29) Therefore, the arrangement of cases is more important in this analysis than the particular formula. This style of legal composition invites readers to identify similarities and variations between each scenario, which might have been a useful practice for judges and aspiring judges who must compare and contrast the claims of their petitioners with the cases from tradition. This fundamentally analogical thought process is common in several kinds of texts in rabbinic literature.[[29]](#footnote-30) However, not every case in a series is related, requiring the audience to decide whether they are comparable and the extent of the comparison, or whether there has been a transition to a different topic of law, or even the interpolation of different text. Some cases may appear substantially different but still be subject to more abstract comparisons.[[30]](#footnote-31) When the text mixes in scenarios and rulings about rabbis’ interactions in the process of transmitting traditions, including our absence stories, then we must at least consider the possibility that the text encodes an analogy between the rabbinic institution and the case or class of cases under discussion.

**“External” Analysis: Critical Theory, Discourse and Rhetoric**

Another application of literary approaches is rooted in literary theories that blur the boundaries between the study of written texts and other cultural artifacts, as well as challenging conventional notions of authorship.[[31]](#footnote-32) This approach recognizes that a text's authority and meaning emerge from a historical context, shaping and being shaped by the discourses familiar to authors and their audiences. However, the scarcity of historical data surrounding rabbinic texts and the context of their transmission limits our ability to reconstruct the practices that produced these texts and the discourses that imbued them with meaning during these early periods of composition and dissemination. Nevertheless, scholars draw upon theories from literature, anthropology, and sociology to move beyond simplistic views of authorship and historical documentation, no longer limiting textual discourse to *halakha* and *Talmud* *torah* as classically understood. They expand the concept of literary practices to include oral and rhetorical performance, and engage in cultural criticism, exploring rabbinic perspectives on topics such as sexuality, gender, animal life, and subjectivity.[[32]](#footnote-33) These scholars aim to reconstruct the cultural tensions and practices “external” to the text, offering insights into how its rhetoric reflects on and addresses these tensions. [[33]](#footnote-34) Practically speaking, this often means identifying voices using the “internal” methods outlined above before attributing meaning to them on the basis of their analytical lens. This, in turn, serves as a basis for considering their historical context, for speaking about “thinking” and “experience” abstracted from specific events and personalities. In other words, they rely heavily on theory to scaffold their construction of historical narratives about rabbinic texts upon the basis of those same texts.

**Institutional Context and Redaction**

A particularly relevant example of evolving perspectives on the history of these texts that stems from literary approaches is the notion that the rabbinic movement operated through a network[[34]](#footnote-35) of disciple circles and small “schools” for much of its existence, as opposed to more centralized and “institutional” academies most clearly documented during the geonic period.[[35]](#footnote-36) The main distinction between the two is boiled down to whether the sages gather around the charismatic individual master or around a group identity that outlives the master. Some scholars even avoid attributing the term “institution” to these earlier forms of social organization.[[36]](#footnote-37) However, the promulgation of standardized literary texts, the editing practices of the *stam* in the Bavli, the development of academies, and the shift away from disciple circles are interconnected issues, often described as processes of "institutionalization."[[37]](#footnote-38) But the historical relationship between these institutionalizing processes in Babylonia remains unclear due to lack of data. Scholars generally accept that disciple circles eventually gave way to academies in both Palestine and Babylonia at least by the geonic period if not sooner, but they differ over the extent of evidence for centralized academies within Talmudic sources and the nature of the process.[[38]](#footnote-39) There are continued debates whether and to what extent the components of the Babylonian Talmud, including its "internal" literary layers, as well as the "external" literary practices and cultural tensions alluded to in the text, predate the establishment of centralized academies and the shift away from disciple circles, coincide with them, or emerge later. Were there intermediate institutions, like “assemblies”? How did the developing body of literature and literary practices influence the process of centralization? While a large portion of scholars take a side, many take an agnostic approach that avoids attributing parts of the Bavli to either setting. In most cases, this means focusing on elements of the text that do not hinge on a specific understanding of the Bavli’s institutional context.

In my thesis, I will adopt an agnostic approach as well, but in my conclusion, I will rely on theory to “scaffold” the issue in the Bavli and ask how some of the texts of the Bavli might have traversed the shift from disciple circles to academies and even influenced the process of centralization rather than reflecting on milieu or the other.

**Institutional Rhetoric in Rabbinic Literature**

In order to “scaffold” my reading of absence stories in their textual and institutional contexts, and make sense of it as a rhetorical strategy, I turn to contemporary theories of “Institutional Memory” and “organizational rhetoric.”

1. **Institutional Memory and Retold Tales:**

I use Charlotte’s Linde’s theoretical framework of “institutional memory” because it helps establish a model for framing the temporal relationships between the institution, its stories, and its members. According to Linde, stories ascribe a type of selfhood to the institution, constructing it as an entity with a past. She argues that an institution endures when its stories are retold by new members who adopt these narratives as their own.[[39]](#footnote-40) These stories enable individuals to position themselves within a larger collective identity, a "we,” i.e., which in turn helps the stories remain an active part of institutional memory. Linde distinguishes between two temporal frameworks:

**The institutional past**: This framework encompasses stories surrounding major figures, founders, important events, and pivotal moments in an institution's history. These stories resurface at both regularly scheduled and special events, and in multiple media, including but not limited to oral and written forms. They are strategically deployed to negotiate present and future decisions by establishing precedents from the past and reinforcing values. Crucially, these stories adapt to different contexts and evolve according to the teller and the audience.

**A Career**: This framework happens on the arc of an individual’s participation in an institution. Institutions generally convey this in bits and pieces through multiple stories. For example, when senior members comment on situations in which their juniors find themselves, they often share relevant anecdotes they either experienced or heard from others. Linde labels these stories as "exemplary narratives of every man," collectively forming what she calls "paradigmatic narratives." A paradigmatic narrative depicts a standard, successful career trajectory. They describe common scenarios that members in various roles at different stages of their involvement might encounter, how individuals have historically navigated them, and what outcomes they should anticipate. They help senior members rationalize behaviors, justify policies, and manage expectations for their juniors, which can have significant impact on morale.[[40]](#footnote-41) As junior members gain experience and status, they may adapt and retell stories from their perspective.

These concepts inform my interpretation of absence stories. Such narratives, I will claim, help the audience imagine Torah study as an institution with a history. Additionally, they help the “current and aspiring” sages in that audience establish expectations for different stages of involvement by giving them role models. Of course, the stories that remain from this period are embedded in literary works, reflecting formal artistry, normative, and officially sanctioned voices of the institution. Nevertheless, they were part of rabbinic institutional memory, likely both drawing on and influencing more informal versions.

1. **Organizational Rhetoric:**

Organizational rhetoric focuses on the way organizations[[41]](#footnote-42) use communication, strategically deploying texts to achieve “specific political or economic goals, build identity, and foster relationships with their stakeholders.”[[42]](#footnote-43) Turning to rhetoric extends our analysis to idioms and figures of speech such as metaphors used to describe the institution, its history, and its policies. Like narratives, rhetorical figures can become part of institutional memory and remain resources for sense-making and negotiation by stakeholders in the institution beyond their initial telling. Both create a shared sense of identity.[[43]](#footnote-44) For the purposes of this study, I refer to several concepts and methods from this field that help to envision the dynamic relationship between texts, institutions and their members.

1. **Organizational Tropes**

Tropes are rhetorical techniques such as metaphors that use one object to represent another[[44]](#footnote-45). Organizational tropes are used to represent aspects of institutional life.[[45]](#footnote-46) Like narratives, tropes can help convey both institutional and subjective time. For example, the idiom "climbing the corporate ladder" uses a dual metaphor. The ladder is the institution which organizes positions hierarchically above and below each other in status and success. while the act of climbing signifies the efforts for career advancement. As a strategy, tropes rely heavily on audiences filling in the blanks. Unlike attempts at clear, straightforward communication, tropes are purposefully “under-coded,” leaving out details.[[46]](#footnote-47) They challenge the audience to recognize intended similarities between the object of representation (the ladder/the career) and the object being represented (the institution/climbing), while disregarding any unintended similarities.

In addition to the more obvious organizational tropes that accompany our absence stories, like the metaphor of Torah as water or the “Heavenly Yeshiva,” I also argue that the analogies we find between our stories and the surrounding topics and cases may have served as a type of organizational tropes, using the “halakha” as a means of representing rabbinic institutional life.

1. **Metaphoric Entailment**

The fact that a trope relies on the audience to select the intended similarities to correctly understand the message does not mean everyone in the audience will comply or that the trope will be consistently used in the same way. Tropes can take on a life of their own, becoming part of memory, shaping meaning at the level of language and thinking. Lakeoff and Johnson refer to the system of meaning created by tropes as “metaphoric entailment.” It expands the implications of tropes beyond the intended similarities in their initial usage, recognizing the influence of the latent meanings in tropes. Within an institutional context, these meanings contribute to the discourse participants use to guide their decisions, and influence how actors organize themselves and shape communal identity, sometimes with negative effects.[[47]](#footnote-48) Therefore, if I am correct that absence stories highlight analogies between rabbinic institutions and the other topics in the text, we can consider what the comparison might entail beyond their literary usage.

1. **Strategic Ambiguity**

Of course, people are generally aware that texts can have multiple interpretations, and often choose their words carefully with diverse audiences in mind. Strategic ambiguity describes the deliberate employment of ambiguity in communication within the institution.[[48]](#footnote-49) It offers short-term flexibility, allowing different stakeholders to find meanings that resonate with their needs, thereby accommodating multiple perspectives.[[49]](#footnote-50) Furthermore, ambiguity requires the audience to fill in the blanks making any narrative, trope or other form of communication more engaging. Additionally, I would argue that, in the long term, ambiguity can ensure a text survives, as adaptability to different meanings allows it to endure and continue to provide sense-making resources for evolving circumstances.

I discuss ambiguity in absence stories in rabbinic texts in three situations: 1) when the story uses ambiguous rhetoric, 2) when surrounding passages employ ambiguous rhetoric, and 3) in the ambiguous relationship between the story and its immediate context. Each of these requires audiences to supply missing details and are potential sites for strategic ambiguity within rabbinic institutions.

1. **The Organizational Voice**

The concept of the “organizational voice” plays on the trope at the heart of the idea of organizational rhetoric. It personalizes the institution as a “rhetor” whose “voice” represents the collective voices of its members.[[50]](#footnote-51) I compare and contrast the uses of this scholarly conceit to a parallel conceit, the authorial “voice,” to rabbinic self-construction as a rhetorical act.

