Mad Rabbis: The Intersection of Bodyminds with Personal, Communal, and Non-Human Relationships in the Babylonian Talmud

by

Hannah Roussel

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(History)
in the University of Michigan
2023

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Rafael Neis, Chair
Professor Julia Watts Belser, Georgetown University
Associate Professor Aileen Das
Associate Professor Ian Moyer
Professor Ellen Muehlberger
Associate Professor M. Remi Yergeau

Hannah Roussel

hroussel@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0009-0007-9106-3240

© Hannah Roussel 2023

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family: Isaac, Julie, Frankie, and Havah Roussel. My life is infinitely better for having you in it. And I do not know how I would have achieved this degree without your love and support.

I would also like to thank my two cats ZuZu and Asami who I love bunches. Their companionship brought me joy and comfort while I adjusted to new disabilities. ZuZu always made sure I took study breaks (i.e. demanded I play with her), and Asami ensured I kept a regular sleep schedule (by meowing loudly until I went to bed).

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my family for their immeasurable support, and to my ADHD Friends for always being there to co-work, laugh, and commiserate. I named my family in my acknowledgments, and most of my ADHD Friends prefer to remain anonymous. I have, however, received permission to name a few of them: Petra, Sina, Janita Botha, and Katie L. A huge thank you to you and the rest of our community for fostering a collaborative, supportive, neurodiverse space. For listening to me rant about highly specific details about ancient Judaism, for keeping me company for the many of the hours I spent writing this dissertation, and for cheering me on through every stage. Thanks also goes out to my CZA family for their support of my academic pursuits throughout my entire life, especially Hellen Kamoroff, z''l, and Mark Kinzer.

Thank you to Rafael Neis for their mentorship and guidance through my entire academic career. I met Rafe the first semester of my undergraduate studies, when I took their first-year seminar, and they have been my supporter and mentor ever since. Thank you for seeing my potential, and for your constant compassion, wisdom, encouragement and tutelage. I hope to be as radical and kind as you one day. I am also grateful to my dissertation committee— Julia Watts Belser, Aileen Das, Ian Moyer, Ellen Muehlberger, M. Remi Yergeau—for their support and feedback. I was privileged to be a graduate student instructor for Ian for three semesters, and to study with him for my preliminary exams. Thank you, Ian, for teaching me how to be a compassionate yet strong leader and teacher, and for your continued mentorship throughout

my doctoral degree. I strive to be as gentle and kind as you. I was also honored to do a preliminary field with Ellen, whose sharp intellect and insight combined with her passion for her field makes her a lovely teacher and conversationalist. Thank you, Ellen, for your mentorship and for enthusiastically cheering me on, I always appreciate your optimistic disposition. I first met Aileen as the professor of my second level classical Greek course. Languages are challenging for me, but Aileen's gifted pedagogy skills made the course enjoyable. She never hesitated to discuss the content of the texts we were translating (i.e. not just the grammar and syntax) which was just what I needed to stay engaged with the material. Aileen, thank you for your guidance throughout my research process, especially in regard to Greco-Roman literature. My final two committee members, Remi and Julia, I did not meet until I asked them to join my committee, and I am forever thankful that they agreed after knowing me for so little time. Remi, thank you for entering the world of ancient history for my sake. Your advice and guidance on disability and mad scholarship has been invaluable and your bright energy during stressful times (such as my prospectus and dissertation defenses) has a balm to my nerves. Thank you for your encouragement and insightful contributions to this dissertation. And last, but certainly not least, thank you Julia for bringing disability studies to the field of rabbinic literature. Your work has been my guide since before I met you, and its impact on this dissertation is immeasurable. Thank you also for your intentional and graceful guidance and feedback.

Another scholar who has had a profound impact on life is Richard Kalmin. I met Richard during my undergraduate studies when he was a visiting fellow at the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies. It was with his encouragement that I applied to Jewish Theological Seminary for my master's degree, and his continued encouragement and mentorship that saw me through to the

completion of the program. Thank you, Richard. When I lost faith in myself, you were there to encourage me and remind me of my strengths.

My dissertation writing group—Jennifer Playstead, Sarah Wheat, and Paige Newhouse—and my dear friend Kirsty Jones were invaluable interlocuters and peer reviewers. Thank you, Jen, for making sure I always stated things clearly and fully, Sarah, for your detail-oriented feedback, and Paige for keeping my paragraph lengths short! Thank you, Kirsty, for your friendship, for building a community of disability and religion scholars, and for all the pictures of your cute pets!

Funding from the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, the LSA International Institute, and the University of Michigan's History Department covered costs for my year of research in Israel. Thank you for your support.

Any mistakes and errors in this dissertation are mine alone and should not be attributed to my committee or any of my reviewers.

Table of Contents

Dedication ii

Acknowledgements iii

Abstract viii

Introduction 1

Rabbinic Literature 3

Hulshat Da'at 6

Disability Studies and Crip Theory 12

Mad Studies 16

Intersectionality 19

Studying Disability and Madness in Ancient Jewish Texts 20

My Methodology 28

Summary of Chapters 31

Chapter 1 Locating *Da'at:* Intestines, Uteri, and Houses 34

1.1 Elazar's Bodymind: *Da'at,* Intestines, Emotions, and Soul 38

1.2 Batya's Bodymind: Wife, House, and Uterus 49

1.3 The Madwoman and her Undead Husband 61

1.4 Conclusion 70

Chapter 2 Tensions in the *Beit Midrash*: Interconnected and Interrelated Bodyminds 73

2.1 The Porosity and Fluidity of Bodyminds 78

2.2 The Relationality of Madness 88

2.3 Power, Gender, and Madness 95

2.4 Changing *Da'at:* A Rabbinic Self Critique 105

2.5 Conclusion 110

Chapter 3 (Eco)Systems of Care: Madness, Community, and Non-Humans 112

3.1 An Insolent Faced Sky and Conspiring Clouds: The Interconnectedness of Non-Human Bodyminds 116

3.2 Honi's Sleep 128

3.3 Fasting for Rain 142

3.4 Conclusion 150

Conclusion 152

Bibliography 157

Abstract

This dissertation studies the Babylonian rabbinic concept of *hulshat da'at*—illness or weakness of mind, through the lenses of disability, mad, gender, and environmental studies. Disability and madness are socially and culturally constructed concepts that elude definition and intersect with other identities. I argue that *hulshat da'at* narratives portray *hulshat da'at* as a specific form of madness that was experienced by those of high social status when said status was lowered or threatened. I have also demonstrated that the rabbis viewed *hulshat da'at* as a severe and negative experience that should be avoided if possible, or immediately addressed if not. They addressed *hulshat da'at* by reassuring the mad person of their status, and they imagined that even nonhumans such as the rain took part in this caregiving strategy. Choosing specific *hulshat da'at* narratives to discuss in each chapter, I argue that each contains rabbinic conceptions that bodies and minds (human and nonhuman) are interconnected with and interdependent on each other. I further analyze how this bodily and mental interdependence allows these narratives to question the efficaciousness of various care giving practices, and what to do when these practices fail.

Chapter one uses the concepts of *bodymind* and intersectionality to analyze the story of Rabbi Elazar and his wife, who I name Batya (bBava Metzia 83b and 84b). The concept *bodymind* views the body and mind as inherently connected. Reading Elazar and Batya's story with this concept allows us to pay attention to the narrative's interplay between body and *da'at* (mind), arguing that it views *da'at* to be interconnected with soul, self, and emotions, all of which are

embodied in the flesh. I also follow the shifting relationship between Elazar and Batya, whose struggle for dominance in their relationship is informed by gender, bodyminds, and houses. I conclude that *hulshat da'at* is gendered masculine and experienced when one's status is threatened.

Chapter two analyzes a narrative about the relationship between Rabbi Yohanan and Reish Lakish (bBava Metzia 84a). Through tracking the shifting bodyminds and relationships of Yohanan, Reish Lakish, and Yohanan's sister I argue that this story contains of rabbinic conceptions of bodyminds as entities that are fluid and interconnected. I use the concept of *mad border body* to argue that Elazar's and Yohanan's madness is just as fluid and relational as their bodyminds. I trace this relationality, analyzing how cultural and societal contexts inform their interpersonal relationships, and how their madness affects those around them. Informed by feminist, postcolonial, disability, and mad studies, I analyze how systems of care function in both Elazar and Batya's and Yohanan and Reish Lakish's stories, including rabbinic care practices for rabbis experiencing *hulshat da'at.* I argue that both stories contain the notion that being disconnected from one's rabbinic colleagues ends in madness and death.

Chapter three focuses on six stories in Bavli Ta'anit. All of which, I claim, question what to do when God is absent, and when systems of care fail. Reading these stories from both a disability and environmental studies perspectives, I propose that these stories imagine communities in which even nonhuman characters, such as the sky and the clouds, have bodyminds that are interconnected with each other and the humans they interact with. Such a view of community allows us (and these stories) to consider ecosystems as systems of care.

Introduction

This dissertation seeks to better understand how ancient Babylonian rabbis and their communities understood experiences of madness–that is experiences that we might today describe, or even diagnose, as mental illness. Such a question begets many others and requires attention to the ethics of studying madness across time and space. One ethical concern, to be discussed in depth further along in this introduction, cautions against applying our own understandings of the world onto past peoples, societies, and cultures. Another is to make sure we do not remove, elide, or forget a mad person's agency through our studies. Indeed, a major principle of mad studies that addresses this concern is the imperative to reclaim and amplify mad voices. This principle is a way to ensure that those who self-identify and/or are labeled as mad are still given agency over themselves and that legitimacy and respect is given to their voices. But when one is studying ancient history and thus working with a dearth of sources, or with sources that are highly mediated, direct voices can be hard to come by.

The Babylonian Talmud is one of the main primary sources[1] we have through which to understand Babylonian Jewish culture and society, and its passages are what I will be analyzing in this dissertation. But it is a text that is highly skewed toward the late antique rabbis who composed, transmitted, and edited it. And thus, while the Babylonian Talmud contains a

[1] "Primary sources" is a term of art that historians use to refer to texts and material objects from the time period being studied. In order to make this dissertation accessible to non-historians and/or people who are not in academia, I am going to occasionally define terms of art.

multitude of voices, they are all voices of male Jewish scholars, or at least mediated by those tradents, storytellers, authors, and editors. In an attempt to reach ancient mad voices, I looked for mad rabbis and stumbled upon the Aramaic phrase *halash da'ateih,* which loosely translates to "his mind became ill/weak." While rabbinic texts, mostly narratives, that include this phrase are still not direct quotes from mad people, they are close. And detailed analyses of these narratives can give us an idea of what some late ancient Babylonian rabbis (the ones who crafted and transmitted these passages) thought about *hulshat da'at*.

I have located thirty-one passages in the Babylonian Talmud that include variations of this phrase, most of which are narratives. I found these passages primarily by doing word searches in Bar-Ilan University's database The Online Responsa Project,[2] but also located some through dictionary entries (i.e., passages listed as examples for certain words) and secondary literature.[3] In this dissertation, I will analyze just *some* of these stories, drawing from mad studies, disability, and gender studies to do so. Ultimately, I will conclude that the Babylonian rabbis did not operate within the same mind/body dichotomy that pervades modern Euro-American thought, but instead viewed the bodies and mind as deeply intertwined entities that were fluid and malleable, influenced and interconnected with the people and world around them. This relationality both among humans and between humans and nonhumans served as a conduit both for care and harm. For the rabbis, one of the greatest harms was a threat to a person's social status which often resulted in *hulshat da'at,* a weakened mind. Thus, *hulshat da'at* was a

[2] This database is accessible with a paid subscription (institutional or individual) at https://www.responsa.co.il/.
[3] "Secondary sources" is another term of art in the field of history. Whereas "primary sources" describes texts and material objects from the time period being studied, secondary sources describe literature written *about* history. The example I always give my students is that an American history textbook used in an American history class to is a secondary source. But the same textbook, when used to study how Americans taught national history in the twentieth century is a primary source.

specific form of madness that could only be experienced by those of high status and was typically gendered masculine and experienced by rabbis (since they viewed themselves as holding high status in their societies). I also argue that the rabbis viewed *hulshat da'at* as a severe and negative experience that should be avoided if possible, or immediately addressed if not. They addressed *hulshat da'at* by reassuring the mad person of their status, and they imagined that even nonhumans, such as the rain, took part in this caregiving strategy. These rabbinic stories thus reveal how the rabbis thought about the mind, body, and madness as well how they thought about community, social status, and systems of care.

This is not meant to be a comprehensive study of madness in rabbinic literature, nor even of *hulshat da'at*. I also am not claiming that *hulshat da'at* was ever or is a fixed category, nor that the conclusions I posit here applied to all Babylonian rabbis. I am merely unearthing one (or possibly a few) line of thought that seems to have existed in rabbinic culture and society.

Rabbinic Literature

Rabbinic literature consists of works authored by rabbis roughly dating from 70-800 CE on topics such as biblical exegesis, Jewish law, myths, and legends. The rabbis who produced this literature were a subset of Judaism: men scholars who claimed expertise in Biblical interpretation, Jewish rituals, and Jewish laws. The rabbis lived in Roman Palestine (modern day Israel/Palestine) and Babylonia (modern day Iraq). Throughout the dissertation I will refer to these men as "the rabbis," and their specific movement of Judaism as "rabbinic Judaism."

Rabbinic literature went through stages of oral and written transmission. The Mishnah, which would become a foundational document in the rabbinic curriculum, is organized as a thematic collection of Palestinian rabbinic teachings from 70 - 220 CE. The Tosefta contains

additional material from this period and scholars still debate whether it was written before, after, or alongside the Mishnah and whether it was compiled in addition to, opposition to, or independently of the Mishnah.

After the Mishnah's redaction in 220 CE, the rabbis began to organize their studies in response to the Mishnah. Palestinian commentary, expansion, and subtle tweaking of the Mishnah was compiled and redacted into the Jerusalem Talmud, or Yerushalmi, around 400 CE. In Palestine, the rabbis also created several independent works that contained commentaries of specific books of the Bible (midrash). Babylonian rabbis also generated their own Talmud, called the Babylonian Talmud or Bavli, ostensibly organized as a commentary to the Mishnah. The Babylonian Talmud's period of creation was far longer than that of the Palestinian Talmud, its creation ranging from the fifth century through to the seventh; some scholars argue that the Babylonian Talmud was not completed until as late as 800 CE. Unlike the Palestinian rabbis, the Babylonian rabbis did not generate a separate textual corpus with commentary on the Bible. Instead, the Babylonian Talmud integrated multiple literary genres.

The phrase *hulshat da'at* appears first in the Babylonian Talmud, and as such it is the primary rabbinic text I engage with in this dissertation. The Bavli is organized topically following the Mishnah's tractates, although it does not cover the whole Mishnah. The Bavli does not fit easily into one (modern day) genre, instead slipping from case law, to history, to stories, to biblical commentary. It went through many stages of oral and written transmission. And when we read Talmudic passages closely, we can see layers of editorial strata, often marked by shifts between Hebrew (designating earlier text) and Aramaic (designating later text). Later additions and redactions are often in an unattributed voice sometimes referred to as *stammim* or simply

as "the anonymous voice of the Talmud."[4] When I cite the Bavli I will include a lower-case "b" to designate Bavli, along with tractate name and folio number and page side. For example, folio 83, page b in tractate Bava Metzia of the Bavli will be written as "bBava Metzia 83b."

In my analyses of stories and passages from the Babylonian Talmud, I will at times refer to manuscripts or textual witnesses. There are many manuscripts of the Bavli and some early printings. Philologists study the differences between these attestations, often trying to ascertain which version(s) is earlier and/or closer to the Bavli as it existed at the end of late antiquity. I will discuss or refer to such textual variants and differences across manuscripts and early printings when they are pertinent to my analyses. To compare textual witnesses, I relied heavily on the transcriptions, photographs, and synoptic charts provided by The Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society (https://fjms.genizah.org). I will often use the abbreviation "MS" for "manuscript," and will always note in a footnote (if not in the main text) which manuscript I am using as a base text for each quoted passage. All translations of Hebrew and rabbinic texts are my own, unless otherwise noted.

There are also times when I will transliterate important words or phrases in my translation and textual analyses. The purpose of transliteration in this dissertation is to aid readers unfamiliar with Hebrew and/or Aramaic in understanding how words in both languages are pronounced, and to help them follow along when I talk about rabbinic word play and my translations of the texts. For this reason, I have chosen to use the Society for Biblical Literature's general-purpose style of transliteration (as opposed to their academic style). This style allows the

[4] For an overview of the scholarship on the editorial layers of the Talmud refer to Catherine Hezser, "Classical Rabbinic Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford University Press, 2004), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199280322.013.0006.

author to choose between noting the silent consonants *alef* א and *ayin* ע with an apostrophe or not at all. I have elected to use the apostrophe when it would aid in pronunciation, such as in *da'at* דעת, and to leave it off when it would not, such as in *rifta* ריפתא (which could also be transliterated as *rifta'*). Additionally, I will transliterate the vowel *tsere* as "ei" instead of "e," to more accurately represent how the vowel is pronounced (think of the "ai" in "tailor," or "ay" in "bay" according to an American Midwestern accent). Choosing to use "ei" corresponds with the common spelling of *beit midrash* (study house) which according to SBL's general-purpose style should be transliterated as *bet midrash.* Additionally, I will transliterate verbs ending in -אי as "ai" (sounds like the word "eye").

Hulshat Da'at

In the Babylonian Talmud, there are 31 passages that mention *hulshat da'at,* a phrase which roughly translates to "illness or weakness of the mind."[5] All of them use variations of the phrase *halash da'atei* translating to "his mind became ill/weak." This phrase appears both in Hebrew and Aramaic, and beyond that most variations are grammatical in nature. The subject of this phrase is feminine only three times: twice in the 3rd person feminine singular–Rav Rehumi's wife and the moon, and once in the first person singular, "My mind became ill/weak" –Rabbi Elazar's wife.[6] Aside from pronouns, this recurring phrase is composed of two words: *halash* "to be/become sick, weak" and *da'at,* which for now let us translate as "mind, opinion, view, or knowledge."