**Rabbinic Absence: A Survey of a Motif**

Turning from theory and method to rabbinic absence stories themselves, we begin by establishing the parameters of the motif. Fortunately, absence stories possess a rich literary history, appearing in various tannaitic works, both Talmuds.[[51]](#footnote-52) Depending on the parameters of the category, we identify at least thirty-four distinct absence stories throughout rabbinic literature, some with parallels in other sources, bringing the total number of texts to no less than forty-two.[[52]](#footnote-53) A comparative analysis of these texts reveals several thematic and linguistic correlations, suggesting a formal relationship between many of them. These stories often fall into one of two broad categories, which we shall refer to as "report" stories and "truancy" stories. There is also a smaller collection of narratives that take place at the entrance to the study house, and some that do not neatly fit into any of these established categories. Remarkably, as far as our knowledge extends, there has been little prior investigation into this theme, and none that connect the Babylonian texts to their tannaitic predecessors.[[53]](#footnote-54)

1. **Report Stories:**

For the category of report stories, we identify nine distinct narratives in eighteen total sources.[[54]](#footnote-55) These stories typically involve a senior Palestinian sage inquiring of a junior Palestinian sage or student about the teachings that transpired in the Beit Midrash. In Tannaitic report stories, the older sage asks what *“hiddush*”, or “innovative teaching” was given in the study house in their absence. The Palestinian Talmud features versions of these stories with amoraic sages, utilizing similar phrasing in Aramaic. In contrast, the Babylonian Talmud omits the term "*hiddush*" ("innovative teaching"). These stories serve as "transmission stories,"[[55]](#footnote-56) primarily focusing on the circumstances surrounding the transmission of a tradition rather than presenting a legal case example. They typically depict sages outside the study session, even though the narrative centers on events within the study session. Chart 1 depicts an example from Tannaitic literature, and one from each Talmud.

**Chart 1 – Examples of Report Stories**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **BT Yevamot 42b** (Vilna Edition) | **PT Gittin 5:4** (Zussman 1075) | **Mekhilta d’R. Yishmael** (Horowitz-Rabin p58)` |
| ר' אלעזר לא על לבי מדרשא אשכחיה לר' אסי **אמר ליה מאי אמור רבנן בבי מדרשא** אמר ליה הכי א"ר יוחנן | ר' יודן לא נחת לבית וועדא קם עם ר' מנא **אמר ליה מה חדתין יומא דין**.[[56]](#footnote-57) אמר ליה כן א"ר יוסי | כבר שבתו תלמידים ביבנה ולא שבת שם רבי יהושע וכשבאו תלמידיו אצלו **אמר להם מה דבר חדש היה לכם ביבנה** אמרו לו אחריך רבי אמר להם ומי שבת שם אמרו לו ר' אלעזר בן עזריה אמר להם אפשר ששבת שם ר' אלעזר בן עזריה ולא חדש לכם דבר... |
| R’ Eleazar did not go into the study house. He found R’ Asi. He said to him: What did the sages say in the study house? He said to him: thus said R’ Yohanan | R' Yudan did not go down to the study house. He stood with R’ Mana. **He said to him: What innovations were there today?** He said to him: Thus said R’ Yossi… | The students had already spent shabbat at Yavneh, but R’ Yehoshua did not spend shabbat there. And when his students came to him, **he said to them: What new word did you have in Yavneh?** They said to him: After you, Rabbi! He said to them: And who was there for shabbat? They said to him: R’ Eleazar Ben Azariah. He said to them: Is it possible that R’ Eleazar Ben Azaria was there and did not introduce something new to you?! |

1. **Truancy Stories:**

In the category of truancy stories, we encounter seven distinct narratives in eleven different locations.[[57]](#footnote-58) These stories generally involve a sage questioning a sage who was conspicuously absent from the study session. The interrogation is usually followed by an excuse which is tied to a broader normative-halakhic discussion. There are a handful of parallels to the one of the two tannaitic sources in different texts, two stories in the PT, and six in the BT, including a parallel to a tannaitic and PT source. These narratives depict a conversation that may occur during a study session, but that discussion generally revolves around events outside of the session. The truant sage is subjected to scrutiny, sometimes successfully defending their absence, and at other times, facing reproach and even excommunication.

Chart 2 contains examples from the Tosefta and both Talmuds

**Chart 2 – Examples of Truancy Stories**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **B Yoma 78a** (Vilna Edition) | **P Shevi’it 8:5** (Zussman 206) | **T Yom Tov 2:6** (Leiberman) |
| ריש גלותא איקלע להגרוניא לבי רב נתן רפרם וכולהו רבנן אתו לפירקא רבינא לא אתא למחר בעי רפרם לאפוקי לרבינא מדעתיה דריש גלותא **אמר ליה מאי טעמא לא אתא מר לפירקא** | יהודה איש חוצי עבד טמיר במערתא תלתא יומין... אתא לגבי ר' יוסי בר חלפתא **אמ' ליה הן הויתה** | מעשה בשמעון התימני שלא יצא בלילי יום טוב לבית המדרש לשחרי' מצאו ר' יהודה בן בבא **אמ' לו מפני מה לא באתה אמש לבית המדרש** |
| The exilarch traveled to Agrunia to the house Rav Natan. Rafram and all the sages went to the lecture but Ravina did not go. The next day, Rafram sought to ease the exilarch’s concerns about Ravina. [Rafram] said to [Ravina]: Why did the master not come to the lecture? | Yehudah, a man from Hutzi secluded himself in a cave for three days… He came to R’ Yossi bar Halafta. He said to him: Where have you been? | A story was told of Shimon the Yemenite who did not go out to the study house on the night of a holiday. The next morning, R’ Yehudah Ben Bava found him. He said to him: Why did you not come to the study house yesterday? |

1. **Entrance Stories:**

Several narratives in Rabbinic literature unfold at the entrance to the study house, with at least three calling attention to the absence of the sage who is just outside rather than inside.[[58]](#footnote-59) All three of these stories are found in the Bavli and consistently feature R' Zeira as an absentee sage. In two instances, R' Zeira sits at the entrance when he has "grown tired" from his studies so that he may stand in respect of the sages coming or going. These two narratives are also variants of “report” stories, as R' Zeira inquires about the teachings inside. In the third instance, he is outside conversing with another sage during the study session.

**Chart 3 – Entrance Story Example (B Hullin 86b)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Come and hear: R’Abba the son of R’ Hiyya bar Abba and R’ Zeira were standing in the market in Caesarea at the entrance to the study house. R’ Ami came out. He found them and said to them: Have I not told you to go immediately into the study house, not to stand outside… | תא שמע דרבי אבא בריה דרבי חייא בר אבא ורבי זירא הוו קיימי בשוקא דקיסרי אפתחא דבי מדרשא נפק רבי אמי אשכחינהו אמר להו לאו אמינא לכו בעידן בי מדרשא לא תקימו אבראי... |

1. **Other Representations of Absence:**

Beyond these established models, there are other absence stories that do not neatly fit into these categories. We identify nine additional stories, mostly in the BT.[[59]](#footnote-60) Seven of these stories depict sages confronting the absence through disciplinary measures or criticism. Additionally, there are instances of themes related to absence like "heroic attendance," where sages overcome obstacles to avoid absence. Although I do not count these as absence stories, they remain related to the theme and occasionally appear in the same pericope.[[60]](#footnote-61)

**Chart 4 – Examples of Absence and “Heroic Attendance”**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **B Yevamot 64b** | **B Berachot 18b** (Vilna Edition) | **B Beitzah 24b** (Vilna Edition) |
| אמר רב אחא בר יעקב שיתין סבי הוינא וכולהו איעקור מפרקיה דרב הונא לבר מאנא | …חזייה ללוי דיתיב אבראי אמר ליה אמאי יתבת אבראי מאי טעמא לא סלקת אמר ליה דאמרי לי כל כי הנך שני דלא סליקת למתיבתא דרבי אפס ואחלישתיה לדעתיה לא מעיילינן לך למתיבתא דרקיעא | אמר רב לעולם אל ימנע אדם עצמו מבית המדרש אפילו שעה אחת דאנא ולוי הוינן קמיה דרבי כי אמרה להא שמעתא. באורתא אמר מותרין באכילה, בצפרא אמר מותרין לקבל. אנא דהואי בי מדרשא הדרי בי לוי דלא הוה בי מדרשא לא הדר ביה |
| Rav Aha bar Yaakov said: sixty sages were [at the lecture of Rav Huna], and they all became infertile [because they needed to urinate] except for me. | …He saw Levi who was sitting outside [the heavenly yeshiva]. He said to him: Why are you sitting outside? Why have you not gone in? He said to him: For they told me that for each year I did not go into the session of R’ Afas and caused him to feel badly, they would not let me enter into the heavenly yeshiva. | Rav says: One should never refrain from [attending] the study house for even an hour. For both Levi and I were there before Rabbi when he said this teaching. In the evening he said it is permitted to eat. In the morning he said it is [only] permitted to receive. I, who was at the study house, changed my ruling. Levi, who was not at the study house, did not change his ruling. |

**Immediate Observations:**

**Problems with Absence –** These stories express a handful of concerns related to absence included in the list below:

1. The absent sage misses out on the teaching from the study session.
2. The study session misses out on a teaching known to the absent sage.
3. The absent sage fails to fulfill the obligation of Talmud Torah.
4. The absent sage insults or causes problems for the sage presiding over the session.
5. Quality concerns about the study session, such as when no one has the needed answer.
6. Egregious social pressures to attend.

While some stories express no specific concern with absence.

**Geographic representation** – Although not conclusive, there are a few notable geographic trends in these stories.

* There appear to be no report stories or entrance stories that focus on absence that take place in Babylonia.
* Report stories in the Bavli all include R’ Asi, either as the reporting sage to R’ Eliezer, or as the absent sage asking R’ Zeira for a report.
* Entrance stories that focus on absence in the Bavli all feature R’ Zeira.
* Absence stories that takes place in Babylonia usually depict confrontation with the absence. Responses include questioning, rebuke, excommunication, heavenly punishment, and forced attendance.
* The Babylonian Talmud, at times, portrays the Babylonians as emphatic, even comical, about attendance.
* Stories that take place in Amoraic Palestine often let the absence go without comment.[[61]](#footnote-62)

**Poetic Integration into Surrounding Texts –** Absence stories usually serve as a framework for transmitting attributed statements, often more than one in report stories, and as case examples of a legal topic in the case of Truancy stories. Some serve as transitions between topics. Additionally, some contain poetic allusions to the surrounding texts .[[62]](#footnote-63)

**Analogies to Surrounding Themes –** There are several examples of relatively obvious analogies between a law or theme from the surrounding sources.

* BT Shabbat 147a which we will explore more in depth below compares forcibly dragging a visiting sage from Palestine to a Babylonian Sage’s lecture to resetting a bone on the sabbath, as well as the power of a place of Torah to restore tradition.
* BT Kiddushin 25b depicts the truant Elders of Nezunia seemingly comparing the sage sent to excommunicate them to an emasculated slave.[[63]](#footnote-64)
* T Yadayim 2:16 Compares R’ Eliezer’s Torah to potentially impure waters. In this selection of Tosefta, both Torah and water have the power to transmit ritual impurity as well as to render things pure.

**Example – Shabbat 147a-148a: Healing the Body and Healing Tradition**

As an example of my approach, I will explore an unusual absence story on B Shabbat 148a that contains several associations to the various normative topics in the surrounding texts. These extend within and beyond the *gemara* on the immediate Mishnah (147a-148a) through much of chapter 22 of B Shabbat. The story follows a teaching of the first-generation Babylonian a*mora*, Shmuel, correcting a ruling in the Mishnah, thereby allowing one to set a broken bone on the sabbath. Because the Talmudic text is non-linear, I begin with the story and proceed to identify different series of cases, or “threads,” within the chapter and how our story fits into each. Therefore, by necessity, I will present the texts out of order.

**Chart 5 – Rabah Bar Bar Hannah Story - B Shabbat 147b-148a**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| “And one may not set a broken bone.” Rav Hannah the Baghdadi says Shmuel says, “The ruling is that one may set a broken bone.” Rabah Bar Bar Hannah went to Pumbedita. He did not go into the lecture of Rav Yehudah. Rav Yehuda sent for Ada the attendant. He said to him, “go and seize him. He went and seized him. When Rabah Bar Bar Hanna arrived, he found [Rav Yehudah] him teaching, “One may not set a broken bone [on the sabbath].” He said to him, “Rav Hannah the Baghdadi says Shmuel says, ‘The ruling is that one may set a broken bone.” [Rav Yehudah] said to him, “Hannah is one of us and Shmuel is one of us and I had never heard this. Was I not justified in seizing you?” | "ואין מחזירין את השבר" אמר רב חנא בגדתאה אמר שמואל הלכה מחזירין את השבר רבה בר בר חנה איקלע לפומבדיתא לא על לפירקיה דרב יהודה שדריה לאדא דיילא אמר ליה זיל גרביה אזיל גרביה אתא אשכחיה דקא דריש אין מחזירין את השבר אמר ליה הכי אמר רב חנא בגדתאה אמר שמואל הלכה מחזירין את השבר אמר ליה הא חנא דידן והא שמואל דידן ולא שמיע לי ולאו בדינא גרבתיך |

Raba Bar Bar Hannah (RBBH) is a 3rd generation *amora* who travels from Palestine to the amoraic center of *Pumbedita* in Babylonia. While there, he fails to show up at the *pirqa*, a public rabbinic lecture of the 2nd generation Babylonian sage, Rav Yehuda. The narrative is similar to a typical truancy story but with major twists. Rather than send an emissary to question or excommunicate RBBH, Rav Yehuda sends Ada the attendant, a man known elsewhere to be excessively large,[[64]](#footnote-65) to force him to come. Additionally, rather than interrogating RBBH, asking him to justify his absence, it is Rav Yehuda who offers justification for his use of force. He contends, after the fact, that his was the right decision, since RBBH knew of the Babylonian tradition going back to one of Rav Yehudah’s own teachers, Shmuel, that corrects the ruling in the Mishnah; a teaching that Rav Yehudah had not heard before.

The story suggests a fairly obvious set of analogies between 1) setting a bone, literally “returning” (*h.z.r.) it*, on the sabbath, 2) forcing RBBH to attend the *pirqa*,and 3) correcting the tradition in Pumbedita by bringing a lost teaching of Shmuel’s to Rav Yehudah. The timing of the lecture itself reinforces the analogy, as the *pirqa* generally takes place on the Sabbath. We will explore these analogies more carefully below. There are, however, several other associations between the story and the surrounding passages in the chapter that we will turn to as well.[[65]](#footnote-66)

**Attendance and the Traveling Sage**

Reading the story on its own, it is unclear whether a visiting sage is obligated or even expected to attend the local study session. R’ Yehudah does not question him or excommunicate him like we see in “truancy” stories,[[66]](#footnote-67) and he feels the need to justify his use of force. Nevertheless, several texts from 145a through 148a reinforce the idea that a traveling sage should participate in local rabbinic gatherings. Our absence story is the last of twelve depictions of sages visiting a different rabbinic region, whether within Babylonia or between Babylonia and Palestine.[[67]](#footnote-68) Most of these stories place the visiting sage immediately in the presence of other rabbis, as if the very purpose of the visit was to collaborate over Torah law. By contrast, RBBH’s explicit lack of attendance appears unusual.

**Containment and Geographic Region**

Moreover, these accounts are part of a larger editorial agenda in B Shabbat to introduce the topic of geographic region into the Talmudic dialectic,[[68]](#footnote-69) particularly focusing on local legal and cultural conventions. To explain the Bavli’s additions, we must first briefly summarize the major discussions in the Mishnah. Chapter 22 of Shabbat portrays a series of cases exploring activities linked to containment in sabbath law, such as storing, squeezing, absorbing, and immersing. The *mishnayot* can be divided into three major sections according to three areas of basic human needs: **1-3** deal with food and drink, **4-5** addresslaundry, and **5-6** discuss bodily care.[[69]](#footnote-70) The first category includes cases such as food and drink stored in barrels, squeezed out of fruit, or immersed in hot water. It even includes a container of water immersed in other water. The middle section involves clothing that become soaked in water, squeezed, and dried in the sun. Finally, the latter set of cases include things like bathing,[[70]](#footnote-71) exercising, or healing, where the body can be the contents immersed in water or swaddled, or the container of vomit, and bones. Certain actions, like squeezing, soaking, or taking an emetic, are prohibited, although less severe variations or specific circumstances, like walking in wet clothing and wetting a towel while drying oneself are permitted. The Mishnah makes references to geographic regions, but most of these appear incidental and do not clearly influence its thinking.[[71]](#footnote-72) The one exception is the outer courtyard of the town. Although not a specific geographic region, it introduces the role of location and its people in determining the law, which we will return to shortly.

The situation is very different in the Bavli. Along with the twelve descriptions of travel between regions we already discussed, the Talmud explicitly addresses regional convention through much of our chapter. On 144b, the *stam* introduces geographic differences into its discussion about juice, suggesting that an opinion in a *beraita* represents a regional convention. 145b-146b is almost entirely about the differences between Babylonia and Palestine, focusing on differences in regional food tastes and containing an extended *Aggadah* depicting Palestinian *amoraim* talking about the character of Babylonians. 146b-147a discusses differences between regions in their sensibilities around the cleanliness of cloaks, and labels an act of folding of one’s garment as a “Babylonian pocket.”[[72]](#footnote-73) Finally, the discussion of exercising and health expands to include places like the *Diyomset,* a location associated with healing on 147b and specifically contrasted with a “place of Torah.”

**Distorting and Protecting Torah: The Role of Onlookers and the Integrity of Tradition**

Our absence story is part of a thread of texts that examine the relationship of the place, the individual and the group to proper Torah observance and study. How might one’s observance affect a group of onlookers, and how might the presence of onlookers impact one’s observance. The Bavli takes its cue from the Mishnah’s cases about laundry, and further expands the discussion to cases of exercise and healing. The Mishnah reads as follows:

**Chart 6 – Onlookers in the Mishnah – M Shabbat 22:4-5**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 22:4-5 … One whose clothing has become soaked in water on the road may walk in them without fear [of squeezing out water]. When he arrives to the outer courtyard, he may spread them in the sun, but not in the presence of the nation. One who bathes in cave water or the hot springs of Tiberius and dries himself, even if he uses ten towels, he may not carry them by hand. But ten people may dry their faces, arms and legs with one towel and bring it home by hand. | מִי שֶׁנָּשְׁרוּ כֵלָיו בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּמַיִם, מְהַלֵּךְ בָּהֶן וְאֵינוֹ חוֹשֵׁשׁ. הִגִּיעַ לֶחָצֵר הַחִיצוֹנָה, שׁוֹטְחָן בַּחַמָּה, אֲבָל לֹא כְנֶגֶד הָעָם:הָרוֹחֵץ בְּמֵי מְעָרָה וּבְמֵי טְבֶרְיָא וְנִסְתַּפֵּג, אֲפִלּוּ בְעֶשֶׂר אֲלוּנְטִיאוֹת, לֹא יְבִיאֵם בְּיָדוֹ. אֲבָל עֲשָׂרָה בְנֵי אָדָם מִסְתַּפְּגִין בַּאֲלוּנְטִית אַחַת פְּנֵיהֶם יְדֵיהֶם וְרַגְלֵיהֶם, וּמְבִיאִין אוֹתָהּ בְּיָדָן: ` |

The first is a case where one’s clothing accidentally becomes soaked. The ruling in the Mishnah is that one may walk home wearing them, even though walking will also *ipso facto* squeeze water out. Upon reaching the ‘outer courtyard,’ one must remove the wet clothing. However, one may spread them out to dry in the sun, so long as the drying does not happen in public view. The *Bavli* on 147a associates the case with the concept of *marit ayin*, which describes an action that might be technically permitted, but whose legality can be misinterpreted by onlookers.

The second case involves drying oneself off with a towel after bathing in a spring. The ruling is that one may only walk home holding the towel in their hand so long as they are in a group, but not when alone.[[73]](#footnote-74) The *stam* explains on 147b “Because he is alone, he will come to squeeze the towel… when they are many, they will remind each other [not to].” The concern for the individual distorting Torah for onlookers in the case of drying clothes in the sun is juxtaposed here with the fact that onlookers can potentially help protect observance and reinforce normative behavior in the case of carrying a wet bath towel.