[5] Final counts of *hulshat da'at* stories in the Babylonian Talmud will vary depending on *how* you count them, and which ones you count. For example, do you count one's that only appear in the majority of manuscripts? Or do you choose one manuscript and only the count the times *hulshat da'at* appears in it? If the same passage is cited in two different tractates, do you cite it as one or two? I have decided that if even one textual witness includes *hulshat da'at* in a passage, I will count it, and have also counted passages repeated within the same textual witness twice.
[6] bKetubot 62b (Rav Rehumi's wife), bRosh Hashanah 23b (the moon), and bBava Metzia 24b (Rabbi Elazar's wife).

The verb *halash* is frequently used to express physical weakness or illness. Michael Sokoloff defines it as "to be weak, tired," and "to be sick, ill, ailing."[7] It is noteworthy that *halash* can sometimes be applied to hearts, for example, in a story on bTa'anit 24b (in many of the manuscripts) Rav Papa's *heart* becomes ill (*halash libeih*).[8]

Da'at contains even more possible meanings. Marcus Jastrow lists the word's main definitions as "knowledge, mind" and "temperament, physical disposition."[9] These two definitions alone demonstrate that *da'at* is seen as both mental and physical, that it does not necessarily prescribe to the same mind-body dichotomy prevalent in modern Euro-American thought. Sokoloff's definitions include "intention," and "opinion."[10] When paired with various prepositions, *da'at* can mean "one's self, one's sake" this usage appears in phrases such as "for the sake of so-and-so," "in the opinion of so-and-so," and "for one's self, on one's own accord."[11] *Da'at* also appears in the rabbinic term of art *salka datakh*, "would it arise upon your mind!?," which is used to challenge another rabbi's argument.[12] And when *da'at* is written in conjunction with the word *atsivah*, "sad" it can be use to describe "someone's whose disposition is sad."[13] I will further discuss the meaning of *da'at* in chapter one.

---

[7] Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), s.v. "חלש."

[8] I discuss more fully the manuscript variations of this story in chapter three, part three. For here it suffices to say that in some version Rav Papa only experiences *hulshat lev* (weakness of the heart), in others only *hulshat da'at*, and in some both. Sokoloff translates this as "not feeling well," s.v. "חלש."

[9] Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* (New York, NY: Judaica Press, 2004), s.v. "דעת."

[10] *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic,* "דעתא."

[11] *The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*, s.v. "*dʿt, dʿtʾ,*" accessed June 5th, 2023, https://cal.huc.edu/oneentry.php?lemma=d%28t%20N&cits=all.

[12] Rabbi Yitzhak Frank, *The Practical Talmud Dictionary*, second (Jerusalem: Maggid, 2001), s.v., "סלקא דעתך."

[13] *The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*, s.v. "*dʿt, dʿtʾ,*" accessed June 5th, 2023, https://cal.huc.edu/oneentry.php?lemma=d%28t%20N&cits=all; *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic,* "דעתא."

When *halash* and *da'at* are placed together they most commonly appear as the phrase *halash da'ateih,* which I translate as "his *da'at* became ill." Because *da'at* means more than "mind," I often choose to transliterate it instead of translating it. I translate *halash* as "ill," simply to avoid the clunkiness of "ill/weak." Methodologically, I choose to read *hulshat da'at* (illness of mind), as experiences of madness. Often times these words are translated as a rhetorical euphemism of other "normal" (i.e. non-mad) emotions. I instead ask: What if we take these words as they are? And what can we learn about Babylonian rabbinic conceptions of madness if we do?

Translations of *halash da'ateih* (and its iterations) vary, mostly in how severely the translator reads this phrase. Translations of the Bavli often read this phrase, or the circumstances that trigger it, as an example of hypersensitive affect. For example, bBava Kama 117a includes a story about an interaction between Rabbi Yohannan and Rav Kahana in the study house (*beit midrash*). The Bavli recounts about Yohanan, "*halash da'ateih*." Adin Steinsaltz translates this as "Rabbi Yohanan was offended." The Soncino Babylonian Talmud translation reads "he felt aggrieved."[14] If these words alone don't give us a good measure of what Rabbi Yohanan was feeling, the consequences certainly do. The text reads, "he [Rabbi Yohanan] saw that his [Rav Kahana's] lips were split open and thought he [Rav Kahana] was grinning at him; *halash da'ateih* [of Rabbi Yohanan] and his [Rav Kahana's] soul rested (i.e. he died)."[15] Other times, the greater context is not so clear.

[14] *The William Davidson Talmud,* translated by Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, accessed June 6th, 2023, https://www.sefaria.org/Bava_Kamma.117a.25?lang=bi; Soncino Babylonian Talmud, Baba Kamma, translated by E. W. Kirzner, https://halakhah.com/babakamma/babakamma_117.html.
[15] Translation courtesy of Rafael Neis.

In bHullin 94b, we read that once Rav Nachman, Rava, and Rav Safra were traveling together to the same city. They came upon Mar Zutra who assumed they were intentionally joining him on the road. Rav Safra clarifies that their meeting was happenstance, and Rava questions his candor, since such honesty could cause Mar Zutra *hulshat da'at*: "You made his mind ill (דאחלישתיה לדעתיה *de'a**halish**tei le**da'at**eih*)!" Both Steinsaltz and Soncino translate these words as "you have upset him." This occurrence of *hulshat da'at* can be read as quite innocuous. Mar Zutra was just a little upset, and the debate is about a lie of omission. That Rava and Rav Safra are debating whether *hulshat da'at* should be avoided with the lie of omission seemingly makes for a rather different case than the former instance, in which Rabbi Yohanan's *hulshat da'at* appears to have the power to kill the person who has provoked it. Thus I ask, do the terms "was upset" or "offended" get at either experience?

It could be argued that *hulshat da'at* can be used to describe experiences of varying severity, and as such, my reading of this term as madness is inappropriate (in some, or all, cases). And it could be further argued that even the cases in which *hulshat da'at* seem to denote something more extreme, e.g. capable of causing death, are hyperbolic narrative devices designed to moralize or entertain, rather than to be taken seriously or literally.

There are two questions we must ask in response to such propositions: (1) Do we read the story on bBava Kamma 117a in light of the one on bHullin 94b? (2) Or do we read bHulllin 94b in light of bBava Kamma 117a? That is to say, does bHullin 94b stand as proof that the story about Rabbi Yohanan's *hulshat da'at* and Rav Khanana's consequent death is an example of exaggeration for rhetorical purposes? Or does their story mean that Rava and Rav Safra's debate was much more intense than we might expect. Are we meant to read this story as Rav Safra

putting Mar Zutra in severe danger? Or, as a third question, are these two stories simply examples of two ends of the *hulshat da'at* spectrum?

I would argue first, that the number of times Bavli narratives describe *hulshat da'at* as having drastic consequences or as something to be avoided, suggest that the rabbis take *hulshat da'at* quite seriously. Second, we must be cautious of defining madness too narrowly, or by levels of severity. Madness is a purposely vague and broad term that elides definition, as will be discussed below, and encompasses a plethora of varied experiences. For example, I take medication for anxiety, depression, and ADHD. Whereas my anxiety and depression used to be debilitating, it no longer is—yet I still identify as mad. Similarly, medical experts have linked Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD) with ADHD. The predominate theory is that ADHD's particular brand of neurodiversity means ADHD brains "can't regulate rejection-related emotions and behaviors, making them much more intense."[16] Yet many ADHDers will say their propensity for RSD is more due to the trauma of being neurodiverse in a society that is structured for neurotypicals. This is but two examples of the complexity and variety of madness, and how madness is culturally and socially contingent. Who's to say that Mar Zutra's upset at not being intentionally sought out is not a moment of madness in his culture and society? Especially when his "upset" literally translates to "you made his mind ill!"?

Through my studies of *hulshat da'at* I have found two sources that read the term with a severity and/or weightiness similar to my own reading. In his definition of *halash,* Sokoloff defines the pairing of *halash* with *da'at* as "to become distraught."[17] Shulamit Valler translates

[16] "Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD): Symptoms & Treatment," Cleveland Clinic, accessed August 9, 2023, https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/24099-rejection-sensitive-dysphoria-rsd.
[17] *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic,* "חלש."

hulshat da'at as "extreme sorrow" in her study of sorrow and distress in the Talmud. Both of these definitions understand *hulshat da'at* to be more emotional or psychological.

Below, in the sections on Disability and Mad Studies, I will address the dangers and pitfalls of anachronistic diagnoses and forcing ancient texts into modern day concepts and world views. At present, it suffices to say that the rabbis do not limit *hulshat da'at* to emotional or psychological distress. Indeed, as we have seen in our discussion of the term above, *da'at* does not simply fit into either the "mental" or "physical" box. Nor is it apparent that the rabbis held to these binaries. In fact, as I'll argue in chapter one, some passages provide ample proof that the rabbis *did not* operate within this binary, or at the very least, that they rejected the mind-body dichotomy, teasing and playing with its boundaries.

Of course, *hulshat da'at* is not the only way that the Bavli refers to madness. In bBava Metsia 59b, Rabbi Eliezer is excommunicated by his fellow rabbis. "His eyes flowed with tears and a third of the world was struck: a third of olives, a third of wheat, and a third of barley […] every place that Rabbi Eliezer set his eyes was burned." Later, when Rabbi Eliezer falls on his face (*denafal al anpeih*, דנפל על אנפיה) in prayer, the person who excommunicated him dies. In another narrative, which we will read in chapter two, Rav Ahadvoi's mother behavior can be described as mad when she weeps profusely and exposes her breasts, behavior that the Bavil considers "a perversion of her ways."

When reading *hulshat da'at* along other occurrences of madness, and attending to the protagonist's positionality (social status, gender, etc.) it becomes apparent that *hulshat da'at* is often an experience exclusively available to those of higher class (i.e., the rabbis). The times in which a protagonist is not a rabbi (or rabbinicized) figure the character is uniquely situated in a

position of power or is in the process of claiming more power. Further analysis of how social status and other identity markers inform the way a person experiences madness will be found throughout this dissertation's chapters.

Disability Studies and Crip Theory

Disability Studies has noted three main models in which the world understands disability: the medical model, the social model, and the cultural model. None of these models are meant to be The One Way to think about disability. Rather each has their uses and disadvantages. The majority of discourse about disability in current Euro-American thought still mainly relies upon what disability studies has termed the medical model. The medical model focuses on individuals: diagnosing them and treating or healing their impairments. Scholars of disability studies, however, recognize that disability is a social, and even cultural, construct. We choose to label certain bodies as disabled and others as abled and/or normal.

The social model makes a distinction between impairment and disability and uses this dichotomy to argue that "impairments aren't disabling, social and architectural barriers are."[18] This model is particularly helpful for activists who wish to create more accessible spaces in their communities. While a popular model that is still in use by disability scholars, this model fails to acknowledge that "impairment" is as socially constructed as disability, similar to the way feminist theorists recognize both sex and gender as social constructs.

Alison Kafer critiques this model, noting that the social model also "erases the lived realities of impairment," astutely observing that "social and structural changes do little to make

[18] Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 7, http://muse.jhu.edu/book/23617.

one's joints stop aching or to alleviate back pain" and "renders pain and fatigue irrelevant to the project of disability politics."[19] Furthermore, founding analysis on the impairment/disability divide prohibits scholars from analyzing how notions of able-bodiedness affect everyone. Kafer notes that the social model does not allow room to consider, for example, treating children with growth hormones or anxiety about aging.[20]

The cultural model recognizes impairment and disability as social constructs and shifts the focus from society to culture. Moss and Schipper write that "the cultural model understands disability as a product of the ways that cultures use physical and cognitive differences to narrate, organize, and interpret their world. Whereas in the social model, disability refers to a type of social discrimination, in the cultural model descriptions of disability become one way by which we create or shape culture."[21] The cultural model addresses two needs that the social model does not; its focus on impairment and disability as constructs contingent to specific cultures allows us to denaturalize impairment and gives room to analyze the broader effects of ableist discourse. However, it is less useful when advocating for increased accessibility legislation or seeking to lessen a person's chronic pain.

Alison Kafer's political/relational model draws from all three models described above. For example, elements of the social and cultural models can be seen when Kafer writes about the political elements of her model: "the problem of disability is located in inaccessible buildings, discriminatory attitudes, and ideological systems that attribute normalcy and deviance to

[19] Kafer, 7.
[20] Kafer, 8.
[21] C. Moss and J. Schipper, *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4.

particular minds and bodies."[22] Unlike the social and cultural models, however, the political/relational model "neither opposes nor valorized medical intervention," instead "it recognizes the possibility of simultaneously desiring to be cured of chronic pain and to be identified and allied with disabled people" who acknowledge the socio-cultural origins and characteristics of the impairment/disability binary.[23] Kafer roots her theory in the actual experiences of people with disabilities. As such, this model comes from her need to think about disability in a way that makes "room for people to acknowledge—even mourn—a change in form or function while also acknowledging that such changes cannot be understood apart from the context in which they occur."[24] It allows us to retain goals of better health care while also critiquing the ideology of disability used within our medical system.

The relational side of the political/relational model asserts that disability is always experienced in relationship with other people. Kafer notes, for example, that people may hesitate to invite friends who are disabled to their house, for fear that their house is inaccessible: limiting both their social circle and the social circle of their friend. In this way the relational model allows us to trace the effects of disability more broadly. It notes not only the effects experienced by the person who is disabled, but also the effects experienced by their friends and family: "difficulty accessing reliable and affordable attendant care or finding appropriate housing certainly affects entire families, not only the disabled person him or herself."[25] This acknowledgment of the inherent relationality of disability greatly informs my analysis of *hulshat*

[22] Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 6.
[23] Kafer, 6.
[24] Kafer, 6.
[25] Kafer, 8.

da'at. *Hulshat da'at* often occurs when a person's social status—e.g., their relationship to those around them—is lowered, and reaches out past the mad person themselves, affecting those around them.

When we acknowledge that disability is both socially and culturally contingent, we are left with the realization that there is no hard and fast definition of disability. Instead, we must seek to understand what disability means in various societies and cultures across time and space. As such, it is rarely useful to retroactively diagnose people of the past. [26] Anachronistic diagnoses not only perpetuate harmful pathologizing of bodily and mental differences, they also limit our analyses by forcing modern day concepts and categories onto societies and cultures that may have viewed the world differently. [27] A non-diagnostic approach to disability uses disability not as a descriptor of non-abled bodies, but rather as a methodology. As Max Strassfeld writes, "To interpret disability is therefore also to interpret the constitution of the norms of embodiment and the various ways contingent bodily attributes are conscripted to work together."[28]

This methodology can also be referred to as "cripping," and comes from crip theory. Drawing from both disability studies and queer theories, crip theory:

> is critical of the ways in which certain identities materialize and become representative to the exclusion of others that may not fit neatly within dominant vocabularies of disability. Many works in crip theory focus on the supposed margins of disability identification as well as on the intersections where gender, race, sexuality, and disability come together.[29]

---

[26] The exception to this rule is when a modern reader of historical texts who self-identifies as disabled and/or mad finds meaning and connection when relating to past people who identified (or could be identified) similarly.
[27] Max K. Strassfeld, *Trans Talmud: Androgynes and Eunuchs in Rabbinic Literature* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 115–16.
[28] Strassfeld, 116.
[29] Robert McRuer and Emma Cassabauam, "Crip Theory," obo, accessed June 2, 2023, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0109.xml. McRuer, Robert , Cassabaum, Emma "Crip Theory". In *obo* in Literary and Critical Theory,

As such, crip theory pushes disability beyond the abled/disabled dichotomy, and questions ideas of normativity, instead embracing the resistive deviance of queer, disabled, and/or otherwise nonnormative persons and movements. In this dissertation I draw from the cultural and political/relational models to study disability as a cultural construct and will use disability as a methodology to investigate how the rabbis thought about body and minds, and how those conceptions figure into their notions of a person's position in their communities.

Mad Studies

The term "Mad Studies" was coined by Richard Ingram in 2008, but the field itself began its development long before this, growing out of the antipsychiatry movement, which began in the 1970s and 80s to counter the rise of psychiatric medicalization in Euro-American societies.[30] Due to its origins, as well as barriers that make academia inaccessible to many mad scholars,[31] Mad Studies still straddles the line between academia, activism, and other publics and communities.

This ability to exist within and learn from multiple communities is an important value of mad studies. This is demonstrated, for example, in Rachel Gorman and Brenda A. LeFrançios' assertation that "The most important potential sources for mad theory continue to be collective interventions into ways of knowing that come from outside the academic industrial complex, or

---

https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0109.xml (accessed 2 Jun. 2023).

[30] Rachel Gorman and Brenda A. LeFrancois, "Mad Studies," in *Routledge International Hanbook of Critical Mental Health*, ed. Peter Beresford and Jasna Russo (New York: Routledge, 2022), 107; Brenda A. LeFrançois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, eds., *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2013), 3–9.

[31] Margaret Price, *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* (University of Michigan Press, 2011), https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.1612837; Jasna Russo and Peter Beresford, "Between Exclusion and Colonisation: Seeking a Place for Mad People's Knowledge in Academia," *Disability & Society* 30, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 153–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2014.957925.

that challenge its boundaries and authority."[32] While my own work does not directly address the academic industrial complex, I do study how the hierarchical scholarly communities of Babylonian rabbis create environments conducive to madness. It is my hope that these conclusions will prompt modern day academics to think more about how our own scholarly communities can become less hierarchical and more welcoming, and thus less ableist and sanist.