**Rabbinic Travel Stories and Onlookers**

Two rabbinic travel stories fall between these *mishnayot* on 147a. They deal with different issues related to clothing on Shabbat and expand the topic of the role of onlookers, both individuals and groups, on torah observance.

**Chart 7 – “Shake the right in his face!” – B Shabbat 147a**

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| --- | --- |
| Ulla went to Pumbedita and saw the sages were shaking out their cloaks. He said, “The sages are violating the sabbath!” Rav Yehudah said to [the sages], “Shake them right in his face! We are not at all concerned about it!” | עולא איקלע לפומבדיתא חזא רבנן דקא מנפצי גלימייהו אמר קמחללין רבנן שבתא אמר להו רב יהודה נפוצי ליה באפיה אנן לא קפדינן מידי |

This account follows the ruling in the *stam* that “shaking out” one’s cloak is only a problem on the sabbath if it meets several criteria, including whether one is generally interested in keeping their cloak clean. [[74]](#footnote-75) In that case, shaking it out is determined to be a biblically forbidden act as part of the laundry process. But it is not forbidden for people who do not care to keep their cloaks clean. In this story, Ulla is visiting Pumbedita from Palestine. He sees the gathered sages shaking out their cloaks and immediately rebukes them for violating the sabbath. Rav Yehuda tells everyone to shake their cloaks “in his face” because “we are not at all concerned about it [being clean].” This cultural characteristic effectively removes the legal issue with shaking cloaks on the sabbath in general for the people of Pumbedita, if not all of Babylonia.

This story presents the inverse of the case in the Mishnah. Normally, drying clothes in the sun is prohibited. Even when the individual has a specific exemption to the accepted law, if he acts publicly, onlookers might become confused. Ulla, however, has travelled to a place where conventions about clothing are different. Therefore, his own knowledge of local law was mistaken and his rebuke a public distortion. Ulla’s trespass is met with a call to the group to perform the act of shaking specifically so that he, the onlooker, would see it. Rav Yehudah incites the group to aggressively defend the integrity of their own practice from the criticism of the outsider. It also corrects Ulla’s misunderstanding of tradition, informing him about the legal caveat of “concern.”

The second narrative portrays three different sages traveling from Palestine, each telling a variation on a story about a sage correcting Rabbi’s observance.

**Chart 8 – Correcting Rabbi’s Observance and Tradition – B Shabbat 147a**

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| --- | --- |
| When Rav Dimi came [from Palestine], he said, “One time, Rabbi went out to the field [on the Sabbath] with both sides of his *tallit* resting on his shoulder. Yehoshua ben Zeiruz, the son of R’ Meir’s father-in-law, said before him, “Did not R’ Meir make one liable for a sin offering for this?” [Rabbi] said to him, “R’ Meir was careful about it to such an extent?!” Rabbi let his *tallit* down.  When Rabin came [from Palestine] he said, “It was not Yehoshua ben Zeiruz. Rather, it was Yehoshua ben Kfosai, the father in law of R’ Akiva. [Rabbi] said, “R’ Akiva was careful about it to such an extent?!” Rabbi let his *tallit* down.  When Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yehuda came, he said “it was said [in response] to being asked.” | כי אתא רב דימי אמר פעם אחת יצא רבי לשדה והיו שני צידי טליתו מונחין על כתיפו אמר לפניו יהושע בן זירוז בן חמיו של רבי מאיר בזו לא חייב רבי מאיר חטאת אמר ליה דקדק רבי מאיר עד כאן שלשל רבי טליתו כי אתא רבין אמר לא יהושע בן זירוז הוה אלא יהושע בן כפוסאי היה חתנו של רבי עקיבא אמר בזו לא חייב רבי עקיבא חטאת אמר לו דקדק רבי עקיבא עד כאן שלשל רבי טליתו כי אתא רב שמואל בר רב יהודה אמר נשאל איתמר |

The story follows a description of two ways of wearing one’s garment, including: 1) the “Babylonian pocket”, which the Bavli interprets as a way of wearing a garment to carry its folds,[[75]](#footnote-76) and is prohibited on the sabbath, and 2) wearing folds in one’s clothing for aesthetic purposes. The first two versions of the story are about older sages related to two famous masters, R’ Meir and the even more revered R’ Akiva respectively, who question Rabbi for wearing his *tallit* in a way that violates the traditions they received. Unlike Ulla in the previous story, they are a more circumspect in how they raise the question, rather than just claiming that Rabbi is violating tradition. Rabbi accepts their corrections and changes his observance. The third variation changes a vital detail in the story. Rabbi is not wearing his *tallit* in the prohibited manner, rather someone raised it as a question in the context of study. This changes the role of the elder sage in the story from correcting Rabbi’s Torah observance to correcting his teachings about Torah traditions.

**A Place of the Body vs. A Place of Torah**

The ability of rabbinic fellowship to protect and heal Torah traditions becomes directly associated with region in the story about the Tannah Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach on 147b.

**Chart 9 – B Shabbat 147b**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| R’ Halbo says: Wine from Phrygia and the waters of the *Diyomset* forced the ten tribes from Israel. R’ Eleazar ben Arach went there. It followed after him and his learning became uprooted. When he returned he came and stood to read from the Torah scroll. He meant to read “This month, for you”. He said, “their hearts were made deaf.” The sages prayed for mercy for him and his learning returned. For this reason they taught: R’ Nehorai says, “Exile yourself to a place of Torah and do not say it will follow after you, for it is your fellows that keep your knowledge in your possession, so do not rely on your own understanding. It was taught: His name was not R’ Nehorai but rather his name was R’ Nehemia, and there are those who say his name was R’ Eleazar ben ‘Arach. And why did they call him R’ Nehorai? Because he enlightened the eyes of the sages with law. | אמר רבי חלבו חמרא דפרוגייתא ומיא דדיומסת קיפחו עשרת השבטים מישראל רבי אלעזר בן ערך איקלע להתם אימשיך בתרייהו איעקר תלמודיה כי הדר אתא קם למיקרי בספרא בעא למיקרא החדש הזה לכם אמר החרש היה לבם בעו רבנן רחמי עליה והדר תלמודיה והיינו דתנן רבי נהוראי אומר הוי גולה למקום תורה ואל תאמר שהיא תבא אחריך שחבריך יקיימוה בידך, ואל בינתך אל תשען תנא לא רבי נהוראי שמו אלא רבי נחמיה שמו ואמרי לה רבי אלעזר בן ערך שמו ולמה נקרא שמו רבי נהוראי שמנהיר עיני חכמים בהלכה |

This story appears in relation to the prohibition of exercising on the sabbath.[[76]](#footnote-77) The Bavli sites a tradition from Palestine that one may not “stand in the grounds of *Diyomset* because it exercises and heals [the body].” The story follows a statement that blames the expulsion of the northern ten tribes from the land of Israel on to the “wine from Phrygia and the waters of *Diyomset.*” While the exact meaning of *Diyomset* can been debated, this statement speaks of it as a location comparable to Phrygia, and implies that the geographic proximity of the tribes in the north led to their downfall. *Diyomset* is apparently a place known for bodily health, but not for its rabbis.

The story portrays the sage Rabbi Eleazar ben ‘Arach travelling “there”, which causes him to forget his Torah when the place “follows after him.” When he returns home and reads scripture in the presence of the sages, he mispronounces the words of Exodus 12:2,[[77]](#footnote-78) which allows the sages to recognize what happened to him and pray for him. As a result, his Torah “returns”. The lesson is that fellowship sustains one’s Torah learning, not ability, and therefore one must “exile oneself to a place of Torah” which does not “follow” the sage when leaves.[[78]](#footnote-79) Here, the location is imagined as healing R’ Eleazar ben Arach intellectually and spiritually, returning his forgotten Torah.[[79]](#footnote-80)

This story, which appears on the same Mishnah as our absence story, clearly shares many similarities with it. Both describe the healing of Torah, one of the individual by the community and the other of the community by the individual.[[80]](#footnote-81) In both, the healing happens because the sage travels to a “place of Torah” where there are local rabbis who intervene to “return” traditions, although notably the story about the Tannah in Palestine involves prayer while the absence story in Babylonia involves force.

Our absence story is in fact quite unusual in that it is the only one we have found that involves the use of force to make a truant sage attend. The questionable nature of this decision is one reason why it is such a good analogy to the act of setting a bone on the sabbath, which is similarly questionable as it contradicts the Mishna. But I argue that it also suggests a satirical approach that highlights the downside of communal reinforcement, which the text implies is a regional difference between Babylonia and Palestine. The use of satire helps express frustration at overbearing expectations of Babylonian rabbinic institutions and a perception of its callousness towards the individual in its pursuit of Talmud Torah. This is most apparent when seeing the absence narrative in context of the story immediately following it at the very close of the chapter, which I interpret as a form of slapstick comedy.

The last story of the chapter investigates the ruling at the end of the Mishnah:

**Chart 10 – The Mishnah on Dislocated Limbs – M Shabbat 22:6**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| One whose arm or leg become dislocated may not shake them vigorously in cold water, but may bathe regularly and if it heals, it heals. | מִי שֶׁנִּפְרְקָה יָדוֹ וְרַגְלוֹ, לֹא יִטְרְפֵם בְּצוֹנֵן, אֲבָל רוֹחֵץ הוּא כְדַרְכּוֹ, וְאִם נִתְרַפָּא נִתְרַפָּא: |

The Mishnah rules that one may not shake a dislocated limb about in cold water to relocate the limb, presumably while numbing it to the pain. However, one may bathe regularly in cold water and not worry about violating the sabbath if it heals because one was behaving normally. The story addresses whether this concern still applies given that Shmuel ruled that one may set a broken bone, correcting the preceding part of the Mishnah.

**Chart 11 – Rav Avia’s Story** – **B Shabbat 148a**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| One whose arm became dislocated etc. Rav Avia was sitting before Rav Yosef when his arm became dislocated. He said to him, “what about this?” - “It’s prohibited.” “And what about this?” – “It’s prohibited.” Eventually, his arm became relocated. He said to him: What’s your problem? We learn “One whose arm or leg become dislocated may not shake them vigorously in cold water, but may bathe regularly and if it heals, it heals!” He said to him, “do we not learn ‘one may not set a broken bone’ and Rav Hannah the Baghdadi said Shmuel said, ‘the ruling is one may set a broken bone?” He said to him: Were they woven together [as one teaching]?! [Rather] where it was said it was said, and where it was not said, it was not said. | מי שנפרקה ידו כו' רב אויא הוה יתיב קמיה דרב יוסף שניא ליה ידיה אמר ליה הכי מאי אסור והכי מאי אמר ליה אסור אדהכי איתפח ידיה אמר ליה מאי תיבעי לך הא תנן מי שנפרקה ידו או רגלו לא יטרפם בצונן אבל רוחץ כדרכו ואם נתרפא נתרפא אמר ליה ולא תנן אין מחזירין את השבר ואמר רב חנא בגדתאה אמר שמואל הלכה מחזירין את השבר אמר ליה כולהו בחדא מחיתא מחיתנהו היכא דאיתמר איתמר היכא דלא איתמר לא איתמר |

A surface examination of this story may not immediately strike the reader as comedic. Rav Avia, a 4th generation Babylonian scholar is sitting in the presence of Rav Yosef, a well-known 3rd generation sage, when his arm becomes dislocated. Rav Avia offers suggestions on ways he might heal his dislocated limb, and each time Rav Yosef says it’s prohibited. At some point, his arm gets better on its own, after which Rav Yosef expresses frustration that Rav Avia even asked the question since the Mishnah is clear that one may behave regularly, but not in an excessive way like shaking it about. Rav Avia defends his question based on Shmuel’s teaching that allows setting a broken bone despite the ruling in the Mishnah, a comparison Rav Yosef rejects. Indeed, one could read the story as a typical example of rabbinic dialectical banter, in which case, Rav Avia appears heroic in his commitment to the discussion of law in the face of personal discomfort.

However, when we consider that these texts were performed before an audience, and that they did at times include pantomime,[[81]](#footnote-82) the possibility that we are dealing with a kind of physical comedy becomes much more feasible. This is especially notable when compared to a similar halakhic pantomime that appears in the “Babylonian Pocket” story from earlier in the chapter.

**Chart 12 – The Babylonian Pocket – B Shabbat 147a**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What is a *marzev*? R’ Zeira says: It is a Babylonian Pocket. R’ Yirmiyah was sitting before R’ Zeira. He said to him, “what about this?” - “It’s prohibited.” <“And what about this?” – “It’s prohibited.”> Rav Pappa says: adopt this principle for yourself. Anything done with the intention to carry is prohibited. Anything for pleasure [i.e, for self-adornment] is permitted. | מאי מרזב אמר רבי זירא כיסי בבלייתא רבי ירמיה הוה יתיב קמיה דרבי זירא אמר ליה הכי מאי אמר ליה אסור <והכי מאי אמר ליה אסור>[[82]](#footnote-83) אמר רב פפא נקוט האי כללא בידך כל אדעתא דלכנופי אסור כל דלהתנאות שרי |

This short account also shows a junior sage repeatedly asking questions that likely indicate some kind of physical demonstration during the performance of this pericope. The full “theatrical” effect of attempting to roll up one’s garment repeatedly is unclear, which limits our ability to read too much into it, especially as the text is lacking details.[[83]](#footnote-84) But even if this text is emotionally neutral, the same likely cannot be said regarding the story about the dislocated arm. Rav Avia’s “motivation” is quite clear. He wants to relocate his arm and is likely in pain.

The possibility that this story was intended for a comedic performance becomes much more plausible when we imagine physically pantomiming the dislocated arm and Rav Avia’s aborted attempts to put it back into place every time Rav Yosef says “*assur.”* If I am correct, then this story is an example of Menippean satire in the Bavli.[[84]](#footnote-85) Within the context of rabbinic slapstick, Rav Yosef’s response is a caricature. He is callous in his focus on legal reasoning while his student is in clear discomfort.[[85]](#footnote-86) If this reading is correct, then both this story and our absence story contain ambivalent depictions of major Babylonian sages in the context of study. Each exhibits some element of abuse or callousness, even though each situation also becomes resolved favorably in the end. These exaggerated and even humorous depictions of abuse of power would likely have helped negotiate the terms of the authority of the senior sage relative to his peers, his juniors and his disciples. Such stories follow the sage through his career, putting the regular abuses the junior faces in context and reminding the senior sage of the plight of his lesser ranked cohort.

**Summation and Institutional Implications**

In this example, we have demonstrated several connections between the absence story and the surrounding *sugyot* corresponding to much of chapter 22 of tractate Shabbat. The story plays on themes of geographic region that the editors weave into the broader chapter, in anonymous glosses and in its choice of sources. It is one of twelve depictions of a traveling sage, most of which immediately place them in the context of a rabbinic gathering. Jointly, these texts evoke a sense of a collective “we.” On a literal level, they divide a larger group that composes the institution of rabbinic study itself, into its two major regions of Palestine and Babylonia. This promotes a group identity encompassing Babylonia and reflects a hegemonic assumption in the Babylonian Talmud that it speaks on behalf of rabbinic tradition in Babylonia. On a figurative level, the text is likely “thinking with” Palestinian amoraim,[[86]](#footnote-87) using them euphemistically to criticize Babylonians, setting expectations for participation without directly calling out stakeholders.

Additionally, I argued that Babylonian pericopes on the final two *mishnayot* of the chapter introduce the concept of the correcting Torah and healing tradition. This is reflected in our story by an analogy between the setting the bone, forcing RBBH to attend the *pirqa*, and returning a lost tradition. However, social pressure is also a source of tension, which explains some of the humorous and exaggerated descriptions of rabbinic abuse of power and callousness in our story and in the one immediately following about a dislocated limb. These stories help manage the expectations of junior sages and justify the behaviors of senior sages while also moderating them.

In my concluding section, I will argue that analogies like those between the intact body, the institutional gathering and the Babylonian tradition may contain clues to the role such rhetoric played in the centralization of the Babylonian rabbinic movement.

**Conclusions and Future Directions:**

The approach offered here provides a model for exploring the dynamic interactions of texts, institutions, and subjective experience in rabbinic culture. It describes multiple ways of thinking about temporality of rabbinic texts by identifying them within practices of institutional memory and organizational rhetoric that adapt them to different needs both at a collective and individual level. These strategies attempt to account for subjective experiences and encourage the audience to take these modes of communication up as their own, repeating stories and other forms of rhetoric that build a collective sense of a “we”. They help make sense of experiences within the institution and manage expectations over the course of an individual’s involvement. My claim is that the rabbinic institution is a common rhetorical topic of rabbinic literature and that it continues to play out in the margins of the text, where the audience is encouraged to fill in the gaps. Therefore, a relatively heavy-handed search for analogies between narrative and non-narrative forms of rhetoric in the text can be an effective tool for identifying metaphors between institutional life and other topics of interest to the sages. In other words, it is that it is highly likely that the rabbinic traditions provided a constant source of organizational tropes and provides multiple opportunities for telling institutional stories and constituting the institution within memory.

Additionally, this approach provides a theoretical basis for applying the concept of metaphoric entailment to organizational tropes. When applied to the Babylonian Talmud specifically, it provides an alternative to thinking about the text as a product of one of two distinct institutional contexts, the academy or the disciple circle. According to this approach, the nascent Babylonian Talmud started as a project of organized groups to create texts and merge them, like other rabbinic works. It likely began before the formation of a centralized academy and continued through to a period that at least begins to see the abandonment of the disciple circle model. I am assuming, however, that that the two cultures were coextensive for a formative period of the Babylonian Talmudic text including the development of the *stam*, and that this was a source of tension that animated much of its rhetoric.[[87]](#footnote-88) It is likely, therefore, that the groups responsible for the production of talmudic texts in earlier stages adopted organizational tropes that idealized institutionalized gatherings beyond the bounds of the disciple circle. These tropes may have participated in broader systems of meaning that favored the processes of centralization of the rabbinic movement and the ultimate decline of the disciple circle. While the range of uses of organizational tropes in a rabbinic context is inaccessible to us, I believe it is worth considering what they might look like as objects of historical analysis.

For example, many scholars follow Rubenstein and interpret the Babylonian “heavenly yeshiva” as a projection of an earthly version of centralized academies of the *stam,* similar to those we find in the geonic period. For Goodblatt, the “heavenly yeshiva” reflects a session of an earthly court or an “academic assembly,” where the sages in these stories are assumed to return to local disciple circles. Other scholars, while not commenting specifically on this trope, are agnostic about this issue, arguing that texts could be either. In my reading, it might have been both, starting as a reference to the sessions of assemblies (which may have served as courts as well) but easily transitioning to a new meaning referring to a centrally located edifice, an academic “institution” of learning. As an institutional narrative theme, it is exemplary of the final, indeed eternal, stage of a rabbinic “career.” As an organizational trope, it represents an idealized rabbinic gathering. The heavenly session presided over by God is the place where the most important sages go, and it is a mark of everlasting status to attend. This would be true whether the audience is projecting an academic assembly or centralized academy run by God, who automatically has a unifying effect on the heavenly version of these earthly institutions. No matter how decentralized the rabbinic movement is on earth, any parallel gathering in the supernal realm would assemble around God. The metaphor, however, is not easily made “backwards compatible,” because the more centralized and institutionalized the earthly organization becomes, the more decentralized models appear inconsistent with the idealized gathering of the heavenly yeshiva.

Furthermore, if I am correct that organizational tropes can develop out of the interplay between narrative and normative discourse, then in theory we might apply a similar argument for centralization. For example, if rabbinic institutions and traditions are conceived as intact living bodies, like the example we explored from tractate Shabbat or as we also find in tractate Hullin 128a-b regarding the flesh and limbs of livestock, then any shift towards decentralizing will appear more like “breaking a bone” or “severing a limb.” This would similarly favor centralization and have the same “backwards compatibility” problem.