While still contentious terms, "mad" and "madness" have been reclaimed by many scholars and activists as replacements for terms such as *mental health* and *mental illness* which are part of the often harmful and dehumanizing psychiatric system.[33] The purposeful vagueness of the terms *mad* and *madness* allow for the inclusion of multiple and varied experiences, without inherent positive or negative connotations. Mad studies both recognizes that mental, emotional, and/or spiritual distress is frequently unpleasant and refuses to let anyone but the person experiencing madness describe their experience in negative or positive terms. As Robert Menzies, Brenda A. LeFrançios, and Geoffrey Reaume so aptly state:

> To work with and within the language of madness is by no means to deny the psychic, spiritual, and material pains and privations endured by countless people with histories of encounters with the psy disciplines. To the contrary, it is to acknowledge and validate the experiences as being authentically human, while at the same time rejecting clinical labels that pathologize and degrade; challenging the reductionistic assumptions and effects of the medical model; locating psychiatry and its human subjects within wider historical, institutional, and cultural contexts; and advancing the position that mental health research, writing, and advocacy are primarily about opposing oppression and promoting human justice.[34]

[32] Gorman and LeFrancois, "Mad Studies," 111.
[33] For further discussions of terminology see Price, *Mad at School*, 9–20; Peter Beresford, "'Mad', Mad Studies and Advancing Inclusive Resistance," *Disability & Society* 35, no. 8 (September 13, 2020): 1337–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1692168.
[34] LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, *Mad Matters*, 10.

I have chosen to use the terms “mad” and “madness” for these same reasons. Additionally, the use of madness as a historical category for analysis has the distinct advantage of avoiding anachronistic diagnostics, instead allowing the Babylonian Talmud’s own terminology and conceptions to stand.

It is the acknowledgement of the varied and multiple experiences of madness that cause many in the mad community to resist the incorporation of mad studies into disability studies. Put simply, madness is not always disabling. For example, I began to struggle with depression and anxiety during my senior year at college. At that point, my depression and anxiety were extremely disabling, and I almost didn’t finish my honors thesis. Over a decade later, I still use therapeutic and medical treatment for depression and anxiety but no longer consider it disabling. Conversely, I consider myself mad *and* disabled due to the neurodiversity of my ADHD brain, even though ADHD is medically considered a developmental disability. Other people with anxiety, depression, and/or ADHD may define these experiences differently, and might even resist the words “anxiety,” “depression,” and/or “ADHD” all together.

These fields also each have similar yet distinct lines of inquiries. Disability studies interrogates and critiques ableism, while Mad Studies does the same for sanism. Mad studies is concerned with state coercion and involuntary commitment, while disability studies focus more on confinement and accessibility. Similarities between these two fields include but are not limited to: challenging medical models of disability and madness, seeking to uplift and enable mad and disabled voices, destigmatizing disability and madness, identifying barriers of inclusion

for bodies and minds labeled "abnormal," and interrogating systems of care.[35] It is thus important that these fields remain distinct while also maintaining their intersecting and overlapping dialogues.

Considering the way in which both madness and disability resist a hard and fast definition, I am not interested in determining whether *hulshat da'at* is more disability or madness. I am more interested in the ways that both fields of thought provide theories and methodologies that help me interrogate the ways in which the rabbis inscribed meaning on bodies and minds, and how those meanings both shape and are informed by rabbinic culture and society. I will thus draw from both mad and disability studies in my dissertation.

Intersectionality

Both disability and mad studies draw from the analytical concept of intersectionality. Originating as an idea in the Combahee River Collective's 1978 statement,[36] and later coined as a term by Kimberlee Crenshaw,[37] intersectionality is the idea that a person's identities do not stack or sit side by side within a person, but rather intersect: each informing and, as such, transforming the other identities inhabiting an individual, to create a single unique identity. The

---

[35] Elizabeth Brewer, "Coming Out Mad, Coming Out Disabled," in *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, ed. Elizabeth J. Donaldson, Literary Disability Studies (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 13–20, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92666-7_2. For further conversations on the relationship between these two fields see Peter Beresford and Jasna Russo, "Supporting the Sustainability of Mad Studies and Preventing Its Co-Option," *Disability & Society* 31, no. 2 (February 7, 2016): 270–74, https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2016.1145380; Ryan Thorneycroft, "Crip Theory and Mad Studies: Intersections and Points of Departure," *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 9, no. 1 (February 27, 2020): 91–121, https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v9i1.597.

[36] The Combahee River Collective Statement. United States, 2015. Web Archive. https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0028151/.

[37] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *U. Chi. Legal F.* 1989 (1989): 139–67. For a more extensive history of the emergence and growth of this theory see Anna Carastathis, "The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory," *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 5 (2014): 304–14, https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12129.

members of the Combahee River Collective (an organization of Black feminists), for example, are not Black, women, and lesbians, rather they are Black lesbian women—their experiences differing from white women, straight women, and black men. Applying an intersectional analysis to *hulshat da'at* will deepen our understanding of how gender, social status, and other identity markers figure into how people experience madness differently in rabbinic literature.

Studying Disability and Madness in Ancient Jewish Texts

The study of disability and madness in ancient Jewish texts is still relatively new. The bulk of this scholarship appears within biblical studies, as demonstrated through the three anthologies on this topic published with the past twenty years: *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*; *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature;* and *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary.*[38] The only work to discuss madness in ancient Jewish scripture, to my knowledge, is Luise J. Lawrence's monograph *Bible and Bedlam: Madness, Sanism, and New Testament Interpretation.*[39] However, her goal for this book is "*not* to undertake a historical enquiry into madness in the first century contexts from which New Testament writings emerge,"[40] but rather to interrogate and critique the sanism and ableism that informs much of biblical and New Testament scholarship. As Lawrence states, "I aim to question under what

[38] Hector Avalos, *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, ed. Sarah J. Melcher and Jeremy Schipper (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); Moss and Schipper, *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*; Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong, eds., *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017).
[39] Louise J. Lawrence, *Bible and Bedlam: Madness, Sanism, and New Testament Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2018).It is important to note that Lawrence does not frame her work in within the context of Ancient Jewish Literature, but rather in the context of biblical and New Testament studies. Nevertheless, the I am taking the liberty of reading it as such because the texts in the New Testament were written by Jews.
[40] Lawrence, 3.

structures and power conditions certain individuals are defined as mad, irrational or insane and to ask whose interests such labeling serves."[41]

A pioneering book that studied disability in both biblical and rabbinic literature was Judith Abrams' *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli*.[42] Covering a vast period and collection of texts, this book sets the ambitious goal of considering how disability was used rhetorically in ancient Jewish texts, and how people with disabilities were stigmatized and marginalized in ancient Jewish societies. Setting such wide parameters allows Abrams to study how Jewish views of disability changed in correlation with shifting cultures and understandings of human bodies and minds. She argues that the rabbis put great emphasis on a person's possession of *da'at* and as such, "the 'most disabling' disabilities in rabbinic culture were those which prevented a person from participating in that culture and from being able to recognize its orally transmitted rules and norms."[43] Based on this observation, she asserts that the rabbinic hierarchical system is as follows:

> Ideal Participants: the rabbis
> Full Participants: grown, free, Jewish men with knowledge (*da'at*)
> Liminal Participants: women, slaves, minors
> Stigmatized: someone who is deaf,[44] a *shoteh* [someone with a mental disability], or a minor[45]

[41] Lawrence, 4.
[42] Judith Z. Abrams, *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli* (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 1998).
[43] Abrams, 124.
[44] In antiquity, there was no standardized system of communication for people who were deaf. Because of this, people who were deaf were considered incapable of communication and reasoning. Abrams, 170–71.
[45] Abrams, 197.

While Abram's does not include *hulshat da'at* in her book, her argument that *da'at* is central to rabbinic social status greatly informs my analyses of the causes and implications of *hulshat da'at* in rabbinic society.

The main scholar to integrate disability studies with rabbinic literature is Julia Watts Besler. In her book, *Rabbinic Tales of Destruction: Gender, Sex, and Disability in the Ruins of Jerusalem*, Belser uses "the terminology of disability to signal the way diverse bodily conditions operate within a given culture to generate a marked, stigmatized difference."[46] This allows her to trace what the rabbis considered to be disabling, and then "to parse the meanings scripted onto disabled bodies, as well as the way that disability affords the rabbis a symbolic discourse […]."[47] In chapter four, Belser pushes "the notion of disability beyond the disabled body, beyond the contours of the exceptional form" when studying "the way that disability can encompass entire communities affected by famine and siege, entire communities debilitated through imperial conquest and the brutality of war."[48]

In addition to disability studies, Belser also draws from feminist theory, queer theory, and other frameworks to provide a critical intersectional analysis of disability and its use in rabbinic literature. Of particular note is her engagement with the material feminist conception of transcorporeality, which focuses on the interactions, interconnections, and exchanges between human bodies and their nonhuman environment. She combines this with postcolonial environmental theories, "focusing on the way imperial violence shapes flesh, mind, earth, and

[46] Julia Watts Belser, *Rabbinic Tales of Destruction: Gender, Sex, and Disability in the Ruins of Jerusalem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), xxviii.
[47] Belser, xxviii.
[48] Belser, 81.

memory."[49] I too will use intersectionality in my study of *hulshat da'at* and how it intersects with rabbinic ideas of sex, gender, and social status.

Madalina Vartejanu-Joubert is, as far as I could find, the (only) scholar who has studied madness in rabbinic literature. [50] Vartejanu-Joubert takes a cultural anthropological approach that recognizes madness as a culturally and historically contingent concept. She does not include *hulshat da'at* in her study but does note many other terms worthy of further investigation.

Shulamit Valler dedicated an entire chapter to *hulshat da'at* in her book *Sorrow and Distress in the Talmud.* Valler considers the social reality and cultural context in which literary sources about sadness were created and adopts a psychological approach when she deems it relevant.[51] As such, Valler does not study *hulshat da'at* from a mad studies perspective and even includes an appendix in which the psychiatrist Alex Aviv studies *hulshat da'at* from a psychological perspective.

While there are psychiatrists who participate in mad pride communities and mad studies scholarship (hoping to change psychiatry from within), Aviv does not appear to be one of these. Rather, he tries to retroactively diagnose mad rabbis, arguing that *hulshat da'at* is not depression but "narcissistic injury," and the rabbis who experience it have "narcissistic sensitivity" which makes them vulnerable to critics of the knowledge and threats to their status.[52] This is a good example of the kinds of stigmatizing and pathologizing lenses that

[49] Belser, xxii.
[50] Madalina Vartejanu-Joubert, "Representations of Madmen and Madness in Jewish Sources from the Pre-Exilic to the Roman-Byzantine Period," in *The Routledge History of Madness and Mental Health*, ed. Greg Eghigian (Routledge, 2017).
[51] Shulamit Valler, *Sorrow and Distress in the Talmud*, trans. Sharon Blass, Judaism and Jewish Life (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011), 15.
[52] Alex Aviv, "Appendix: Hulshat Da'at and Self-Psychology," in *Sorrow and Distress in the Talmud* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011), 276–77.

survivors of psychiatry and/or mad folks point out and criticize. Valler herself translates *hulshat da'at* as "extreme sorrow," and comes to similar conclusions as Aviv, arguing that in most cases of *hulshat da'at* "the fierce anguish of the sages is a result of their apprehension for their honor or status, which is based on an egocentric approach to life."[53]

I consider retrospective diagnosis to be ahistorical. Yet, without the stigmatizing and pathologizing implications of Valler and Aviv, one can recognize that community and interpersonal relationships are bound up with bodymind and can affect it in both enriching and devastating ways. This is especially the case when one is part of a community which prides and prizes *certain kinds of bodies and minds* above others (as I will argue in this dissertation). Given that *da'at* was central to rabbinic status, threats to a rabbi's status often resulted in *hulshat da'at*.

In addition to these works that directly study disability and madness in rabbinic literature, I will draw from works that study rabbinic conceptions of the body and/or mind. Rafael Neis' scholarship is one such example. In their earlier works, Neis demonstrates that rabbinic conceptions of the body and mind do not fit into mind/body dichotomy of dominant modern Euro-American thought. Knowledge, for example, shone in faces and could be transferred through sight and "directing the heart," which had previously been read simply as "intention," actually included specific physical comportment.[54] They also locate rabbinic notions of the body

[53] Valler, *Sorrow and Distress in the Talmud*, 103.
[54] Rafael Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Ways of Seeing in Late Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); "Directing the Heart: Corporeal Language and the Anatomy of Ritual Space," in *Placing Ritual Texts: The Rhetorical and Ritual Use of Space*, ed. Mika Ahuvia and Alexander Kocar, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 131–65, https://www.academia.edu/34834234/Rafael_Neis_Directing_the_Heart_Corporeal_Language_and_the_Anatomy_of_Ritual_Space_in_Placing_Ritual_Texts_The_Rhetorical_and_Ritual_Use_of_Space_proofs_.

as porous and malleable in rabbinic understandings of the gaze: "in the blurring together of seer and visual object that undergirded late-antique notions of vision, to see was all too easily to be(come)."[55] In their more recent work, Neis explores rabbinic distinctions (or lack thereof) between human and animal bodies. In their article, "The Reproduction of Species: Humans, Animals, and Species Nonconformity in Early Rabbinic Science," Neis shows that the early rabbis:

> "set the human side by side with other species and consider a range of bodily variation. They embed this account of humans and other species in broader consideration of reproduction, embryology and zoology. What emerges is a thinking about humanness through a rabbinic 'biology' that seeks to determine the boundaries–and more importantly–the overlap between species."[56]

Neis concludes that the rabbis used these boundaries to determine not only who was human, but who was Jewish—that is, they use these bodily designations to determine who counts in their world, and who operates within it.

Mira Balberg also studies how the rabbis used their classification systems to determine who and what "mattered" in their communities in her book *Purity, Body, and the Self in Early Rabbinic Literature.* According to the rabbinic purity system, various objects cannot begin to contract impurity until their owner wants/intends to use them. From this fact, Balberg concludes that "In the Mishnah, human subjectivity constitutes the material world insofar as it determines which components of the material world *matter*, and it constitutes the world of impurity insofar as only that which matters can partake in purity and impurity."[57] She further argues that the way in which humans engaged with this purity system also demonstrates a fluidity to the human

---

[55] Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, 2013, 202. See also their argument that the rabbis used "certain practices of looking" to transform themselves into "icons," 203-204.

[56] Rafael Neis, "The Reproduction of Species: Humans, Animals and Species Nonconformity in Early Rabbinic Science," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (2017): 292.

[57] Mira Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 111, http://muse.jhu.edu/book/30545.

body, that puts in constant relationship to its environment. Tools, for example, become an extension of the human body within the framework of ritual purity.[58]

Another work that engages with the variations and changeability of the human body is Max Strassfeld's recent book *Trans Talmud: Androgynes and Eunuch in Rabbinic Literature*. In this book, Strassfeld transes rabbinic literature. While transing has a few meanings,[59] one of the ways that Strassfeld transes the Talmud is "by paying attention to the materialities of bodies and bodily change […] transing recognizes the particular scrutiny that singles out certain types of bodies and the way that all bodies, in their propensity to change and shift through time, thwart expectations of orderliness."[60] Strassfeld also uses disability studies as part of their project to trans the eunuch in chapter four. They refuse "to interpret eunuchs or 'genitally damaged' men as disabled in advance," and instead "examine the moments when eunuchs and people with 'genital damage' are accommodated by the rabbis, as well as the moments in which they are not."[61]

Across all these works, we learn that the rabbis did not think of the body and mind in the same ways that we do in modern Euro-American society. Their conception of the human body was wider. The mind and body were not so distinct from one another, and each had malleable boundaries. Minds could receive knowledge through a gazing eye, bodies could expand to include tools, and both could transform and be transformed by the people, animals, objects, and environment around them. The inseparability of what we might think of as "mental," "affective,"

[58] Balberg, 97, 101–2.
[59] For an in depth explanation of how one could trans a text, and a complete account of how Strassfeld transes the Talmud, see Strassfeld, *Trans Talmud*, 13–21.
[60] Strassfeld, 20.
[61] Strassfeld, 150.

"psychological," or "emotional" from the body and its parts is seen through rabbinic literature. Hearts shatter; hearts direct; hearts become weak; faces blanche (*halbanat panim*);[62] faces blush; and faces turn yellow.

My intervention in these fields of work, then, is primarily to demonstrate how applying insights from mad studies to rabbinic literature is a useful and generative endeavor. It is also to contribute to the growing intersection of disability studies and rabbinic literature studies, being led by Belser. Additionally, I hope that my dissertation demonstrates how mad studies, a field that mostly focuses on present day or more recent history, can be applied to societies and cultures further back in history. Indeed, my study of hulshat da'at as madness has led to insights that deepen our understandings of how the rabbis thought about bodies and minds, contributing to the scholarship summarized above. It also contributes to scholarship on Babylonian rabbinic culture, demonstrating how seriously a threat to one's status was. Using intersectionality to trace how gender, socio-economic status, and other markers of difference contribute to one's overall status also demonstrates the intricacies of rabbinic social hierarchy. At the same time, the few hulshat da'at stories that critique rabbinic focus on status—of which I argue Honi's story and Yohanan's story are two—shows us that not all rabbis accepted beit midrash hierarchy as it was, and instead found great importance and meaning in their relationships with their fellow rabbis. My final contribution then, is to argue that despite the highly competitive nature of Babylonian rabbinic culture, the Bavli also contains versions of care and society in which humans

[62] bBava Metsia 58b; mAvot 3:1. Catherine Hezser, *Rabbinic Body Language: Non-Verbal Communication in Palestinian Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity* (Boston: Brill, 2017), 210–17.

and nonhumans alike are interconnected and interdependent on each other, and whose care for each other can lead to deep and sustaining relationships.