**Dissertation Outline with Sources:**

Chapter 1: Introduction – Institutional Memory and Organizational Rhetoric in Rabbinic Literature

**Literature Review**

* The “Literary Turn” in Rabbinic Scholarship
* The “Rhetorical” and “Temporal Turns” in Rabbinic Scholarship
* Institutional discourse and subjectivity in Rabbinic scholarship
* Charlotte Linde on Institutional memory and storytelling
* Organizational Rhetoric and “Rhetorical History”

**Theory and Method**

* Notions of Relevance and the search for analogies in rabbinic literature
* The relationship between text, institution and subjectivity

Chapter 2: **Absence Stories – The Development of a Literary Motif**

**A Brief Literature Review**

* Goodblatt, Mandel and E. Fraenkel

**Overview of four categories of absence stories**

* Report Stories
* Truancy Stories
* Entrance Stories
* Other Kinds of Absence stories and stories of “heroic attendance”
* General Observations

**Chapter 3: The Palestinian Absence Story**

**Report Stories in Tannaitic Literature**

* When the elder sage transitions out (**Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael 15 -Horowitz/Rabin p58**)
* The benefits of participating in the *Beit Midrash* (**Tosefta Sotah 7:6-7**)
* Pure Torah (**Tosefta Yadayim 2:7** and **Mishnah Yadayim 4:3**)

**Truancy Stories in Tannaitic Literature**

* Talmud Torah as Resistance (**Mekhilta d’Rashb”I 12:16**)
* “Is there still temple service?” (**Sifrei Bamidbar *Korach* 116 (Hor. 133))**

**Absence Stories in the Palestinian Talmud**

* Report Stories (**P Gittin 5:5**, **P Baba Kamma** **9:3**, **P Yoma 3:6**)
* Other Absence Stories **(P Shevi’it 8:5, P Nedarim 11:1, P Beitza)**

**Absence Stories in Midrash Aggadah**

**Shir Hashirim Rabbah 1:3, Bemidbar Rabbah 14:4.**

**Chapter 4: A tractate about Attendance and Lifelong Learning – P Hagiga Chapters 1 and 2**

* Absence from the festival and Separation from the Torah (**M Hagiga Chapter 1)**
* Exploring a lifetime of Torah/Those who fall away from Torah **(T Hagiga Chapters 1 and 2)**
* R’ Yehoshua’s story again **(P Hagigah 1:1)**
* A legitimate excuse: when action takes precedence over study **(P Hagigah 1:7)**
* Elisha Ben Abuya and Rabbi Meir: A complex report story **(P Hagigah 2:1)**

**Chapter 5: The Bavli Report Story**

* “Son of a Ewe:” a poetic connection – **(B Bechorot 3b)**
* Who is the father of this child? Who is the author of this Mishnah? **(B Yevamot 42b)**
* Agents of Torah **(B Kiddushin 44a)**
* Living animals and living Torah **(B Hullin 128a-128b)**

**Chapter 6: Bavli Absence Stories**

* Bavli Truancy Stories **(B Berachot 28b, B Yoma 78a, B Beitzah 25b, BKiddushin 25a, B Baba Metzia 85b)**
* Entrance Stories **(B Berachot 28a, B Eruvin 28b, B Hullin 86b)**
* Other Absence Stories **(B Berakhot 16a, B Berakhot 18b,**
* Negligence in Prayer and Traditions (**B Berachot Chapter 4)**

**Chapter 7: The Heavenly Yeshiva in Absence Stories**

* Honoring Dead Sages **(B Berakhot 18b)**
* Two absence stories in a well-studied text **(B Baba Metzia 84a-84b)**

**Chapter 8:**

* Metaphoric Entailment and the Organizational Trope
* The Centralization of the Rabbinic Movement in Babylonia
* Centralizing tropes – God’s Yeshiva and Intact Bodies