My Methodology

I have already addressed some aspects of my methodology throughout my discussion of disability and mad studies and intersectionality. To summarize and state more fully what has been sprinkled throughout this introduction, I treat both disability and madness as methodologies in and of themselves. That is, instead of striving to find hard definitions for disability and madness, I use these terms as analytical categories to study how society and culture marks some bodies and minds as "normal" and others as nonnormative, disabled, and mad. Furthermore, just as crip theorists and mad scholars often focus "on the intersections where gender, race, sexuality, and disability come together,"[63] I too use intersectionality to study where disability, madness, gender, and other identities come together in Babylonian rabbinic culture to dictate a person's social status and inform how members of the rabbinic community affect and interact with each other. I also study how ruptures in rabbinic social hierarchy interacts with madness: madness is both caused by a threat or lowering a person's status and can contribute to a lowering of status.

Now to speak more broadly about what methodology led me to this topic and these stories. When choosing my dissertation topic, and later the specific *hulshat da'at* stories to include, I was guided by one of the main lessons I learned throughout this dissertation process: to trust my gut and follow my heart. Allow me to explain. While these cliches are not typically

[63] McRuer and Cassabauam, "Crip Theory." This quote is just describing crip theory, but it easily applies to mad studies as well.

acceptable historical methodologies, their corporal imagery seems quite fitting for a dissertation that discusses bodies, including guts and hearts (see chapters one and three specifically). These cliches also nicely capture one of my advisor's, Rafael (Rafe) Neis', main advising philosophies—if something interests you, it's probably because it's something worth studying, and as you do the work the *who, what, where, when* and *how* of it will become clear.

My dissertation prospectus cast a much broader net than the dissertation presently before you. I proposed a topic of mental disabilities in rabbinic literature, and only one chapter was going to shift focus to discuss madness and *hulshat da'at*. But as I tried to begin work on my dissertation, I was torn on what chapter to start with. So Rafe told me to pick the one that was most interesting at that moment. I picked *hulshat da'at*, and soon discovered there was enough material for a whole dissertation. But I quickly became stuck once again, many of these stories were rich and complex, and as such necessitated in-depth readings and analyses. But there wasn't space for each one, so which stories would I choose? I struggled to find ways to organize these stories. Were some interpersonal and some communal? Were some in the beit midrash and others outside? Were some about retributive punishment and others not? I originally thought that a threat to a person's social status was the cause of *hulshat da'at*, but then I came across stories where a wife goes mad at the sight of her husband's rotting corpse, and rabbis experienced hulshat da'at when rain didn't come, and another in which a rabbi's mind weakened when his wife gave birth to a daughter instead of a son. Those weren't about status, I thought.

After a few months of trying to organize these stories, Rafe finally told me: "just choose the stories that interest you and figure it out from there." Or in other words, (and probably more accurate to what they actually said,) "have faith in your intellectual intuition, you might not know

why these stories are calling to you now, but eventually you will." And so I did. I chose the story about Yohanan and Reish Lakish because my heart broke alongside Yohanan's grief as he repetitively called "where is Reish Lakish!?" Ya'ita and Imma Orhata's[64] tears demanded to be acknowledged. Elazar's unrotting body was too fantastical to ignore, and I needed to understand why it was Batya[65] who experienced hulshat da'at and not him. The rain stories were similarly intriguing. Almost every other *hulshat da'at* narrative seemed to be about interpersonal relationships, but what were the relationships at play when Honi slept for 70 years, and Rav Papa failed to bring rain?

As I read these stories more closely, I realized that Elazar's supposedly rotting corpse was a threat to Batya's social standing. That the failure of Papa's communal fast implied he wasn't as worthy of God's favor as he thought, and that having a daughter instead of a son meant that Rabbi Shimon had not contributed to the rabbinic lineage, that he had no child that he could turn into a great rabbi. Contrary to my first assessment, these tales were about status. It also became clear that while I had originally read the narratives of Elazar and Batya and Yohanan and Reish Lakish to be stories about intimate relationships—they were also about community, just like the rain stories I write about in chapter three. I also realized that each of these stories allowed me to talk about care giving practices, the way that madness is embodied, and that bodyminds are interconnected and interdependent.

[64] Those intimately familiar with the Babylonian Talmud may wonder who these women are. They are Rabbi Yohanan's sister (bBava Metzia 84a) and Rav Ahadvoi's mother (bBava Batra 9b), both of which the Bavli leaves unnamed. I have given them names, and explain my reasoning for doing so and for choosing these specific names in chapter two.

[65] Elazar's wife is not named in the original text (bBava Metzia 84b), and so I have named her Batya. See chapter one for further discussion on why I have named her and why I chose Batya.

And so, retroactively, I can write that I chose these stories because they addressed questions about community, care, madness, and embodiment. But the truth behind this polished academic sentence is that these are the stories whose strong affect drew in my neurodiverse mind into conversation. And thus, a large part of this dissertation is a conversation between a mad and disabled woman (me) and ancient Babylonian rabbis (some of who were also mad and/or disabled). Once I chose these stories, I had to analyze them. And so modern-day rabbinicsts, historians, disability, mad, and feminist scholars were brought into the conversation as well. What resulted is a conversation about the embodiedness of madness, the interdependence we have on each other, and the ways in which communities can both heal and harm.

Summary of Chapters

My dissertation is composed of this introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. A detailed analysis of every *hulshat da'at* passage is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I have chosen specific *hulshat da'at* narratives to analyze in each chapter. I have organized my chapters around a study of *hulshat da'at*'s relationality, beginning with an analysis of how *hulshat da'at* affects interpersonal relationships in chapter one and concluding with a discussion of *hulshat da'at* and community in chapter three.

Chapter one uses the concept of *bodymind* to analyze the story of Rabbi Elazar and his wife, who I name Batya, on bBava Metzia 83b and 84b. The *bodymind* is a concept from disability and mad studies that views the body and mind as inherently connected and inseparable. I demonstrate how reading Elazar and Batya's story with this concept allows us to pay attention to the interplay between body and *da'at* that occurs in the first third of the story. I track the

complex meanings of *da'at* and conclude that the rabbis viewed it as an entity interwoven with soul, self, and emotions, all of which are seated in the body. I also follow the shifting relationship between Elazar and Batya, whose struggle for dominance in their relationship is expressed through *da'at*, uteri, and houses. Paying close attention to the way *hulshat da'at* is affected by this struggle, I conclude that *hulshat da'at* often occurs when tensions in interpersonal relationships threaten to upset the social hierarchy between two people and/or within their communities.

In chapter two, I analyze a narrative about the relationship between Rabbi Yohanan and Reish Lakish, which is found on bBava Metzia 84a, directly in the middle of Elazar and Batya's tale. I argue that reading Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story through disability and mad studies perspectives and within its literary context (both as one of many *hulshat da'at* stories, and its textual position in the middle of Elazar and Batya's narrative) furthers our understanding of the story itself, the story in which it sits, and of rabbinic conceptions of bodyminds as entities that are fluid and interconnected. In doing so, I build upon the work of rabbinic literature scholars who study rabbinic conceptions of bodies as being in constant flux, informing and being informed by those around them. Drawing from the mad studies concept of a *mad border body*, I argue that Elazar's and Yohanan's madness is just as fluid and relational as their bodyminds. I also trace the relationality of their bodyminds, analyzing how cultural and societal contexts inform the way they interact in their interpersonal relationships, and how the ramifications of those interactions affect other people in their lives too.

Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story contains moments when care practices are abused, and moments when they fail. Informed by feminist, postcolonial, disability, and mad studies, I

analyze how systems of care function in both Elazar and Batya's and Yohanan and Reish Lakish's stories, including rabbinic care practices for rabbis experiencing *hulshat da'at.* I argue that both stories contain the notion that being disconnected from one's rabbinic colleagues ends in madness and death and demonstrate how Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story of interrelated bodyminds, fluid madness, and broken systems of care prime us to read about these same themes in Elazar and Batya's narrative.

In chapter three, I analyze six stories in Bavli Ta'anit—four of which are *hulshat da'at* narratives, and two of which I argue are thematically relevant. All six of these stories, I claim, deal with questions about what to do when God is absent, and when systems of care fail. Reading these stories from both disability and enviromental studies perspectives, I propose that each of these narratives imagine communities in which even nonhuman characters, such as the sky and the clouds, have bodyminds that are interconnected with each other and the humans they interact with. Such a view of community, I assert, allows us to consider ecosystems as systems of care. In five of these stories, rabbis and their communities must decide what to do when rain does not fall, and their standard rainmaking rituals fail to make rain come. In one of these stories, the famed rain bringer Honi HaMe'aggel, fails to understand a bible verse and wonders why a farmer would plant carob trees. Hoping to help him find the answers to these questions, the ground encircles him as he sleeps for 70-years. Effectively waking up in the future, Honi's community no longer recognizes him, he experiences *hulshat da'at*, and he dies. The earth's actions were well intended, but its "care" caused Honi irreparable harm.

Chapter 1 Locating *Da'at:* Intestines, Uteri, and Houses

CONTENT WARNING: Self-Harm, Gore

In the introduction, I undertook an initial analysis of the word *da'at* - mind, opinion, knowledge – and the related concept *hulshat da'at* –illness/weakness of the mind. In this chapter I'll expand my analysis of both through a close reading of a story in the Babylonian Talmud about Rabbi Elazar and his (unnamed) wife, paying particular attention to the narrative's use of word play and the characters' intersectional identities. With this focus, we'll see that this story portrays *hulshat da'at* as something that affects and is affected by a person's body, mind, and interpersonal relationships. As we will see, in this story rabbis Elazar's responses to his unsettled *da'at* creates tensions in many of his relationships, including his relationship with his body which he repeatedly causes to suffer each night. Tensions with his human relationships, and wavering faith in his *da'at* also lead Elazar to experience further *hulshat da'at.* How he and the other characters respond to these tensions is influenced by their various social identities (rabbi, woman, man, laborer, slave, etc.) and the power dynamics between each character. Throughout this analysis, the story also reveals a rabbinic view of body and mind that does not fit modern day, Euro-American conceptions of the mind and body as distinct, separate entities. Rather, the rabbis' viewed *da'at* as something tied up with the soul, the self, and one's emotions, all of which are rooted in the body.

In this story (found on bBava Metzia 83b and 84b, and here according to MS Hamburg), Rabbi Elazar, an oft-cited rabbi who lived in Roman Palestine in the second century CE, goes to great lengths to ease his doubts in the trustworthiness of his own *da'at*, which causes tensions in his marriage. For clarity's sake, I have divided up the story into three parts, and will analyze each in depth. In part one, Elazar's *da'at* becomes unsettled when a washerman insults him. Acting in anger Elazar, who works for the Romans, has the man arrested for thievery. Later, Elazar regrets his actions and begins to doubt his *da'at* (since he acted so impulsively and arrested an innocent man). Elazar seeks to reassure himself that his *da'at* is still true, locates his *da'at* in his gut and undergoes abdominal surgery to test his *da'at*'s accuracy. Throughout the narration of these events, the Talmud uses wordplay to highlight the physicality of Elazar's *da'at*, as well as of his soul and emotions, entities that the text treats as tied up, and perhaps even interchangeable, with *da'at*. Part two sees Elazar continuing these physical tests of his *da'at,* though in more of a penitentiary vein. It also introduces his wife and uses imagery of houses and reproductive organs—mostly uteri—when narrating the struggle for control between the spouses. Part three recounts the events after Elazar's death, in which his body does not decompose and in which it/he continues the rabbinic activity of adjudicating disputes. Meanwhile, his wife continues to test his body's vitality, and her *da'at* weakens when she thinks he/the body might be decomposing. The story ends when Elazar is finally buried and Rabbi Yehudah the Patriarch proposes to Elazar's widow—which she soundly refuses. The oscillating unrest of Elazar's and Batya's minds in conjunction with their struggle for power, also makes it clear that the strength and/or weakness of a person's *da'at* is often tied up with the power afforded them by their

position in the community's social hierarchy. Conversely, a threat to that power often results in an unsettled or weakened *da'at*.

This tale views the mind as part of the body, at times even embedded in specific body parts. Disability and mad studies express a similar notion in the concept *bodymind*—a term that expresses the inseparability of what is often understood as a mind-body dichotomy.[66] The first to introduce this term (borrowed from trauma studies), to the fields of disability and mad studies, is Margaret Price who explains that "…because mental and physical processes not only affect each other but also give rise to each other—that is, because they tend to act as one, even though they are conventionally understood as two—it makes more sense to refer to them together, in a single term."[67] When we reject the now prevalent mind-body dichotomy, and instead read Elazar's story through the lens of *bodymind,* new understandings arise about how late antique Babylonian rabbis understood *da'at* to be deeply intertwined with soul, self, emotions, body, and social status. I am not claiming that the rabbi's view of body and mind are exactly the same as this modern concept. However, I do borrow and use the term *bodymind* throughout this dissertation as a shorthand for acknowledging the ways this and other rabbinic texts locate *da'at* within the body, and describe emotions, self, and the soul as equally embodied in a person's flesh.

Past scholarship on this narrative has primarily focused on Elazar—instead of Elazar *and* his wife—and has interpreted the tale through lenses other than disability, mad, and gender

---

[66] This dichotomy particularly exists in Euro-American thought after Descartes. See Sami Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), for discussion of cultures that do not think in terms of a mind/body dichotomy.

[67] Margaret Price, "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain," *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 269. For an additional foundational work on this concept see, Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined*.

studies. Perhaps the most well-known (amongst rabbinicists) analysis of this story is Daniel Boyarin's reading of the tale as grotesque satire in which we see hero-sages topple, informed by twentieth century Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of Greco-Roman (Hellenistic) literature as grotesque satire. Boyarin pairs this story alongside other rabbinic narratives he identifies as comedic to support his greater argument that the Babylonian Talmud is "part and parcel of an expanded late-ancient Hellenism."[68] And while his mode(s) of analysis lead to useful insights and conclusions of the text, I hope to here demonstrate that other modes of analysis are equally generative and legitimate. Whereas Boyarin is quick to read fat bodies and large penises as grotesque and vast amounts of blood and pus as satirical in late antique cultures, my own reading hesitates to label these texts as such, and instead continues along with the methodology I presented in the dissertation's introduction: what if we take the rabbis at their word(s)? Is it really so hard to believe that *hulshat da'at*—weakness of mind—can be interpreted as madness? And similarly, is it really so obvious that we are meant to laugh at a rabbi's unsettled mind, or assume that Elazar's pride in his large body/penis is comedic? When we read these texts through the lenses of disability and mad studies, I propose that the answers to these two questions is no. It is quite feasible to read these texts as serious, despite its moments of exaggeration, and perhaps even *because* of its exaggerations (could not the exaggerations be a rhetorical tool to highlight the story's main points rather than invoke comedy?). Indeed, I argue that when we use madness as methodology, take inspiration from the concept of *bodymind,* and employ intersectional analysis, this tale emerges as a story that explores the meanings and experiences

[68] Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 180, https://doi.org/10.7208/9780226069180.

of *da'at* and troubles the body/mind and man/woman dichotomies. Through such a reading, we are able to conclude that the rabbis viewed the *da'at* as intertwined with body, emotions, soul and self, and *hulshat da'at* as something experienced by a person of high social standing when their status is threatened.

1.1 Elazar's Bodymind: *Da'at,* Intestines, Emotions, and Soul

In part one of his story, Rabbi Elazar experiences a rollercoaster of emotions, oscillating between a settled and unsettled bodymind. It begins with Elazar's encounter with a Roman officer whose job it is to capture thieves—a crime which is punishable by death. The rabbi questions him: "perhaps you took away righteous people and left behind wicked people!?" and advises the officer on how to accurately identify thieves, unwittingly earning himself the role of thief-catcher. Two people, his teacher and a laborer—a washerman—express their disdain that he is effectively collaborating with the imperial authorities:

פגע[70] ביה ר' יהושע בן קרחה אמ' ליה חומץ בן יין עד מתי אתה מוסר עמו של אלהינו להריגה	Rabbi Yehoshua son of Korhah [Elazar's teacher],[69] encountered Elazar, and said to him "Vinegar son of Wine! For how long will you hand over the people of for execution?!"

[69] Shmuel Safrai, "Eleazar Ben Simeon," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 6 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 308, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587505763/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=78b6e539.

[70] The verb I have here translated as "encountered," also means "to attack, strike" and in noun form can mean "contact, accident, (evil) occurrence; affliction." *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, s.v. "פגע." This verbiage thus holds a double meaning, Yehoshua "ran into/encountered" Elazar, but he also "struck" Elazar with his harsh words. Also of note, in MS Hamburg (the one I am using in this chapter), Yehoshua and Elazar meet in person and talk face to face. In all other manuscripts and printed editions, they instead speak via messenger, the verb שלח "sent," replaces the verbs פגע "strike" and אמר "he said" throughout this conversation between student and pupil (meaning each line of dialogue was sent via messenger). The one exception is the Escorial manuscript that uses שלח "sent" the first two times, but אמר "said" for Yehoshua's final reply. The use of a messenger highlights the metaphorical distance that now exists between these two men, a rhetorical device that the story uses two other times, as we shall see.