1. Martin S. Jaffee, “Rabbinic Authorship as a Collective Enterprise,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, 2007, 17–37. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Seth Schwartz, “The Political Geography of Rabbinic Texts,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 75–96.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This does not replace the continued desideratum for more historical and archaeological evidence or deny the painstaking work of scholars to find relevant historical data in both Jewish and non-Jewish sources. Jason Sion Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests: The Culture of the Talmud in Ancient Iran* (Univ of California Press, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. In terms of classical rhetorical artistry, it allows us to see how the absence story pertains meaningfully to the normative *logos* of the textrather than analyzing it only as it pertains to questions of *ethos* and *pathos*, or treating it as a stylistic flourish to be ignored. For the meanings of these categories see George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2003), 95-96. See Richard Hidary, *Rabbis and Classical Rhetoric: Sophistic Education and Oratory in the Talmud and Midrash* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 70 and 256 for an example of their use in rabbinic literature. See James S. Baumlin and Peter L. Scisco, “Ethos and Its Constitutive Role in Organizational Rhetoric,” in *The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and Communication*, 2018, 201–13, for a description of these categories in organizational rhetoric. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Jacob Neusner’s and Jonah Fraenkel’s work, respectively, helped usher in this shift to emphasizing literary readings over the historical-biographical readings that once dominated the field. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 7-10. For the formulation “internal practices” see Christine Elizabeth Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah* (Oxford University Press, 1997). Also see Jason Sion Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests: The Culture of the Talmud in Ancient Iran* (Univ of California Press, 2021) for limitations on this viewpoint. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See Peter Schäfer, “Research into Rabbinic Literature: An Attempt to Define the Status Quaestionis,” *The Journal of Jewish Studies* 37, no. 2 (1986): 139–52.for the division into “macroforms” and “microforms”. See Jaffee, “Rabbinic Authorship as a Collective Enterprise,” for the division into “macroforms,” “microforms,” and “lemmata.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Regarding stories and their contexts, see Ofra Meir, *The Poetics of Rabbinic Stories* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1993) and Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Regarding the concepts micro-, macro-, synchronic and diachronic analysis of rabbinic literature see A. Gray, “A Talmud in Exile,” *Brown Judaic Studies, Providence, Rhode Island*, 2005; Mira Beth Wasserman, *Jews, Gentiles, and Other Animals: The Talmud after the Humanities* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. The Tosefta, for example, contains elements that predate our Mishnah, but also contains statements of amoraic sages that postdate it. Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Mishnah: A New Approach to Ancient J ewish Texts*, vol. 109 (Mohr Siebeck, 2005); Shamma Friedman, *Tosefta Atikta: Masekhet Pesah Rishon, Makbilot haMishnah vehaTosefta, Perush uMavo* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002). Regarding relative chronologies of layers in the Bavli, see Richard Lee Kalmin, “The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud,” *The Cambridge History of Judaism; Vol. 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, 2006, 840–76. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Kalmin, “The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud”; Jaffee, “Rabbinic Authorship as a Collective Enterprise.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Barry Scott Wimpfheimer, “The Mishnah’s Reader: Reconsidering Literary Meaning,” in *What Is the Mishnah? The State of the Question: The Proceedings of a Conference at Harvard University*, ed. Shaye J.D. Cohen (Harvard University Press, 2022), 335–67. Yaakov Elman, “Order, Sequence, and Selection,” in *The Anthology in Jewish Literature*, ed. David Stern (Oxford University Press, 2004); David C. Kraemer, *Reading the Rabbis: The Talmud as Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 11. Wasserman, *Jews, Gentiles, and Other Animals: The Talmud after the Humanities* 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, *Transmitting Mishnah: The Shaping Influence of Oral Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 117-219; Catherine Hezser, “Roman Law and Rabbinic Legal Composition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 144–64. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. These are commonly in casuistic form with a protasis and an apodosis (“If X, then Y”). See David Halivni Weiss, *Midrash, Mishnah, and Gemara: The Jewish Predilection for Justified Law* (Harvard University Press, 1986), 2-3. *Contra* Shanks Alexander, who demonstrates that the Mishnah uses variations on casuistic language, and places cases in different arrangements to generate audiences’ intellectual engagement. *Transmitting Mishnah* 117-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Meirav (Tubul) Kahana, “Tetralemma in the Mishna and the Tosefta / הטטרלמה והטרילמה במשנה ובתוספתא (חלק ראשון),” *Lĕšonénu: A Journal for the Study of the Hebrew Language and Cognate Subjects / לשוננו: כתב-עת לחקר הלשון העברית והתחומים הסמוכים לה* עא, no. ג/ד (2009): 287–308; Meirav (Tubul) Kahana, “Tetralemma in the Mishnah and the Tosefta / הטטרלמה והטרילמה במשנה ובתוספתא (חלק שני),” *Lĕšonénu: A Journal for the Study of the Hebrew Language and Cognate Subjects / לשוננו: כתב-עת לחקר הלשון העברית והתחומים הסמוכים לה* עב, no. א/ב (2010): 37–51. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. David Brodsky, “From Disagreement to Talmudic Discourse: Progymnasmata and the Evolution of a Rabbinic Genre,” ed. Ronit Nikolsky and Tal Ilan, *Rabbinic Traditions between Palestine and Babylonia*, 2014, 173–231; Hidary, *Rabbis and Classical Rhetoric: Sophistic Education and Oratory in the Talmud and Midrash*. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Avraham Walfish, “The Poetics of the Mishnah,” *The Mishnah in Contemporary Perspective* 2 (2006): 153–89; Jay Rovner, “Rhetorical Strategy and Dialectical Necessity in the Babylonian Talmud: The Case of Kiddushin 34a—35a,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 1994, 177–231; Jay Rovner, “Metasystemic and Structural Indicators of Late-Stage Babylonian Stammaitic Compositions,” *Oqimta*, no. 1 (n.d.): 369–419. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Gray, “A Talmud in Exile”; Wasserman, *Jews, Gentiles, and Other Animals: The Talmud after the Humanities*; Julia Watts Belser, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity: Rabbinic Responses to Drought and Disaster* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Jacob Neusner represents the extreme view that rabbinic works only reflect unified voices of authors who are responsible for the final versions of the text. Jacob Neusner, “Story and Tradition in Judaism,” in *Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishnah* (University of Chicago Press, n.d.), 307–28, accessed January 1, 1981; Jacob Neusner, *The Bavli’s One Voice: Types and Forms of Analytical Discourse and Their Fixed Order of Appearance* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, n.d.), accessed January 1, 1991. Yonah Fraenkel, at least in regard to narratives, reflects an opposing extreme that sees stories as isolated from their literary contexts within their respective works. Jonah Fraenkel, *Darkhei Ha-Aggadah ve-Ha-Midrash* (Masada: Yad LeTalmud, n.d.), accessed January 1, 1991. See Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *The Mishnaic Sotah Ritual: Temple, Gender and Midrash* (Boston: Brill, n.d.), accessed January 1, 2012. 5. Cf. fn. 15 for the "hesitant and critical return" to Neusner. Also see Wimpfheimer, “The Mishnah’s Reader: Reconsidering Literary Meaning.” In reference to the Babylonian Talmud, Moulie Vidas argues that the act of citing traditions is a form of authorship and, therefore, claims that we cannot strongly distinguish between earlier later layers in the Bavli. Moulie Vidas, *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (Princeton University Press, 2014). Wasserman argues that editing at the "macro-level" of the document does not discount differences in sources at the "micro-level." Mira Beth Wasserman, *Jews, Gentiles, and Other Animals: The Talmud after the Humanities* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 21-22. The general trend towards integrated readings of Talmudic tractates, especially regarding the place of stories in the text, has gained steam from the works of Watts-Belser and Wasserman. Jane Kanarek, “The Righteous Women of Bavli Sotah: On Reading Talmudic Narrative in the Context of a Tractate,” in *Studies in Rabbinic Narratives, Volume 1*, ed. Jeffrey L. Rubenstein (SBL Press, n.d.), 79–91, accessed January 2, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Steven D. Fraade and Moshe Simon-Shoshan, “Halakha and Aggada in Tannaic Sources,” in *The Literature of the Sages: A Re-Visioning*, ed. Christine Hayes (Boston: Brill, n.d.), 253–74, accessed January 1, 2022; Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, Yonatan Feintuch, and Jane L. Kanarek, “Halakha and Aggada in Post-Tannaic Literature,” in *The Literature of the Sages: A Re-Visioning*, ed. Christine Hayes (Brill, n.d.), 544–620, accessed January 1, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Yair Lorberbaum, *In God’s Image* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Barry Scott Wimpfheimer, *Narrating the Law: A Poetics of Talmudic Legal Stories* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Moshe Simon-Shoshan, *Stories of the Law: Narrative Discourse and the Construction of Authority in the Mishna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Robert M. Cover, “Foreword: Nomos and Narrative,” *Harv. L. Rev* 97 (1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Lorberbaum, *In God’s Image*; Avraham Walfish, “Ichud Ha-Halakha ve-Ha-Aggada: Iyyun Bi-Darkhei ’arichatah Shel Ha-Tosefta,” ed. Joshua Levinson, Jacob Elbaum, and Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Higayon L’Yona: New Aspects in the Study of Midrash, Aggadah and Piyut: In Honor of Professor Yona Fraenkel*, n.d., 309–31; Yonatan Feintuch, “Uncovering Covert Links between Halakhah and Aggadah in the Babylonian Talmud: The Talmudic Discussion of the Yom Kippur Afflictions in B. Yoma,” *AJS Review* 40, no. 1 (2016): 17–32; Yonatan Feintuch, “Reading Talmudic Stories in Multiple Halakhic Contexts: The Hasid in the Graveyard, Rav Ada b. Abba and the Lovesick Man,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 68, no. 2 (2017): 284–307; Wasserman, *Jews, Gentiles, and Other Animals: The Talmud after the Humanities*; Wimpfheimer, *Narrating the Law: A Poetics of Talmudic Legal Stories*; Kanarek, “The Righteous Women of Bavli Sotah: On Reading Talmudic Narrative in the Context of a Tractate.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Belser, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity: Rabbinic Responses to Drought and Disaster*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Richard Lee Kalmin, “The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud,” *The Cambridge History of Judaism; Vol. 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, 2006, 840–76. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Steven D Fraade, “Anonymity and Redaction in Legal Midrash: A Preliminary Probe,” *Malekhet Mahshevet: Studies in the Redaction and and Development of Talmudic Literature, Ed. Aaron Amit and Aharon Shemesh (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2011)* 9 (2011): 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Lynn Kaye, *Time in the Babylonian Talmud: Natural and Imagined Times in Jewish Law and Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Shanks Alexander likens it to, “trying to herd kittens into a bag.” Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, “Recent Literary Approaches to the Mishnah,” *AJS Review (Cambridge University Press)* 32, no. 2 (2008): 225–34. Catherine Hezser refers to “imposing” compositional practices and a lack of detail “to the point of being elliptical and enigmatic.” Catherine Hezser, “Roman Law and Rabbinic Legal Composition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 144–64. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. This contrasts with Hezser (*ibid.*) who argues that Palestinian Rabbinic texts are deliberately opaque to maintain a monopoly on interpretation. Compare with Lightstone who argues that the idiosyncratic and complicated style of the Bavli similarly limits access. Jack N. Lightstone, *The Rhetoric of the Babylonian Talmud, Its Social Meaning and Context* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006) [Google Books Edition]. For approaches that focus more on the joyful aspects of textual intrigue, see Galit Hasan-Rokem, “An Almost Invisible Presence: Multilingual Puns in Rabbinic Literature,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, 2007, 226; Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood: Jewish Narrative Dialogues in Late Antiquity*, vol. 4 (Univ of California Press, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Simon-Shoshan identifies a range of narrativity in the presentation of law in the Mishnah, although his approach applies to other rabbinic works as well. Moshe Simon-Shoshan, *Stories of the Law: Narrative Discourse and the Construction of Authority in the Mishna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Steven D. Fraade and Moshe Simon-Shoshan, “Halakha and Aggada in Tannaic Sources,” in *The Literature of the Sages: A Re-Visioning*, ed. Christine Hayes (Boston: Brill, 2022), 253–74. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. According to my approach, phenomenon of story cycles, aggadic dialectic, and the serial narrative, share similarities to the series of cases in more narrative forms. While the order of cases is still apparent in the Babylonian Talmud, I would suggest that the enthymeme provides a parallel phenomenon in for the non-narrative portions of rabbinic texts. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. See the synopsis of M Shabbat chapter 22 in the “Example” section below which places cases related to food storage concerns, juicing fruit, laundry, and bodily well-being in succession. The common topic in all of these cases is containment. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Martin S. Jaffee, “Rabbinic Authorship as a Collective Enterprise,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, 2007, 17–37; Ra’anan S. Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow, “Introduction: Anthropology, History and the Remaking of Jewish Studies,” in *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition*, ed. Ra’anan S. Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow, 2011, 1–28. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Mira Beth Wasserman, *Jews, Gentiles, and Other Animals: The Talmud after the Humanities* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Mira Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Sarit Kattan-Gribetz, *Time and Difference in Rabbinic Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020); Joshua Levinson, “From Narrative Practice to Cultural Poetics: Literary Anthropology and Rabbinic Sense,” *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature/TEXTURES: Culture, Literature, Folklore, for Galit Hasan-Rokem*, no. 1 (2013): 63–86. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. As opposed to approaches that limit the use of rhetoric to “internal” textual artistry to questions of textual preservation or a narrow pedagogy of intellectual engagement and mnemonics. Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Beth A. Berkowitz, “The Rhetoric of the Mishnah,” in *What Is the Mishnah?*, ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen, The State of the Question (Harvard University Press, 2022), 187–203, https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.423484.14; Moulie Vidas, *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (Princeton University Press, 2014); Jay Rovner, “Rhetorical Strategy and Dialectical Necessity in the Babylonian Talmud: The Case of Kiddushin 34a—35a,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 1994, 177–231; Richard Lee Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors and Editors in Rabbinic Babylonia* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Hezser applies sociological theories from Social Network Analysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. David M. Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia*, vol. 9 (Brill Archive, 1975); David M. Goodblatt, “The History of the Babylonian Academies,” *The Cambridge History of Judaism; Vol. 