Elazar said to him, “I am destroying thorns from the vineyard.”	אמ' ליה קוצים אני מכלה מן הכרם
Yehoshua said to him, “The owner of the vineyard will come and destroy its thorns.”	אמ' ליה יבא בעל הכרם ויכלה את קוציו
One day, a certain washerman encountered Elazar[71] and called him “vinegar son of wine.”	יומא[72] חד פגע ביה ההוא כובס קרייה חומץ בן יין
Elazar said, “Learn from all of that insolence that he is evil.”	אמ' מדאית ביה עזות פנים כולי האי שמע מינה רשע
He said to them, “capture him!” And they captured him.[73]	הוא אמ' להו תפסוה תפסוה

Elazar’s teacher, Rabbi Yehoshua, accuses him of sending Jews to their death, insulting him as “vinegar son of wine.” The insult speaks to the ways that Elazar sours his illustrious heritage by his actions and is unworthy of his predecessors. Elazar’s attempt to justify his work is negated by his teacher who argues that it is up to God to dispose of wicked Jews. Continuing with the wine and grape metaphor, Yehoshua claims that “the owner of the vineyard”—God—is the one who will enact punishment, “destroying thorns”—thieves— “from the vineyard”—the Jewish people. We hear nothing from Elazar, who presumably continues his work. Subsequently, when a washerman similarly insults Elazar, the latter deduces from this “insolence” that the

[71] The text always refers to Elazar as “Rabbi Elazar” when mentioning him by name (as it tends to do for the other rabbis mentioned in the story as well). Often when the text uses pronouns, I’ll insert the character’s name for clarity, but without a title, to help readers know the difference. Also, you’ll note that in my own writing I use a rabbi’s title and full name the first time I mention him, but then drop the title moving forward, simply for the sake of brevity.
[72] With this word (*yoma*) the story switches from Hebrew to Aramaic (the same word in Hebrew is *yom*). This suggests that an earlier version of the story existed in which Elazar did not have this conversation with the washerman.
[73] bBM 83b, I will cite from MS Hamburg for the entirety of this story.

washerman is an evil person and turns him into the Romans, abusing his power in an act of retaliation.

After the washerman is arrested, Elazar calms down and tries to redeem the washerman—that is pay a price to get him out of jail. But he is unsuccessful and chastises himself by quoting a Bible verse. Here is where the text begins to speak about *da'at*:

לבתר דנח דעתיה איבנש לפרוקי ולא מצי	After his *da'at* had rested [*d'nah da'atei*], he gathered [money] to redeem him, but was not able [to do so].
קרי עליה שומר פיו ולשונו שומר מצרות נפשו	He recited this verse about his him, "He who guards his mouth and tongue guards his *nefesh* [soul/self] from distress/pain" [Proverbs 21:23].[74]

The expression "his *da'at* had rested" is our first (in)direct mention of madness. Elazar, we infer, experienced an *unrested da'at* upon hearing the washerman's reprimand. Only "after his *da'at* had rested" does Elazar regret his actions and seek to undo them.

Elazar's recitation of the verse, "He who guards his mouth and tongue guards his *nefesh* from distress" (Proverbs 21:23) could be read in two ways: as self-chastisement for rashly calling for the washerman's arrest, or as a continued chastisement of the washerman's harsh words. According to the first reading Elazar continues to regret his actions. According to the second reading, Elazar's recitation is an attempt to wash his hands of the whole situation—saying, "well, I tried to save him, but he really shouldn't have spoken out of turn in the first place." Considering Elazar's continued distress over this situation, I argue that Elazar is applying this verse to himself.

[74]Note the following verse, "Insolent, proud, 'scorner' is the name of the one who acts in insolent fury." (Proverbs 21:24). Already, we see a hint of Elazar's ambivalence about who is really to blame: himself or the washerman.

If we read Elazar as applying this verse to himself, then he is also applying the verse to his bodymind, which includes his distressed *da'at.* The Hebrew word *nefesh* is most commonly defined as "soul" or "self." When Elazar recites this verse in relationship to his distressed *da'at*, he uses *da'at* and *nefesh* interchangeably. Just like *da'at*, *nefesh* has a plurality of meanings some of which are more physical than others. In Biblical Hebrew, *nefesh* also functions a verb meaning, "to breath, sigh." Its full range of meaning as a noun is "soul, living being, life, self, person, desire, appetite, emotion, and passion."[75] The word's equivalent in Babylonian Aramaic, *nafsha*, means "soul, body, self, life, human being, person, and body," and functions as a base for reflexive pronouns, such as *nafsheh*, "himself."[76] When using this verse to describe his unsettled *da'at*, Elazar conflates the meanings of these two words. The verse itself links mouths and tongues with soul. Mouth, tongue, soul, and mind are all bound together in Elazar's Biblical recitation.

As such, it is clear from the first mention of *da'at* that Elazar, and the late antique rabbi-storytellers, have a complex understanding of *da'at* that does not simply fit into a body-mind dichotomy. Indeed, it appears that many things that we might today define as nonphysical—souls, emotions, opinions—were seen as quite intertwined with and rooted in the human body. Furthermore, through the recitation of this verse, Elazar implies that he could have avoided distress had he kept his mouth and tongue quiet. Speech as expressed by the mouth and tongue is similarly a physicalized-mental operation that elides separation into body versus mind. In fact, the tongue and mouth themselves protect the *nefesh* from distress/pain. The verse in the

[75] Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew English Lexicon*, Reprint edition (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979), s.vv. "נפש," "לבב."
[76] *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, s.v. "נפשא."

context of the larger narrative sets up a consistent interrelated relationship between the body and mind.

Unfortunately, Elazar's resolution to not speak in haste or anger comes too late. He is unable to save the washerman, who is hung on the gallows for a crime he did not commit. Facing these consequences, Elazar's *da'at* is once again no longer at rest, which the story communicates through weeping, and the attempts of his fellow rabbis to comfort him:

זקפוה קם תותי זקיפיה וקא בכי	They hung him. Elazar stood below the gallows weeping.[77]
אמ' לו ר' אל ירע לך הוא ובנו באו על נערה המאורסה ביום הכיפורים באותה שעה	They [the other rabbis][78] said to him, "Rabbi do let this shatter you.[79] He and his son had sex with an engaged young woman on Yom Kippur at the same time!"[80]
הניח ידיו על בני מעיו ואמ' שישו בני מעי שישו ומה ספק שלכן כך ודאות על אחת כמה וכמה מובטח אני בכם שאין רמה ותולעה שולטת בכם	He rested [*heniah*] his hand on his internal organs, saying, "Rejoice internal organs, rejoice! Just as your doubt[s] [are correct], how much more so are your certainties! I trust in you that no maggot or worm will rule over you."

Despite the tension between Elazar and his community, his fellow rabbis still try to comfort him—informing Elazar that the washerman was guilty of a different capital crime. Comforting a

[77] MS Florence 8-9 says "he was distressed" וקא מצטער, instead of "weeping." MS Frankfurt, U: Ms. Barth. 107 seems to instead add this word before the whole sentence, "Distressed, he stood below the gallows…" It appears that the sentence could have ended with "weeping" בכי, but the manuscript is too damaged to tell for certain. This is notable because the verb "to be distressed, pained" מצטער, could be read as a descriptor of madness. For a deeper analysis of this verb in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, see the first chapter of Valler, *Sorrow and Distress in the Talmud*.

[78] While the text itself does not explicitly state that it is the rabbis who reassure him, it is safe to assume that the rabbis are who "they" are referring to, since the logic they employ is rabbinic in nature, and this formula of "actually he/she/they committed this other sin" appears frequently in rabbinic literature.

[79] Note early printings instead say, "Let it not be bad/evil in your eyes." A turn of phrase, like many we see in this story, that eschews a distinct body/mind divide.

[80] Note, this is the only manuscript that includes the words "at the same time."

fellow rabbi when he is under severe distress is common in *hulshat da'at* stories, as I explained in the introduction. The verb that I have translated as "shatter (*yeira*)," comes from the root רעע (*ra'a*) which is defined as "to strike against, shatter, impair."[81] Through this word choice, the text continues to make clear the debilitating effects of an unsettled or weakened mind.

Thus far Elazar's emotions have taken several turns: from an incited mind to a settled mind. Elazar now experiences grief and tears at the washerman's death as he stands under the gallows, followed by relief and elation when he learns that the washerman was indeed worthy (according to rabbinic law) of capital punishment.

The Babylonian Talmud uses diction to draw certain links throughout this tale, beginning here where the repetition of the word "rest (*nah*)" is used to link body and *da'at.* Notably, upon hearing from his colleagues Elazar "rests (*heniah*) his hand on his internal organs," and enjoins them to rejoice. The use of the verb "to rest (*nah*)" ties his action of hand to belly with the previous line "after his *da'at* had rested (*denah*)," linking Rabbi Elazar's *da'at* and intestines: his hand seeks to comfort and settle his belly/mind, while his words reassure their "doubts" and "certainties"– terms usually ascribed to "opinions or views (*de'ot*, pl. of *da'at*)" held by the mind (*da'at*). Elazar doesn't address himself—or his "self" as an abstracted, disembodied entity—directly. Rather he locates/identifies the seat of his pronouncements and mind within and as a part of his body, specifically his belly. He further embodies his innards' stability and his trust in his gut by declaring that "no maggot or worm will rule over you"—a claim that they will never

[81] *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, s.v. "רעע." When in the imperfect tense and followed by the article ל, as is the case here, the verb is usually translated as "to displease, grieve." I kept the definition of "shatter" because I felt it better encapsulate the word's meaning and more vividly depicts the emotional turmoil Elazar is experiencing, and continues to experience, throughout most of the story.

decompose, seemingly due to their strong *da'at*. This theme of mental relief, trust, and flesh impervious to the usual travails of death and corruption threads, like a winding loop of intestines, across the entire story.

Having seemingly and fleetingly re-settled his mind/belly—or should I say, *bellymind*—with his hand, words, and the news that the fatal effects of his wrath were ultimately deserved, we learn that Elazar's "*da'at*, even so, was not settled." It appears Elazar does not fully trust his colleagues' information. To reassure and settle his unsettled mind, Elazar resorts to a fascinatingly embodied procedure. The relationship of settled mind to gut is once again materialized when what we might call a surgery tests Elazar's declaration of trust in his intestines against their ability to withstand decomposition.

But even so his *da'at* was not settled (*la yatva*).[82]	ואפלו הכי לא יתבא דעתיה
They gave him sleep medicine, brought him to a marble house, and cut open his belly. They took out from him baskets of abdominal fat and set (*umotvei*) them in the sun in Tamuz and Av,[83] and they did not decompose.	אשקיוה סמא דשונאתא ועילוה לביתא דשישא וקרעוה ליה לבריסיה והוו מפקי מיניה דיקולי[84] דתרבא ומותבי בשמשא דתמוז ואב ולא מסרח

[82] Vatican 115a follows this sentence with the words, "he examined his *nafsha,*" הוה בדיק מנפשיה. Which further supports my reading that Elazar, and this text, are treating *da'at* and *nafsha* as interchangeable. It also directly situates *nafsha* in the body and abdominal organs.

[83] Significantly, these are the first two summer months in the Jewish calendar.

[84] The spelling of this word (in English, "baskets") was corrected on the manuscript. All other textual witnesses spell it according to the correction and repeat the word, which would be translated as "baskets and baskets" or "*baskets."* The word is not repeated in the Hamburg manuscript. For a comparison between the discussion of rotting fat and blood with a passage in Aristotle's *History of Animals* see Shamma Friedman, "Shamma Friedman, 'Aristotle in the Babylonian Talmud? A Scholastic Interpolation by the Talmud's Anonymous Glossator,' Maarav, Vol. 21, No. 1-2 (2014): 311-317," accessed August 10, 2023, https://www.academia.edu/38101986/Shamma_Friedman_Aristotle_in_the_Babylonian_Talmud_A_Scholastic_Interpolation_by_the_Talmud_s_Anonymous_Glossator_Maarav_vol_21_no_1_2_2014_311_317.

כל תרבא נמי לא מסרח	[The Talmud's anonymous editorial voice[85] interrupts the narrative to raise an objection:] But not all abdominal fat decomposes!
כל תרבא דאית ביה שוריקי סומקי מסרח והאי א'ע'ג' דאית ביה שוריאקי סומקי לא מסרח	[The Talmud's anonymous editorial then gives a solution, before returning to the narrative:] All abdominal fat that has red veins in it decomposes. But despite the fact that it had red veins in it, it did not decompose.
קרי אנפשיה אף בשרי ישכון לבטח	He recited about his *nafsha* [himself] the verse, "[Therefore my heart was glad, and my honor rejoiced,] also my flesh will settle in trustworthiness" (Ps. 16:9).

The narrative continues to use word repetition for rhetorical effect, linking mind and body. Just as the key term "rest (*nah*)" was used to describe Elazar's *da'at* and to link the latter with his belly, so too the term "settle (*yatav*)" links *da'at* and body: Elazar's mind is still not settled (*la yatva da'atei*) and after removing his intestines they "set (*umotvei*) them in the sun." This word repetition emphasizes the surgery's purpose of *settling* Elazar's bodymind. First his *da'at* was *unsettled*, but now his body parts associated with *da'at* are being "*set*" in the sun, with the ultimate goal of proving Elazar correct and thus *settling* his mind.

And the test-surgery proves successful, Elazar's insides are insusceptible to normal processes of decomposition. Earlier, Elazar declared his "trust (*muvtah*)" in them by assuring them that "no worm or maggot will rule over" his belly. Now he recites a verse affirming said

[85] As explained in the dissertation's introduction, the Babylonian Talmud went through centuries stages of oral and written transmission and editing before it reached the text we have today. Early layers of the text preserve which rabbi asks a question of the text and/or provides a solution. Later editors/contributors interject anonymously, as we see here.

trust in his "flesh which will settle in trustworthiness (*lavetah*)."[86] The trust in his gut is physicalized by its steadfastness in the face of processes that usually decay mortal flesh.

But *da'at* is not the only thing intertwined with flesh. Emotion, in this case gladness, is braided within the organ of the heart, "therefore my heat was gald."[87] Emotion is also alluded to with the verse's words "my honor rejoiced." Scholars in fact suggest emending *kavod* (honor) to *kaved* (liver), the latter an internal organ that parallels the heart in the first phrase.[88] Regardless, this pairing was no doubt suggestive to rabbinic-style midrashic wordplay, which scholars consider to be related to *kaved*—the adjective "heavy"—another kind of settling. Thus, the embodied procedure and the results to which it testifies, as well as the allusive verse Elazar recites, manifest the intermingling of body, mind, emotions, and soul in rabbinic culture.

In addition to unearthing a rabbinic understanding of *da'at*, part one of the narrative also demonstrates one of the most common ways that *da'at* is weakened in Talmudic stories—through the lowering of a person's social status (or threat thereof), and thus a lessening of their power in their interpersonal relationships and social contexts. *Da'at* is thus tied up with power, not interchangeably as it is with soul, self, emotions, and body, but in the sense that *da'at* and power/social status affect each other.

---

[86] The verb "settle down (*shakan*)," is different from the verb "to settle/set (*yatav*)," but echoes it, nevertheless.

[87] The heart is itself a term that combines affect and body part. See Neis, "Directing the Heart," which argues that *kavvanat halev* (direction of the heart) needs to be understood as one of several rabbinic concepts of "body-mind" that upset binaries of mind/body dualisms and metaphorical and embodied language.

[88] The word *caveid* – honor or liver – has the root *k.v.d.* with connotations of heaviness and weight. *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gensenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*, s.v. "כבד." This entry also notes that Galen considered the liver to be the "*the heavy* organ, *par excellence,* of the body," suggesting that this same idea existed in ancient Jewish thought. On the relationship between honor (*kavod*), liver (*kaved*), and heavy (*kaved*) see Mark S. Smith, "The Heart and Innards in Israelite Emotional Expressions: Notes from Anthropology and Psychobiology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 427–36, https://doi.org/10.2307/3266440.

Elazar draws power from his intersecting identities as Jew, rabbi, man, free person, and Roman employed thief-catcher. In the dissertation's introduction, I briefly discussed the analytical concept *intersectionality.* Intersectionality is the concept that identities do not stack or sit side by side, but rather overlap with and within each other. Applying an intersectional analysis to Elazar allows us to understand how his various identities work together to inform his experiences and how others interact with him. His Jewishness grants him membership in his local Jewish community. Being a rabbi grants him authority amongst the other rabbis and the Jews that follow them. As both man and free person he has more power and agency than slaves, women, and minors—and thus often some kind of power over these others.[89] His job for the Romans grants him a kind of coercive power over his community—whomever he identifies as a thief gets arrested and hanged.[90] But it also threatens his other status markers when it causes conflict between Elazar and his fellow rabbis and Jews, as demonstrated when Elazar's teacher and a washerman call him "vinegar son of wine," an expression that denotes their low regard for him.

Babylonian rabbis took much pride in their association and even their scholastic and family lineages, and often used them to rhetorically assert the superiority of their ways of being Jewish.[91] When Rabbi Yehoshua, Elazar's teacher, says he his unworthy of his ancestors as

[89] This trio is often listed together as a halachic category in rabbinic literature.
[90] For an in depth analysis and catalogue of the various status markers of Palestinian rabbis—including Torah knowledge and public offices—see Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 255–306.
[91] See for example opening lines mPirkei Avot 1:1-12. Ronit Nikolsky and Tal Ilan discuss a passage on bSanhedrin 5a in which Babylonian rabbis lay claim to the Oral Torah produced by Palestinian rabbis. Their work also includes a substantive historiography of the relationship between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis. Ronit Nikolsky and Tal Ilan, "Mehata LeHatam, from There to Here (BSanh 5a), Rabbinic Traditions between Palestine Adn Babylonia: An Introduction," in *Rabbinic Traditions between Palestine and Babylonia* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 1–31. Other works on rabbinic elitism based on intellect and/or geographic location include (but are not limited to): Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (JHU Press, 2004), 80–101, 123–42; Jonathan A. Pomeranz, "Did the

"vinegar son of wine," he negates Elazar's position as a rabbi and the social power he gets via his rabbinic lineage (in this regard, Yehoshua may be the "wine"). But since Yehoshua is his teacher, and thus of higher status, Elazar responds with respect and engages him in learned debate, justifying his actions and dealing with his interlocutor. As Elazar's teacher, it is acceptable for Yehoshua to rebuke him.[92] The washerman, however, does not have the same privilege, and as such his words signify that Elazar is already beginning to lose his social standing in his community—a fact that causes Elazar's *da'at* to no longer be at rest and explains Elazar's vastly different responses to the two men.

When rebuked by a washerman, viewed as Elazar's social inferior, Elazar does not even deign to address him directly. Rather, he reacts harshly, punishing the man for the perceived insult and reasserting his dominance in the process. In other *hulshat da'at* stories similar incidents of disrespect, and thus threats to social position, instigate the experience of *hulshat da'at*.[93] This is further emphasized in our story by the fact that Elazar's *da'at* only rests once he has reasserted his position of power over the washerman. That is, only once Elazar has restored the social hierarchy, is he able/willing to try and rescue the washerman.

However, as we read, Elazar's *da'at* does not stay calmed for long. When his unable to save the washerman's life and correct his impulsive actions, Elazar's status is once again threatened, though this time the threat comes not from his community, but from his doubt in his own *da'at*. Elazar relies on his *da'at* as both rabbi and thief catcher, and thus an untrustworthy

---

Babylonian Sages Regard the Ammei-Ha'Aretz as Subhuman?," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 87 (2016): 115–43, https://doi.org/10.15650/hebruniocollannu.87.2016.0115.

[92] Studies of rabbinic teacher-student relationships in Palestine and Babylonia (respectively) are Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 332–52; Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud* (JHU Press, 2010), 91–149.

[93] For example, bBava Kamma 117a and bBava Metzia 84b.

da'at threatens the power he gains from both positions. In addition to asserting authority through lineage, Babylonian rabbis sought to gain power through their mental acuity, i.e., their *da'at*, using it to assert themselves as scholars and experts of Jewish law.[94] Intellectual sharpness also determined a rabbi's position in relationship to his colleagues. In several narratives in the Bavli a rabbi's seat in the study house or rabbinic academy is promoted or demoted based on his scholarly performance: two of these are also *hulshat da'at* stories.[95]

Elazar uses logic and strategy to identify thieves in his Jewish community. His does so effectively when first discussing thief-catching strategy with the Roman officer, but inaccurately when he concludes the washerman's insolence means he is evil to the point of deserving the death sentence. (Despite the fact that his colleagues reassure Elazar that the washerman was indeed guilty of a capital offence, Elazar does not appear to agree, as evidenced by his further tests.) An unreliable *da'at* thus threatens both of his rabbinic and governmental positions, a fact that unsettles Elazar's *da'at* further.

1.2 Batya's Bodymind: Wife, House, and Uterus

In part two of the story, Elazar continues his struggle with trusting his bodymind and with his social status, particularly in relation to his wife, who emerges as the protagonist of the rest of this tale. This introduces a different dimension to the gender dynamics in the narrative's exploration of bodymind, social status, and madness. As we will see, whereas most of Elazar's power comes from his *da'at/*gut, his wife's comes from her house/uterus. In parts two and three

[94] Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, 13–14.
[95] bBava Kamma 117a and bBava Metzia 84b.

of our story, Elazar tries to claim her uterine power and she seeks to access the power of *da'at*. When she succeeds in part three, she also becomes just as susceptible to *hulshat da'at* as Elazar.

As is often the case for women in rabbinic literature, Elazar's wife is unnamed. The Bavli often refers to women as "daughter of X" or "wife of Y," or even as "his house (*beiteih*)" to refer to a man's spouse. This last term is how our story refers to Elazar's wife. The term "house" can also be used to refer to a woman's uterus.[96] Cynthia M. Baker shows that while rabbinic wives were not forced to stay secluded in their homes, they were bound to houses through architectural language.[97] The word *bayit* thus has multiple meanings, a fact that this narrative will use to undermine a straightforward understanding of marriage, bodyminds, and gender.

I will refer to Elazar's wife by name in order to protest against this gendered anonymity and hence erasure. I name her Batya, בתיה (*batyah*), since its letters (except for a missing *yod*) allude to the word ביתיה (*beiteh*), "his house(hold)/wife."[98] Batya means "daughter of God." In choosing this name I hope to acknowledge the ways that even as mediated via the rabbinic men who tell her story, Batya had agency and personality apart from being one of the entities and beings under the domain of her husband and householder.

Part one concluded with Elazar joyfully congratulating himself and his "flesh" on their incorruptible endurance. Part two picks up once again the pattern of Elazar's vacillating—settled and unsettled—bodymind. While his colleagues' reassurance and the proof of his unrottable

---

[96] Note that "house" as uterus specifically refers to a married woman's uterus. A virgin's sexual anatomy is called a "door." It only becomes a "house" once she is married. Cynthia M. Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 56-57.

[97] See the second chapter of Baker's book, *Rebuilding the House of Israel,* 34-76.

[98] Hebrew and Aramaic are written without vowels (though some consonants can also serve as vowels, much as the letter *y* in English.) The rabbis often utilize this fact for clever word play, and I have continued the tradition in my choice of Batya's name.

intestines affirm Elazar's *da'at*, his comfort continues to be short lived thus revealing the guilt that lies behind his self-doubt. As such, his fleshy "tests" now take on the form of iterated penance. Every night Elazar takes upon himself unspecified sufferings. Not realizing his ailments are self-inflicted, Batya cares for him by making him medicine that she pays for from her dowry. When she learns the truth, she leaves him and returns to her father's house.

ואפלו הכי לא סמך ר' אלעז' בר' שמע' אנפשיה	But even so, Rabbi Elazar bar Shimon did not rely/lean on his *nafsha* [himself].[99]
(דיל' חס ושלום מטא בי האי מעשה לידיה) קביל עליה ייסורי[101] כל יומא מאורתא הוו מיתין ליה שתין נטמי[102] ומפקי מתותיה שתין משיכלי דמא וכיבא	In case, God forbid, this incident happened by his hands, he received upon himself sufferings.[100] Each day, at night, they gave him sixty felt-cloths and would bring out from beneath him sixty basins of blood and pus.
ועבדה ליה דביתהו שתין מיני לפדא ואכיל להו ולא הוה שבקא ליה דביתהו למיפק לבי מדרשא כי היכי דלא לידחקוה רבנן	And his "house" made him sixty types of fig-based dishes and fed him. And she, his "house," would not give him leave[103] to go out to the study house [*l'vei midrasha*] so that the rabbis would not press him.[104]

[99] The printed versions of this text (Soncino, Vilna, and Venice) and three of the manuscripts (Munich 95, Vatican 117, Frankfurt, U:Ms. Barth 107) use *da'at* instead of *nafsha*. In addition to MS Hamburg 165 (the manuscript I am using), three other manuscripts (Escorial, Oxford:Heb. C. 17/69-78, Vatican 115a) use *nafsha*. This goes to show how interchangeable the two are.

[100] Most manuscripts do not include this sentence. Aside from Hamburg 165, it appears only in Munich 95, Vatican 115a, Vatican 117, and Escorial, which has a slightly different version of this line starting with "*Since* this happened by *my* hand…," הואיל ומטא ההוא מעשה לידאי instead of "In case, God forbid…"

[101] MSS Munich 95, Escorial, Vatican 115a, and Vatican 117 also contain variations of this phrase (most notably, in the Escorial manuscript, Elazar says this in the first person).

[102] In the majority of the other manuscripts this word is spelled נמטי, it appears the scribe of our manuscript simply flipped the two middle letters.

[103] A more literal translation is "would not leave him to…" but I think "would not give him leave" more accurately captures what is happening here. I am also consciously choosing to read the text this way. "Not give him leave" puts the power in her hands, whereas "not leave him to" leans towards the derogatory image of a nagging wife.

[104] In MS Florence 8-9, instead of the line "so that rabbis may not press him," reads "She reasoned he might be ill." סברא דיל' חלש (*sevara dilmah halash*). In this version, Batya is already exercising her *da'at* ("she reasoned") and suspects that it's the rabbis at the *beit midrash* who are making her husband's bodymind ill (*halash*).

באורתא אמ' להו אחי ורעי בואו בצפרא אמ' להו אחי ורעי לכו	At night he said to them, "my brothers and my friends come!" In the morning he said to him, "my brothers and my friends, leave!"[105]
יומא חד שמעה דביתהו אמרה לה את קא מיתית להו עילוך בלית ממון של בית אבא אימרדא ואזלא לבית נשה	One day his "house" heard him, she said to him, "you are bringing them upon yourself! You are diminishing the money of my father's house [referring to her dowry]!" She deserted him and went to her father's house.

In place of the "baskets and baskets of abdominal fat" removed from him in the surgery, every morning his sufferings produce "sixty basins of blood and pus," which are mentioned not as details in an experiment, but as the graphic outcome and material product of his suffering. Rather than seeming to prove or affirm, the process is habitually repeated, with only the temporary relief Batya provides through sixty corresponding remedies.

Elazar's guilt demonstrates his continued mistrust of his *da'at*. As the story states, "In case, God forbid, this incident happened by his hands, he received upon himself sufferings." His shift from seemingly passing the test to repeated penance implies that Elazar is still uncertain acceptance that his actions were justified. The story further emphasizes the penitentiary nature of these new sufferings through wordplay. The noun I have translated as "suffering (*yisura*)," can also mean "chain, prison."[106] The dual meanings of this word both allude to the washerman's capture and suggest that Elazar is trapped in his own inner turmoil.

Due to these sufferings, Elazar relies on Batya's care, and as such cedes *some* control of his bodymind to her. When we meet Batya, she is funding her husband's health care with her

[105] The majority of the manuscripts (as opposed to MS Hamburg, which I am using) include the words "…leave because [you are] a neglect of Torah study!" MS Vatican 117 is a variation of this line, saying instead "leave because [you are] a neglect of the *beit midrash*!"

[106] *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, s.v. "יסורא"

dowry ("the money of my father's house") and making sixty dishes each day. Just as significantly, she constrains Elazar's activities and movements, preventing him from going to the study house lest he be harmed. When Batya learns that her husband's sufferings are self-inflicted, she grows angry due to wasted resources spent on her husband's care and promptly returns (along with her funds) to her father's house, no longer caring for or funding Elazar.

Houses in this story manifest seats of power and the tensions between them. The rabbinic study house, or *beit midrash* (in Aramaic, *bei midrasha*), has come to be used in English to refer to any place in which rabbis gathered to study Torah. While the *beit midrash* has taken many physical forms historically and has various corresponding names in rabbinic literature, it's general connotation as the seat of rabbinic communal power remains constant.[107] Jews who followed the rabbis would come to the rabbis for various rulings, a practice we'll read of further on in the story. Torah study was generally thought to be a male-only activity by the rabbis, with some notable exceptions. As such the *beit midrash* was primarily a male-only, rabbi-only space except for when women and/or *amme ha'arets* ("commoners" or literally "people of the land") came to seek a rabbinic ruling.[108] It is thus striking that Batya was able to keep her husband away from the *beit midrash* and instead encapsulated within her own house.

---

[107] Hayim Lapin, "The Origins and Development of the Rabbinic Movement in the Land of Israel," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. Steven T. Katz, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 222–223, doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521772488.010. Study houses were originally anywhere the local group of rabbis gathered. They could be in someone's courtyard, under a tree just outside of town, etc. As the rabbis gained prominence, they began to have designated spaces and buildings. For example, sometimes the *beit midrash* is called a *yeshiva,* which literally translates to "sitting," because a *yeshiva* was wherever a man *sat* to study Torah. For a conversation on the banquet hall as a *beit midrash,* see Gil P. Klein, "Torah in Triclinia: The Rabbinic Banquet and the Significance of Architecture," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 102, no. 3 (2012): 325–70. Today, Jewish seminaries are often called *yeshivot* (pl. of *yeshiva*) and *beit midrash* in modern usage refers to a room filled with Jewish texts and tables in which people (many are now egalitarian) can study Torah and other Jewish texts.

[108] While this was mostly the case, there are times in which women were allowed in the *biet midrash* and allowed to engage in Torah study. This was especially so in early rabbinic generations when the rabbis did not have dedicated

The houses in this story both function in tension with each other, while also symbolizing the tensions (societal and interpersonal) that Elazar and Batya must navigate. The *beit midrash* and wife/household both make their demands on Elazar and exercise critique toward him. Batya, in turn, is caught between her husband's and father's houses and fully excluded from the *beit midrash*. When she marries, the "money of [her] father's house" gives her some control over Elazar's medical care, as does her role of housewife. But her power is not total. She stops Elazar from going to the *beit midrash* but he still invites sufferings upon himself in their own home, and drains Batya's dowry with his medical expenses. Batya's only recourse is to return to her father's house, which gives her autonomy from Elazar but places her under her father's care.

The two houses that stand out the most in the tale, the couple's house and the *beit midrash,* also come to symbolize the sources of power that each character draws from. Elazar wields the power of his *da'at* in the *beit midrash* (that is, when Batya doesn't stop him from going), and Batya uses her role as "his house"/person-with-a-uterus to exercise some control over her husband's actions. When we remember that *bayit* in the context of marriage is distinctly gendered feminine in the Bavli, the rhetorical significance of these houses become clearer: the *beit midrash* is associated with *da'at,* and the household with Batya's role as wife and woman—i.e., as a person with a uterus. As the woman/wife in the relationship, Batya runs the household and as such controls when her husband can leave it. Additionally, as a woman, she falls into the often woman-gendered role of caretaker. As feminist studies acknowledge, gendering caregiving as "woman's work" can be a way to keep women subservient. And as

beit midrash buildings and would often meet in their homes. For more on this see Judith Hauptman, "A New View of Women and Torah Study in the Talmudic Period," no. 9 (2010): 249–92.

disability studies acknowledge, the position of caregiver can also be a way to exert control, and abuse, over those in need of care.[109] Batya is able to use her intersecting identities of woman, wife, caretaker, and freewoman from a wealthy family, to subvert this gendered caregiving role but does so in a way that leaves her husband without care, as we see when she takes her dowry, as well as herself, back to her father's house. Elazar's health lies in her hands, *and* in her purse. Batya no doubt expects that Elazar will have to give up his nightly sufferings once she leaves.[110]

The theme of *bayit* continues throughout the rest of the story, and the power that Batya gains from her house/uterus becomes clearer as Elazar tries to usurp it. Despite Batya's intention to force Elazar to give up his sufferings, her absence allows Elazar to assume full bodily autonomy and control of the household—something that Elazar boasts about when speaking to Batya via messenger. Elazar also demonstrates his intellectual prowess when he returns to the *beit midrash* and exercises rabbinic control of women's uteri by ruling sixty samples of vaginal blood ritually pure:

סליקו הנך ספונאי עילו ליה שתין עבדי בדנקיטי שתין ארנקי ועבדו ליה שתין מיני לפדא ואכל	Sixty sailors rose up and came and brought him sixty slaves, each of which handed over sixty purses and made him sixty types of pap and he ate them.
יומא חד אמרה לברתה זיל ח(י)[ז]י מאי קא עביד אבוך	One day she said to her daughter, "Go and see what your father is doing."

[109] Christine Kelly, "Building Bridges with Accessible Care: Disability Studies, Feminist Care Scholarship, and Beyond," *Hypatia* 28, no. 4 (ed 2013): 786, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2012.01310.x.

[110] Note that throughout this chapter I mainly accept that the rabbis thought of women to be the ones with uteri (except for when Elazar tries to usurp uterine power later on). While this generalization suffices for my analysis, it is important to note that the rabbinic conceptions of sex and gender did not necessarily fit into male/female and man/woman dichotomies. For further discussion on this see scholarship by Max Strassfeld and Sarra Lev, including (but certainly not limited to) Strassfeld, *Trans Talmud*; Sarra L. Lev, "They Treat Him As a Man and See Him As a Woman: The Tannaitic Understanding of the Congenital Eunuch," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (2010): 213–43.

She went. He said to her, “Ours is greater than theirs.” He recited the biblical verse about his *nafsha* [about himself], “[She is like the ships of the merchant,] she brings her food from far away. [She rises while it is still night and gives food to her household…]” [Proverbs 31:14-15].	אתא[י]אמ'(רה) לה שלנו גדול משלכם קרי אנפשיה ממרחק תביא לחמה
One day he went to the *bei midrasha* [study house].	יומא חד נפק לבי מדרשא
They brought before him sixty types of blood.[111] He declared all of them ritually pure.	איתי לקמיה שתין מיני דמא טהרינהו כולהו
The rabbis were murmuring about him, saying, “Is it possible[112] that not one of them is uncertain!?”	הוו קא מרנני רבנן עליה אמרי אפשר דלית בהו חד ספק
He said to them, “If it’s in accordance with me, let them all [the children birthed by the women who sent the blood samples] be males, and if it’s not let there be one female among them.”	אמ' להו אם כמותי הוא יהיו כולם זכרים ואם לאו נקבה אחת ביניהם
They were all males, and they [their parents] named them after Rabbi Elazar.	היו כולם זכרים אסיקו להו ר' אלעזר על שמיה
Rabbi [Yehudah the Patriarch] said, “How much of Israel’s propagation has this evil person [Batya] annulled!”[113]	א"ר כמה פריה ורביה בטלה (..... ..)[רשעה] זו מישראל

Sixty sailors take Batya’s place in funding and making Elazar’s medicine. The story uses the number sixty repeatedly to emphasize narrative connections. The sixty dishes Batya prepares

[111] Based on the continuation of the story, it's safe to assume that these are samples of blood that have come from vaginas, and he is ruling whether they are discharges that require ritual immersion or not.

[112] All the other textual witnesses use סלקא דעתך (*salka datkha*) instead of אפשר (*efshar*). I will discuss this later in the chapter.

[113] I took some creative liberties with this translation in favor of more accurately capturing its meaning. bBM 84b.

for her husband correspond to the sixty basins of blood and pus that Elazar fills each night. Now, sixty sailors fund Elazar's health care with sixty purses and feed him sixty dishes. Finally, the number sixty is employed again to link sixty samples of women's vaginal blood to Elazar's sixty basins of pus and blood and harkens back to the red veins in Elazar's abdominal fat that did not rot in the sun.[114]

In part one, two of the terms used for Elazar's intestines, "*beneih me'av*" and "*ciresah*," can also be used to designate "womb" or "uterus."[115] This double meaning, along with the graphic description of basins filled with blood and pus (which can be compared to menstruation and other vaginal discharges), foreshadow how his power struggle with Batya is expressed in houses and uteri.