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, 2006, 821–39; Isaiah Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era: A Social and Cultural History (Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: Mercaz Zalman Shazar, 1990); Richard Lee Kalmin, “The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud,” *The Cambridge History of Judaism; Vol. 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, 2006, 840–76; Richard Lee Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors and Editors in Rabbinic Babylonia* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1994); Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, vol. 66 (Mohr Siebeck, 1997); Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, “The Rise of the Babylonian Rabbinic Academy: A Reexamination of the Talmudic Evidence,” *JSIJ*, no. 1 (2002): 55–68; Moulie Vidas, *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (Princeton University Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, vol. 66 (Mohr Siebeck, 1997); David C. Kraemer, *A History of the Talmud* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Among other examples, see Jack N. Lightstone, *The Rhetoric of the Babylonian Talmud, Its Social Meaning and Context*, Google Books (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006); Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (University of Chicago Press, 2009); Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100-400 CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. David M. Goodblatt, “The History of the Babylonian Academies,” *The Cambridge History of Judaism; Vol. 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, 2006, 821–39; Richard Lee Kalmin, “The Formation and Character of the Babylonian Talmud,” *The Cambridge History of Judaism; Vol. 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, 2006, 840–76; Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, “The Rise of the Babylonian Rabbinic Academy: A Reexamination of the Talmudic Evidence,” *JSIJ*, no. 1 (2002): 55–68; Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Moulie Vidas, *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (Princeton University Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Charlotte Linde, *Working the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. See Linde 145-147 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. I use the terms “organization” and “institution” interchangeably depending on which theory I am citing, but I tend to use the word “institution” when referring specifically to rabbinic social practices because “organization” is generally used for modern constructs. Nevertheless, we can still refer to the sages “organizing,” themselves into social groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Øyvind Ihlen and Robert L. Heath, “Introduction: Organizational Rhetoric,” *The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and Communication*, 2018, 1–13, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. K. Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (University of California Press, 1970), https://books.google.com/books?id=xaEwDwAAQBAJ; Robert L. Heath, George Cheney, and Øyvind Ihlen, “Identification: Connection and Division in Organizational Rhetoric and Communication,” *The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and Communication*, 2018, 111–26; George Cheney, “The Corporate Person (Re) Presents Itself,” *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations*, 2009, 165–83; James S. Baumlin and Peter L. Scisco, “Ethos and Its Constitutive Role in Organizational Rhetoric,” in *The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and Communication*, 2018, 201–13, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119265771.ch14. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Edward F. McQuarrie and David Glen Mick, “Figures of Rhetoric in Advertising Language,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 22, no. 4 (1996): 424–38; Bruce A. Huhmann, “Rhetorical Figures: The Case of Advertising,” *The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and Communication*, 2018, 229–44. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. Damion Waymer, “Spades, Shovels, and Backhoes: Unearthing Metaphorts in Organizational Rhetoric,” in *The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric*, ed. Øyvind Ilhen and Robert L. Heath (John Wiley and Sons, 2018), 244–56; Gareth Morgan, “Commentary: Beyond Morgan’s Eight Metaphors,” *Human Relations* 69, no. 4 (2016): 1029–42; Peter M. Hamilton, “Synecdoche: Another Ubiquitous and Everyday Trope,” *The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and Communication*, 2018, 257–68. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979); Edward F. McQuarrie and David Glen Mick, “Figures of Rhetoric in Advertising Language,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 22, no. 4 (1996): 424–38; Bruce A. Huhmann, “Rhetorical Figures: The Case of Advertising,” *The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and Communication*, 2018, 229–44. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago press, 2008); Damion Waymer, “Spades, Shovels, and Backhoes: Unearthing Metaphorts in Organizational Rhetoric,” in *The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric*, ed. Øyvind Ilhen and Robert L. Heath (John Wiley and Sons, 2018), 244–56. Also see Gail Labovitz, *Marriage and Metaphor* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. Helle Kryger Aggerholm, Birte Asmuß, and Christa Thomsen, “The Role of Recontextualization in the Multivocal, Ambiguous Process of Strategizing,” *Journal of Management Inquiry* 21, no. 4 (2012): 413–28; Eric M. Eisenberg, “Ambiguity as Strategy in Organizational Communication,” *Communication Monographs* 51, no. 3 (1984): 227–42; Mats Alvesson, “Organizations as Rhetoric: Knowledge‐intensive Firms and the Struggle with Ambiguity,” *Journal of Management Studies* 30, no. 6 (1993): 997–1015; Mats Alvesson, “The Play of Metaphors,” in *Postmodernism and Organizations* (Sage Publications, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. “Strategic ambiguity” is similar to Bakhtin’s notion of “dialogism” commonly employed in the study of Rabbinics This is a good example of how the discourse adopted by scholarship shapes the interpretation of the text. Scholars tend to use dialogism as a basis for literary and cultural criticism of rabbinic texts, which either succeed or fail at being authentically dialogical. Others focus more on whether these texts are authentically “pluralistic. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Robert L. Heath, George Cheney, and Øyvind Ihlen, “Identification: Connection and Division in Organizational Rhetoric and Communication,” *The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and Communication*, 2018, 111–26; George Cheney, “The Corporate Person (Re) Presents Itself,” *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations*, 2009, 165–83; Damion Waymer, “Spades, Shovels, and Backhoes: Unearthing Metaphorts in Organizational Rhetoric,” in *The Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric*, ed. Øyvind Ilhen and Robert L. Heath (John Wiley and Sons, 2018), 244–56. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. I use multiple search words and extensive reading to identify sources, but there are likely texts I neglected in the vast corpus of rabbinic literature. I identify relatively few texts in the volumes of Midrash Aggadah using the search terms that worked for other works. That could be because these texts were designed for sages to be primers for performances for a lay audience. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. **Tannaitic Sources**: *Mekhilta dR’ Yishmael* (Horowitz-Rabin 58-59), T Sotah 7:6-7, T Yadayim 2:16, M Yadayim 4:3, Mekhilta d’Rashb”I 12:16, T Yom Tov 2:6, Sifrei Bamidbar *Korach* 116 (Hor. 133); **PT** – P Gittin 5:5, P Baba Kamma 9:3, P Yoma 3:6, P Hagiga 2:1, P Hagiga 1:1, P Hagiga 1:7, P Shevi’it 8:5, P Nedarim 11:1, P Beitza 1:7; **BT** – B Kiddushin 44a, B Yevamot 42b, B Bechorot 3a, B Hullin 128a-128b, B Hagiga 3a, B Hagiga 3b, B Eruvin 47a, B Beitza 21a, B Yoma 78a, B Berakhot 28b, B Kiddushin 25a, B Bava Metzia 85b, B Nedarim 81a, B Berakhot 28a, B Eruvin 28b, B Hullin 86b, B Beitzah 24b, B Berakhot 16a, B Berakhot 18b, B Megilah 7b, B Bava Batra 22a, B Kiddushin 66a, B Shabbat 148a, B Baba Metziah 84a; **Midrash Aggada** –Shir Hashirim Rabbah 1:3, Bemidbar Rabbah 14:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Elyashiv Frankel dedicates a chapter of his dissertation to absence stories in the Bavli. His focus is on establishing the genre of the *halakhic* story in the Bavli. He does not cover “report” stories at all and generally does not discuss the development of the genre. Furthermore, he argues that there is generally no meaningful connection between these stories and their legal contexts. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. *Mekhilta dR’ Yishmael* (Horowitz-Rabin 58-59), T Sotah 7:6-7, T Yadayim 2:16, M Yadayim 4:3, P Gittin 5:5, P Baba Kamma 9:3, P Yoma 3:6, P Hagiga 2:1, P Hagiga 1:1, B Kiddushin 44a, B Yevamot 42b, B Bechorot 3a, B Hullin 128a-128b, B Hagiga 3a, B Hagiga 3b, B Eruvin 47a, Avot d’R Natan 18:2, Bemidbar Rabbah 14:4. Not every parallel report story is necessarily an absence story. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. Simon-Shoshan ??? [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. Correction from יומרון. See Rosenthal 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. Mekhilta d’Rashb”I 12:16, T Yom Tov 2:6, Sifrei Bamidbar *Korach* 116 (Hor. 133), , P Shevi’it 8:5, P Nedarim 11:1, B Beitza 21a, B Yoma 78a, B Berakhot 28b, B Kiddushin 25a, B Bava Metzia 85b, B Nedarim 81a [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. B Berakhot 28a, B Eruvin 28b, B Hullin 86b [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. P Beitza 1:7, B Beitzah 24b, B Berakhot 16a, B Berakhot 18b, B Megilah 7b, B Bava Batra 22a, B Kiddushin 66a, B Shabbat 148a, Shir Hashirim Rabbah 1:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. Three examples of “heroic attendance” are B Yevamot 64b (Chart 4), the story of Hillel on the roof of the Beit Midrash in B Yoma 35b, and Rabban Gamliel attendance after he was ousted as the patriarch in B Berakhot 28a. The stories of Hillel and Rabban Gamliel also describe security policies that would keep people out of the Beit Midrash. On the other hand, B Sanhedrin 84b presents a midrashic account of a diametrically opposing policy in the days of King Hizkiya with an implicit threat of violence against people who did *not* attend the *Beit Midrash*. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. See B Yevamot 64b (Chart 4) which claims, almost certainly tongue-in-cheek satire, that the sages attending Rav Huna’s lecture became infertile because it took so long and they couldn’t leave to pee. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. For example, a report story in B Bechorot 3b does not appear to create any thematic connection between the institution and the local topics, but it does suggest a parallel between the case of a “goat born from a ewe (*rachel*)” and the name of the sage Rav Merri Bar Rachel. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. I would like to thank Dr. Christopher Erlinger for confirming for me that the loss of the male organ is associated with cooling in many antique cultures. This is the most likely explanation for calling Rav Hamnuna, “Karnuna,” signifying that the metaphorically emasculated sage is cold rather than hot. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. B Niddah 24b. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. I am limiting my study to selections of the Bavli chapter that I believe are numerous enough to be representative. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. It is possible that such measures would have little impact on RBBH, since he is not local. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. Ten of these accounts, all which take place in Babylonia, involve the transmission of traditions, while the two that take place in Palestine are about differences over taste in food. The first set can be found on 145a יתיב רב דימי, 145b כי אתא רב יהושע, 146b דרב איקלע לההוא אתרא, 147a עולא איקלע לפומבדיתא, עולא איקלע לבי אסי בר היני, כי אתא רב דימי, כי אתא רבין, כי אתא רב שמואל בר רב יהודה, 147b רבי אלעזר בן ערך איקלע להתם and our absence story on 148a. The two in Palestine are both on 145b, ואמר רב ספרא... ועוד אמר רב גזא.... The theme of vomiting appears in the latter two and in our sugya as well (see below). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. Of course, geographic region is a common topic in rabbinic law. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
69. The division of the Mishnah is slightly different in the Bavli, which combines mishnayot 5 and 6 into a single Mishnah. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
70. Mishnah 5 addresses squeezing a towel but does so in the context of bathing, so it is a transition case from laundry concerns to bodily care. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
71. There are four geography related details in the Mishnah. 22:2 mentions the *kolyos haispanin*, which is generally understood as a salted fish dish from the Iberian peninsula. However, geographic origin does not appear to play a role in the ruling. The same is true of 22:3 which discusses a ruling of R’ Yochanan ben Zakkai on a case that occurred in Arabia, and 22:5 mentions the hot springs of Tiberius. The only exception is 22:4 which discusses the “outer-courtyard” of the town, which we will discuss further below. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
72. Interestingly, R’ Zeira, a Babylonian by birth, is the one explaining it to his Palestinian junior R’ Yirmiyah. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
73. The Mishnah’s use of the examples of one person with ten towels and ten people with one towel is rhetorical. Essentially, the Mishnah is teaching that it does not depend on the level of dampness but on being in a group. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
74. The chronological relationship between the story and the ruling in the *stam* is unclear. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
75. See Chart 12 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
76. See Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine/Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1994), 93-97 about the relationship between the series in the Mishnah to wrestling [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
77. The misreading involves a minor variation in three letters from the phrase, החדש הזה לכם. The ד loses the tail from its head, becoming a ר, the ז loses most of its trunk, becoming a י, and the כ gains a foot, and becomes a ב. He fails to pay attention to these minor details and ends up reading the phrase החרש היה לבם, meaning, their hearts were deafened, suggesting a limited mental capacity to learn. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
78. The lines following the story that identify R’ Elazar ben ‘Arach as one of the great “enlighteners” of his time, by name (R’ Nehorai) and by deed. His individual accomplishments only emphasize the moral lesson as he still ultimately required a *makom torah* to maintain his learning*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
79. I also suggest that the physical strain of exercise is comparable to the social reinforcement of learning. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
80. Although, who exactly is doing the healing and object of the healing is ambiguous. Rav Yehuda is the healer, but so is Rabah Bar Bar Hana. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
81. ??? [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
82. Although the repeated line is of [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
83. It is certainly possible that the audience assumes that R’ Yirmiya is asking picayune questions, as he does elsewhere in the Babylonian Talmud, or perhaps his garment is dragging and tripping him, making him want to find a solution. Either of these “motivations” would provide for a humorous performance that either portrays the student as annoying or works as slapstick comedy with R’ Yirmiyah playing the buffoon. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
84. Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (University of Chicago Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
85. He does not pray for him like the sages with R’ Eleazar ben ‘Arach, nor does he offer him any words of comfort. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
86. Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100-400 CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Christine Hayes, “The ‘Other’ in Rabbinic Literature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 243–69, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521843901.012. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
87. Compare to Vidas who argues that primary tension is between two modes of scholastic learning, memorization and argumentation. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)