When Batya sends her daughter to check on Elazar, he boasts that he is doing better than ever, and better than Batya's performance as wife/house before she left. Elazar's words "ours is greater than theirs" invokes a phrase he utters in an embedded story on the preceding page—between parts one and two of Elazar and Batya's narrative. In that anecdote, a Roman matron mocks Elazar and Rabbi Yishmael bar Yosi's large penises, claiming that their children could not conceivably be theirs. They respond by boasting that their wives' genitalia are even larger, "theirs are greater than ours."[116] I suggest that here Elazar inverts this phrase when messaging

---

[114] Boyarin also connects the sixty basins of blood and pus to the sixty samples of blood in Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 102.

[115] *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, s.v. "בריסא, ברסא." The word *me'av* "his innards," is often used to express internal organs more generally, and sometimes refers to "loins" or "womb." *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gensenius Hebrew-English Lexicon,* s.v. "מעה;" *The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*, s.v. "m'yn, m'y'," accessed January 9, 2022, http://cal.huc.edu/oneentry.php?lemma=m%28yn%20N&cits=all.

[116] bBM 84a. For a deeper analysis of this text see chapter three, also see Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 95-99.

his wife via their offspring, perhaps somewhat ironically given the embedded anecdote, "ours is greater than theirs."

I argue that the rabbi this time claims that he possesses the bigger reproductive organ and/or the greater household.[117] He bolsters his claim with his citation from the Proverbs passage which lays out the virtues of an ideal wife who busies herself with *beitah* (her household).[118] In applying this verse to himself, Batya's husband claims that she is no longer needed, and that he effectively has usurped her role in–or as– the household/person with a uterus. Like the woman in Proverbs, who is likened to merchant ships, his sailors provision him with hyperbolic sixty-fold enslaved people and victuals. In his actions, Elazar further emphasizes his newfound independence and freedom and householding/uterine power by leaving the house (which Batya previously prevented). He now goes to the study house, where he rules on the ritual purity status of sixty women and their uteri, successfully orchestrating the birth of sixty boys in the process.

The Bible forbids sex between a menstruating woman and her spouse, because menstrual blood was considered ritually impure: the rabbis elaborated upon this restriction and the attending ritual impurities of menstrual bleeding. It became a practice for women to bring samples of vaginal emissions before a rabbi to have him discern whether it was menstrual blood. When Elazar rules the blood samples as non-menstrual blood, all sixty women are permitted to

[117] This is not the only late antique story in which a man appears/claims to have a menstruating uterus. See Ellen Muehlberger, "Simeon and Other Women in Theodoret's Religious History: Gender in the Representation of Late Ancient Christian Asceticism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23, no. 4 (2015): 583–606, https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2015.0050.

[118] Proverbs 31:10-31. See verses 15, 21, and 27 which refer to her household (*beitah*). Elazar cites part of verse 16, "[She is like the ships of the merchant,] she brings her food from far away," alluding also to the sailors who now sustain him.

have sex. As in the sixty bowls of pus and blood, the sixty dishes, and sixty sailors, there is also something hyperbolic about these sixty samples. That so many samples would be designated pure (e.g., not menstrual blood) stretches credulity.

This incredulity is expressed in the narrative, but this time it is the rabbis who doubt Elazar instead of Elazar himself. In questioning his rulings, they question his *da'at* and his rabbinic authority.[119] Manuscripts other than MS Hamburg make the link between Elazar's ruling and his *da'at* through a slightly different wording. In those textual witnesses, when the rabbis doubt Elazar, instead of saying "Is it possible…" the rabbis incredulously ask "Does it even occur to you (*salka datakh*)…" or literally, "arise [in] your mind (*da'at*)!" This phrase is a rabbinic term of art that appears in debates in rabbinic literature. It is quite clear that in various transmissions of the story, this phrase was intentionally used here to further emphasize the rabbis query of Elazar's *da'at*.

Faced with his colleagues' doubts, Elazar must once again verify his own bodymind. But now that he has control of the house/uterus, he verifies his *da'at* not through his own flesh, but through the flesh of women, their uterine materials, and their progeny. Elazar declares, "If it's in accordance with me, let there be males and if not, let there be one female." The resulting totality of males, named after him, validate his ruling. In this sense, the outcome of Elazar's bodymind is demonstrably productive through the proliferation not just of boys (the favored gender) but even mini-Elazars. I mentioned above that rabbinic lineage was important to the

[119] His rocky relationship with his colleagues was already alluded to when we were told that Batya "would not give him leave to go out to the study house so that the rabbis would not press him." It is unclear in the text itself whether we are meant to read this as a literal or metaphorical pressing, as the verb, *dahak*, can be read either way. Perhaps we are meant to read it as both (as is the case with many of the words used in this story). The pressures of Elazar's tension with his fellow rabbis contributes to his physical and emotional sufferings.

rabbis. So too was continuing that lineage through reproduction. But reproduction could be achieved biologically or preferably, as scholars have shown, through the proliferation and training of rabbinical students.[120] Elazar seems to find a creative middle ground here, wielding his rabbinic *da'at* about, and of, uteri to produce mini-Elazars with/via other women's uterine material and outside of his household and spouse Batya.

These results, unblemished by a single daughter, appear to temporarily ease the tension between Elazar and his comrades, as is demonstrated when Rabbi Yehudah the Patriarch takes Elazar's side in his argument with Batya. Yehudah castigates Batya, asking "How much of Israel's propagation has this evil person [Batya] annulled" by preventing her spouse from leaving her domestic confines. Yehudah's statement takes on added dimension when we recall that earlier Elazar and Batya's child appeared in the story—a girl and emissary for her mother. Indeed, in another Talmudic passage on bBava Batra 16b, Rabbi Shimon, the patriarch's son, experiences *hulshat da'at* when his wife gives birth to a daughter and not a son.

Elazar's roundabout way of producing boys gains further significance when we remember that *bayit* can refer to a wife's reproductive organs. When Batya has control of her "house" there's only a daughter. When Elazar gains control of the "house" he's able to facilitate the birth of sixty boys. This also harkens to the term *piryah ureviyah* used for propagation, a term that evokes the blessing in Genesis 1:26 and elsewhere for humans to propagate. The rabbis turn this blessing into a commandment but dispute from the Tannaim (the early rabbis) and onward whether this is incumbent on women or only men and even whether girl children satisfy the

[120] For more discussion on rabbinic reproduction see Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

obligation. A minority of views include women, but most rabbis in these texts see this obligation as the province of men. Elazar thus ends part two as the victor in his struggle with Batya, with control over both house/uterus, propagation, and the *beit midrash*/*da'at.*

1.3 The Madwoman and her Undead Husband

Part two ends with Elazar at the height of his power, hyper productive, living large, controller of house/uterus and *beit midrash*/*da'at*. Part three opens with Elazar on his deathbed, and his wife, Batya back with him. [121] This new situation, as we will read, allows Batya to emerge as the final victor over both house/uterus and *beit midrash*/*da'at*. Due to his continued tensions with his colleagues, Elazar knows he will not be buried and instructs Batya to place him in their attic. Elazar's bodymind, due to its trustworthy incorruptible *da'at*, fails to decompose. Batya returns to her role as caregiver and guardian of house/uterus, Elazar's bodymind, and *beit midrash/da'at*. Even when eventually Elazar is buried, she maintains her power, refusing to once again become another man's "house" and turning down the patriarch Yehudah's marriage proposal.

כי הוה קא (נחייה) [ניחא] נפשיה אמ' לה לדבית' ידענא בהו ברבנן דרתיחו עילואי ולא מיעסקי בי שפיר אגניין בעיליתאי ולא תידחלי מינאי

When Rabbi Elazar's *nafsha* [soul] was resting (*nayeiah*) [i.e. when he was dying], he said to his "house," "I know that the rabbis are angry[122] with me, and will not properly tend to me [upon my death]. Lay me down

[121] It's not clear when their reconciliation occurred. Perhaps we are meant to infer that his claim of being "greater" convinced Batya to return, or that she's returned only now that he's dying.

[122] The word I have translated as "angry," *dereteihu*, literally means "boiling," another physical description of an emotion. Also of note, in place of "I know that the rabbis are angry with me," manuscript Florence 8-9 instead says, "I know that the rabbis hold [their anger] about me in their *da'at,"* ידענא דרבנן נקטי בדעתיתו עילויה. The verb I have translated as "hold" is *nakat* and when used in the phrase *nakat milta' beda'atei* its translated as "he felt aggrieved." The manuscript does not include the word *milta'* ("word," or "thing") but it seems safe to assume a similar sentiment even without that word. *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic,* s.v. "נקט."

[*aganayin*] in my attic and do not be afraid of me."

Rabbi Shmuel son of Nahmani said "The mother of Rabbi Yohanan told me that the "house" of Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon told her, 'Not less than eighteen and not more than twenty-two years[123] that he slept [*ganai*] in his attic, every day I would go up and inspect his hair. When a hair[124] would fall off, blood would come.

א"ר שמואל בר רב נחמן אשתעיא לי אימיה דר' יוחנן דאישתעיא לה דביתהו דר' אלעזר בר' שמע' לא בציר מתמני סר ולא טפי מעשרין ותרתין דהוה גני בעילתיה כל יומא סליקנא מעיינא ליה במזייה כי הוה משתמטא ביניתא הוה אתי דמא

One day I saw a creeping thing coming out of his ear. My mind became ill [*halasha da'atai*]. He appeared to me in a dream and said to me, 'It's nothing. One day I heard something disgraceful about a rabbinical student, and I did not protest as was required of me.'"

יומא חד חזאי ריחשא דקא נפיק מאוניה חלשא דעתאי איתח[ז]י לי בחלמא ואמ' לי לאו מידי הוא יומא חד שמעי בזילותא דצורבא מרבנן ולא אמחאי ביה כדאיבעי לי

When two people would come seeking a judgment they would stand at the entrance, one said his piece and the other his. A voice came out from his attic-house [*bei alita*][125] and said, "Person so and so, you are guiltless, and person so and so you are culpable."

כי הוו אתו בתרי לדינא הוו קימי אבבא אמ' מר מלתיה ואמ' מר מלתיה נפק קלא מבי עליתא ואמ' איש פל' אתה זכאי ואיש פל' אתה חייב

One day his "house" was quarreling with a neighbor. She said to her, "May

יומא חד הוה קא מינציא דבת(י)הו בהדי שיבבתה אמרה לה תהא כבעליך שלא נתן לקבורה

[123] While this manuscript does not include the word "years," the majority of the other manuscripts do.

[124] A second word for "hair" is used in the text, *binita,* which can also mean "small fish" or "worm," no doubt foreshadowing the worm that will crawl from Elazar's undead ear. *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature,* s.v. "ביניתא."

[125] "House (*bayit*)" can also mean "room" or "chamber." A smoother translation would be "upper chamber" instead of "attic-house," but I wanted to emphasize the repetition of *bayit,* which takes the form "*bei*" when it's the first word of a compound noun in Aramaic (in Hebrew it takes the form *beit*). The word I have translated as "attic (*alita*)" can also mean "upper chamber." Thus, combining it with *bei* is a bit redundant and therefore can be read as rhetorical emphasis.

you be like your husband who was not given for burial!”

The rabbis said, “All of this is certainly not proper conduct!”

[אמרי רבנן כולי האי לאו אורח ארעא]

There are those who say [that it happened this way]: Elazar’s father] appeared to them in a dream. He said to them, “I have one pigeon among you, and you do not wish to bring him to be with me!”

איכא דאמרי אבוה איתחזי להו לרבנן בחלמא אמ' להו פרידה אחת יש לי ביניכם ואין אתם מבקשים להביאה אצלי

The rabbis went to tend to him. The citizens of Akbaria did not give them leave [to do so], because as long as Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon rested [*nayach*] in his attic, no evil animal had entered their city.

אזול רבנן לאיעסוקי ביה לא שבקוה בני עכבורי דכל כמה דהוה נייח ר' אלעזר בר' שמעון בעלתיה לא סליק חיה רעה במתיהו

One day, Yom Kippur eve, the citizens of Akbaria were preoccupied. They [the rabbis] took him out to his father’s burial cave. They found a snake that was encircling the cave. They said to him, “Snake, Snake, open your mouth and this son may enter and be with his father.” It opened for them, and they brought Elazar up [into the cave].

יומא חד מעלי דכפורי הוה טרידי בני עכבורי אזול אסקוה למערתא דאבוה אשכחוה לעבנא דהדרא ליה למערתא אמרי לה עבנא עבנא פתחי פיך ויכנס בן אצל אביו [פתחה להו ועילוה]

We do not learn why Elazar is on his deathbed. Is it from all the sufferings? Or is he simply dying of old age? The story does not answer these questions, instead focusing on Elazar’s bodymind’s continued care and activities, including an emphasis on the fact that he is finally at rest. When the text tells us that Elazar is dying, it uses the phrase, “his *nafsha* was resting (*nayeiah*).” A typical rabbinic euphemism for death, the image of a rested soul here also harkens back to Elazar’s earlier struggles to maintain a rested and settled mind. We saw in part one that the text treats *nafsha* and *da’at* interchangeably, and the story continues to do so now. It even

brings back its use of the verb "to rest (*nah*)," reminding us of when Elazar's *da'at* first rested after he had the washerman arrested—"after his *da'at* had rested [*d'nah da'ateih*]"—and when "he rested (*heniah*) his hand" comfortingly on his belly after hearing the washerman was guilty of a different capital crime. When he tells Batya to "lay me down in the attic," he uses the verb *ganai*, which means "to be shaded, to lie down, sleep."[126] This is also how Batya refers to him later when she says, "Not less than eighteen and not more than twenty-two years that he slept [*gani*] in his attic." Later, in the text uses *nah* again when saying, "as long as Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon rested [*nayeiah*] in his attic, no evil animal had entered their city." No longer unsettled, Elazar sleeps and rests in the attic, under both the eaves and Batya's full care.

Now resting in peace, he no longer needs to undergo tests to prove the trustworthiness of his *da'at*, nor to punish himself through sufferings for his *da'at* failing. Batya, however, continues the tests for him, and experiences *hulshat da'at* when she mistakenly thinks his bodymind has begun to fail. In her own voice, we hear how Batya would inspect his undead corpse daily, finding assurance that he remained incorruptible in the blood (echoing the earlier bloods from the surgery, sufferings, and women's uteri) that still flowed from his living-dead body. However, on one occasion, Batya sees a worm crawling out of Elazar's ear and, as she powerfully testifies, "my mind became weak [*halasha da'atai*]," at the evidence that his body is decomposing. Her husband then appears to her in a dream and assures her that this is not the case. But why was Batya so distressed over the prospect of her husband's rotting bodymind? While no doubt a horrifying thing to witness in its own right, the following scene helps us begin to understand what is truly at stake for Batya in this moment—what she almost lost.

[126] *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, s.v. "גנא, גני"

In part two, Batya starts her story with quite a bit of power only to learn that she is not completely in control. She may be able to keep her husband home, but she is unable to keep him from inviting his nightly sufferings. She relinquishes this power when she returns to her father's house, and Elazar takes her place bragging that he is the larger house/uterus. But now, upon her husband's undeath she regains control of their domicile and Elazar's bodymind within it.

Not only has Batya retaken control of the house/uterus, but she has even subsumed and gatekeeps a/the *bei midrasha.* In the scene that follows, we see Elazar's *da'at* still fulfilling its/his rabbinic duties even while in rest. While he can no longer go to the *beit midrash*, people with disputes come to him for adjudication, standing below the attic entrance, talking to his bodymind, and listening for his vocal decision. In rabbinic literature the *beit midrash* is sometimes described as an *aliyah,* "upper-storey,"[127] this term was presumably used when the rabbis met in someone's attic. Elazar's attic is referred to by the Aramaic version of this same word, *ilita.* When his undead bodymind is adjudicating, the text even goes so far as to call it *bei ilita* ("attic-house" or "attic-chamber"), mirroring the Aramaic for *beit midrash, bei midrasha,* and in so doing emphasizing that the study house is now *inside* Batya's domicile. In part two, Batya ceded the "house" to Elazar and he fully took over her reproductive-uterine power through his actions in the *beit midrash*. However, now the tables have turned. Just as Batya's limited control over Elazar's bodymind in part one becomes fully realized in part three, so too she now controls who can and cannot access Elazar's *da'at* at the *beit midrash* whereas before

[127] Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (JHU Press, 2004), 16. See also a discussion by Gil P. Klein on how the rabbis would study Torah in banquet halls and its surrounding rooms, including upper chambers, on Shabbat, "Torah in *Triclinia*," 348-49. For a thorough analysis of study houses in Palestinian rabbinic communities, including ones located in upper rooms, see Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 209–14.

she could only deny Elazar access. Elazar ends part two with both the power of uterus and *da'at*, but at the close of this story, Batya now has control of both.

Batya's newfound access to *da'at* power is vividly signified by the fact that her direct speech and voice only resound once Elazar is undead, when she relays her experiences of tending to her spouse's living-dead body in the attic. Furthermore, her words are embedded within a typical rabbinic style of oral transmission: "Rabbi A said in the name of Rabbi B." It is not often that women appear as transmitters of rabbinic traditions, so it is noteworthy when they do. It is also notable that a second woman is the tradent of the original statement, "Rabbi Shmuel son of Nahmani said, '*The mother of* Rabbi Yohanan told me that *the "house" of* Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon told her...'"[128] Here, even if ultimately transmitted by a man/rabbi, we read a snippet of the likely dense and entangled women's networks and the circulation of women's discourse, a discourse that thanks to Batya's newfound regulation of the domesticated *beit midrash* has been brought into and preserved by rabbinic transmission. The narrative then continues in Batya's statement in her own first-person voice. This is doubly significant: it is one of only two occasions in the Talmud that a human woman experiences *hulshat da'at,* and it is the only instance in which *hulshat da'at* is narrated in the first-person.[129] Batya *deploys* her *da'at* in the form of women's transmission, and describes her own embodied-mental experiences and emotions.

But with Batya's recent access to power through *da'at*, she also becomes susceptible to an unsettled and/or weakened mind—*da'at* and the status it brings is now something she can

[128] Emphasis added. now

[129] For context, there are 31 *hulshat da'at* stories in the Babylonian Talmud (that I have found).

lose. It is also still contingent upon Elazar. As a woman, Batya is still never fully free of her husband, and still must, however subversively, accrue her standing through him. This can explain why she daily continues to test the incorruptibility of Elazar's bodymind. And can perhaps be provided as an alternate reading for why the rabbis finally decide to bury Elazar. That is, perhaps Elazar's burial was actually an attempt to remove him from Batya's care, and in doing so undo the standing Batya gains from housing him.

The narrative preserves two versions of how the rabbis realize that Elazar had died and was not given a proper burial. In the first version, Batya gets into an argument with her neighbor. In the heat of the moment the neighbor wishes that Batya also be denied proper burial like her spouse when her time comes. Presumably, the latter statement comes to the ears of the rabbis. In the second version, Elazar's father comes to the rabbis in a dream, beseeching them to bury Elazar so that father and son can be reunited. Notice how this effectively mirrors Batya's rejoining her father's house in part two of the narrative.

In the first version, we see Batya heatedly arguing with a community member, just as Elazar argued with his teacher and lashed out in anger at the washerman. She has fully taken Elazar's place: arguing with people, accessing the *beit midrash*, and experiencing *hulshat da'at*. The rabbi's response, "All of this is certainly not proper conduct!" can be read as referring to Batya's usurpation of Elazar's *beit midrash/da'at*, and the way she/he are holding court in their attic *bayit/beit midrash* as much as it could be read as a response to Elazar's delayed burial. In this reading they bury Elazar not because they have a change of heart regarding Elazar, but rather as an attempt to limit Batya's ability to draw power from his undead state. A similar

dynamic may be at play in the version where Rabbi Shimon, Elazar's father, pleads to the rabbis to bring his son to him—i.e., away from Batya.

Batya's formidability nonetheless persists, as we see in the narrative's close in which the patriarch Yehudah proposes marriage to her.

שלח ר' לדבר באשתו שלחה לו כלי שנשתמש בו קדש לא ישתמש בו חול	Rabbi [Yehudah the Patriarch] sent to speak with his [R. Elazar's] wife.[130] She sent to him [in reply] "A vessel that held something holy, should not hold something that is profane."
[איבא דאמרי הבי שלחה ליה][132] תמן אמרי באתר דמארי תלא ליה זיניה קולבאי רעיא קולתיה תלא	There are those who say this: She sent to him, "There they say,[131] 'in the place where the master hangs his armor and axe, should a shepherd hang his pitcher?'"
שלח לה נהי דבתורה גדול ממני במעשים מי גדול ממני	He sent to her, "Granted, he is greater than me in Torah, but in deeds who is greater than me?"
שלחה לו בתורה לא ידענא [את קאמרת] במעשים ידענא דהא קביל עליה יסורי	She sent to him, "In Torah, I do not know. You say in deeds, I do know that he received sufferings upon himself."[133]

Despite previously calling her "evil one," Yehudah now proposes marriage to the newly (yet decades-long) widowed woman. This is also the first and only time (across all manuscripts) where Batya is called "his wife" instead of "his house." Perhaps this shift in appellation is a nod to how she stands to lose both uterine and *da'at* power now that Elazar is buried. There is no more *alyiah/beit midrash* for her to control, and should she remarry her "house" would once

[130] Note this is the only time that Batya is not referred to as "his house." Instead, she is called "his wife," or more literally, "his woman." It's the same across the textual witnesses.
[131] "There they say" is used in the Bavli to introduce a tradition or idiom from Palestine.
[132] Brackets in the Hebrew/Aramaic text designate words that were added in the margin.
[133] bBM 84b.

again be under a rabbi's control. But Batya shows this is not the case when she soundly refutes Yehudah using rabbinic style wordplay to say that her house/uterus is too great for him.

Two versions of Batya's rejection are given. In the first, Batya rebuffs the rabbi by suggesting that she is a vessel that held something holy – her now fully dead and buried spouse— and thus she surely cannot "hold" something/someone profane.[134] The metaphor works on several levels. First, she is schooling Yehudah in halakhah by invoking the ritual principle of "they elevate in sanctity but do not degrade (*ma'alin biqedusha ve'ein moridin*)." While the principle is usually applied to sacred objects and vessels, she is applying it herself. Second, the metaphor reasserts the house/uterine status through which Batya has found power—both as householder, and in the woman-gendered role of caretaker. Batya suggests that Yehudah is unworthy of residing with/in her house, alluding to how his reproductive organs are unworthy of residence within hers. Perhaps this is her version of "ours is greater than yours."

The second version of Batya's response, and what seems to be on all reckonings an editorial interpolation,[135] is even more sexually explicit, "In the place where the master of the house hangs his armor and axe, should a shepherd hang his pitcher?" Instead of focusing on the "vessel" and its capacity to "contain," the language makes the filling objects the grammatical and agentive subjects. This adage is arguably more allusive of sexual genitalia – comparing the master of the house's armor and axe to a shepherd's pitcher. Both responses convert the cliched

[134] This is analogy invokes a technical ritual argument. The Mishnah describes how one can upgrade an object in holiness (e.g. parchment by writing God's name on it) but that afterwards one cannot downgrade it and use it for secular things. The principle is "one upgrades in holiness but does not downgrade." On this logic after having been the vessel that contained the holy Rabbi Elazar, she cannot now be degraded by containing the everyday Rabbi Yehudah. See for example mMegillah 3:1.

[135] The way that Batya introduces the idiom she quotes with the words "there they say," which the Bavli uses to designate an idiom or tradition from Palestine. Batya's story takes place in Palestine. When we consider this and the switch from Hebrew to Aramaic, it's clear that this version of Batya's rebuff is a latter Babylonian addition.

woman-as-passive-receptacle-of-man to a more agentive role when we consider how she contained and constrained her husband during his sickness and after his death, and how she eventually fully controlled who could and could not enter. In the ultimate back and forth, Yehudah pushes back on her comparisons of size and greatness. Batya goes so far as to trade in her own knowledge and lack thereof ("I do not know" and "I know"); she even lays claim now to the very things that caused her to leave her husband—that he brought sufferings upon himself.

1.4 Conclusion

In the dissertation's introduction, I discussed the wide range of meanings that the word *da'at* contains. Mind, opinion, and self are but a few of these definitions. In this chapter I used the analytic concepts of bodymind and intersectionality to analyze Elazar and Batya's story—a story that explores the various ways that *da'at* is rooted in the body and how it influences and is influenced by a person's standing and interpersonal relationships.

Through the use of wordplay, this narrative portrays *da'at* as an entity and concept interwoven with soul, self, and emotions, all of which are seated in the body. Elazar locates his *da'at* in his gut when he says, "Rejoice internal organs, rejoice! Just as your doubts [are correct], how much more so are your certainties! I trust in you that no maggot or worm will rule over you." This location of *da'at* is furthered emphasized by the text's repetition of the verb "to rest," in this same scene. First, Elazar's "*da'at* rested" after Elazar reestablished his status by arresting the washerman. The next time his *da'at* settles due his fellow rabbis' reassurances, and "he rested his hand on his internal organs." Wordplay is also used to link *da'at* to emotions, self, and body parts through Elazar's recitation of Biblical verses and the narratives later repetition of key verbs from those recitations: Proverbs 21:23, "he who guards his mouth and tongue guards his

nefesh [“soul/self”] from distress/pain,” and Psalms 16:9, “Therefore my heart was glad, and my honor rejoiced, also my flesh will settle in trustworthiness.” Elazar recites both verses to express the rested or settled state of his *da’at.* And the word “trustworthiness (*lavetah*),” refers to when Elazar told his guts “I trust (*muvtah*) in you.”

The story also locates *da’at* within the body when Elazar and (later) Batya put his body through various physical tests and punishments to reaffirm themselves of the trustworthiness and incorruptibility of Elazar’s bodymind. It also genders *da’at* and the power and status that come with it as masculine when associating it with the *beit midrash* and contrasting it to the feminine gendered power and status that comes from being a wife/house/person-with-a-uterus. However, the story also troubles this binary when it associates Elazar’s blood and puss with vaginal emissions and has *da’at* and uterus/house as power that both Elazar and Batya can tap into and gain control of.

This narrative also demonstrated that power and status are interrelated with *hulshat da’at*. Throughout the story Elazar’s *da’at* weakens when his status in his community is threatened, and Batya can only experience *hulshat da’at* when she rises in status and power through controlling Elazar’s undead bodymind and subsumes the *beit midrash* into her house/domain. Furthermore, the ways that Elazar and Batya could access and wield power was greatly dictated by their gender, economic status, employment etc.

These insights all combine to demonstrate a rabbinic understanding (as portrayed in this narrative) of *da’at* as something that is as psychical as it is mental, located in bodies and seated in architecture. They also demonstrate an understanding of *hulshat da’at* as something that is caused when one’s power and status is threatened. As such, *hulshat da’at* is always experienced

within relationships and community and it can affect those relationships and community in turn. We'll see this even more so in chapter two, when we read and analyze a story about the tensions between Rabbi Yohanan and Reish Lakish, which primarily unfold in the *beit midrash.*

Chapter 2 Tensions in the *Beit Midrash*: Interconnected and Interrelated Bodyminds

CONTENT WARNING: Rape

In chapter one, I analyzed the story of Rabbi Elazar and his wife, who I named Batya. Inspired by the concept *bodymind*, from the fields of disability and mad studies, I analyzed the story to see how body and mind interacted and interrelated in the narrative. This analysis revealed a rabbinic conception of *da'at* (mind, knowledge, opinion) that is as physical as it is mental, and that is entwined with rabbinic notions of soul (*nefesh/nafsha*), self, and emotions. I also employed the analytical concept intersectionality to pay close attention to Elazar and Batya's various intersecting identities, and how those identities influenced each character's status and agency. This analysis yielded a rabbinic understanding that *hulshat da'at* both informs and is informed by a person's social status in their community. Elazar uses his *da'at* to get a civic job identifying and arresting thieves. He also uses his *da'at* to maintain his position in the social hierarchy of the *beit midrash* (rabbinic study house), and his *da'at* becomes unrested/unsettled when these positions are threatened. After Elazar's (un)death, Batya gains control of Elazar's bodymind and hosts the attic-*beit midrash.* She goes on to become the beneficiary of the social power of Elazar's *da'at*. As such, she too becomes susceptible to an unsettled mind and experiences *hulshat da'at* when it appears that Elazar's corpse has finally begun to decompose, perhaps threatening the stability of her newfound status and role. Thus, *hulshat da'at* always exists in community and often occurs during strife in interpersonal relationships.

In this chapter I will expand upon these themes, analyzing a narrative about the relationship between Rabbi Yohanan and Reish Lakish. I will argue that this story (as well as Elazar's and Batya's story) views bodyminds as porous and interconnected, fluid and malleable, and that its Babylonian authors understood madness to be just as relational. I will also continue my analysis of gender and *hulshat da'at* to further demonstrate that *hulshat da'at* is a specific form of madness typically reserved for those of a high(er) social status, and thus is coded as masculine.

To analyze Elazar and Batya's story, I divided it into three parts. In the Bavli's text the story is effectively divided into two. Between what I designated as part one and part two, the Talmud *seemingly* wanders off topic with a set of traditions and narratives for the space of more than one folio. [136] This embedded passage, however, is not as digressive as it might first appear. Rather, it is saturated with the themes of the Elazar and Batya's tale: gender and sex, reproductive organs, imperialism, thieves/bandits, status and power, and weakened bodyminds. As such, it is fair to say that the whole collection (including Elazar and Batya's story, and a final story about Elazar and Yehudah) acts together as one cohesive unit.

The themes binding these passages together include madness, reproductive organs/gender/sex, and social status. For example, a story about Elazar and his fellow informant Yishmael's encounter with a Roman matron, inaugurates the "digression." As discussed in chapter one, the two rabbis boast of their wives' great reproductive organs saying, "theirs are

[136]The standard pagination for the Babylonian Talmud counts both sides of the page as one, specifying each side (folio) as either a or b. Part one of Elazar and Batya's tale can be found on page 83b of the tractate Bava Metzia. The insertion of other passages and stories starts on the bottom of 83b and continues to the end of 84a. Elazar and Batya's story resumes at the top of 84b.

greater than ours," a phrase that Elazar inverts a folio later in part two of the framing tale, boasting to Batya, "ours is greater than theirs." Other highlights from this folio include a series of passages that work together to code Yohanan's beauty as femme. They include a discussion of Rabbis Yishmael, Elazar, Yohanan, and Papa's penis sizes (in which Yohanan's appears to be the smallest[137]), discussions of Yohanan's unique beardless beauty,[138] and concludes with a narrative about Yohanan and Reish Lakish's relationship, in which Reish Lakish is taken by Yohanan's womanly beauty. The latter is the focus of this chapter.

Rabbi Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story begins with their sexually charged meeting in the Jordan River and concludes when a disagreement between them results in *hulshat da'at*, illness (*halash*), and death. Quite popular for the homoerotic undertones—or overtones—of Yohanan's and Reish Lakish's relationship, much scholarly work has been written about this tale. However, this text has not been analyzed from a mad studies perspective. Rafael Neis analyzed this story with an eye towards the role of the sexualizing and objectifying gaze in the scene in the Jordan River. They also situated it within its imperialist context, analyzing how it used the imperial and erotic gaze to overturn Roman imagery of Rome as a conqueror of the Jews.[139] Michal Bar Asher Siegal also analyzed the imperial and sexual imagery to which this story responds, in order to draw connections between this story and its late antique Christian monastic literature.[140] The

[137] Note that Rav Papa's penis is said to be "like Harpanian baskets," the size of which I do not know. So, it is possible Yohanan has the second smallest penis. Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, 2013, 161. For an in depth analysis of units of measurements used in this passage refer to Zvi Septimus, "Revisiting the Fat Rabbis," in *Talmudic Transgressions: Engaging the Work of Daniel Boyarin*, ed. Charlotte Fonrobert, Ishay Rosen-Zvi, and Moulie Vidas, vol. 181, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Boston: Brill, 2017), 419–56, https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1163/9789004345331_017.

[138] The discussion of Yohanan's beauty consists of a few rabbinic traditions, one of which says that Yohanan's beauty is not like that of other rabbis, because he does not have a beard.

[139] Rafael Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 158–67.

[140] Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, "Ethics and Identity Formation: Resh Lakish and the Monastic Repentant Robber," *L'identité à Travers l'éthique: Nouvelles Perspectives Sur La Formation Des Identités Collectives Dans Le Monde*

argument I present in this chapter does not contradict these readings, but adds to them. I will draw upon Neis' work in particular, using their readings of the erotic gaze and bodily comportment and invocation and overturning of imperialist imagery as a basis on which to ask questions about the power dynamics between Yohanan and Reish Lakish throughout their story, and to trace the role of the gaze past the opening scene in the Jordan River. I conclude that Yohanan and Reish Lakish's relationship was a continuous struggle for power, informed by their various identities, status, and the hierarchal culture of the beit midrash. When this struggle results in illness of mind and body and death, the narrative uses this story to critique the extreme hierarchy of the *beit midrash.*

I argue that reading this story through disability and mad studies perspectives, and within the context of other *hulshat da'at* stories and its positioning in the middle of Elazar and Batya's tale allows us to reach further insights about rabbinic culture. The understanding that *hulshat da'at* frequently (if not always) occurs when a person's status/power is threatened prompts us to pay attention to the social dynamics in this story. In focusing on how social identity and status dictates Yohanan and Reish Lakish's interactions with each other and other characters, while also paying attention to the body, I am able to produce an analysis that demonstrates a rabbinic view of bodyminds as interconnected to the point of being able to impact each other. When read this way, we can see how Yohanan and Reish Lakish's tale sheds further insight into Elazar and

Greco-Romain, 2015, 53–72. Other scholarship on this narrative includes Richard Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1–5; Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 212–19; Daniel Boyarin, "Why Is Rabbi Yoḥanan a Woman? Or, a Queer Marriage Gone Bad: 'Platonic Love' in the Talmud," in *Authorizing Marriage?: Canon, Tradition, and Critique in the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions*, ed. Mark Jordan et al (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 52–67 and 178–84; Yonah Fraenkel, *Studies in the Spiritual World of the Aggadic Story* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1981), 73–77.

Batya's relationship, prefacing the second part of the married couple's story by priming the audience to think about the relational aspects of bodyminds and madness.

For ease of reference and analysis, I've divided Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story into four parts: (1) their meeting, (2) their argument, (3) Yohanan and his sister, and (4) Yohanan and Reish Lakish's deaths. The story starts when Reish Lakish, a bandit, sees Yohanan bathing in the Jordan River and rushes in to rape him. Yohanan remarks on Reish Lakish's strength, and Reish Lakish remarks on Yohanan's beauty. Yohanan then convinces Reish Lakish to marry his (Yohanan's) sister and become a rabbinic Jew under Yohanan's tutelage. Part two takes place during a debate in the *beit midrash*. The text tells us that the whole *beit midrash* was divided over the question of when in the stage of its creation can a weapon contract impurity. Yohanan and Reish Lakish take opposing sides, and their argument devolves into insults, resulting in Yohanan's mind falling ill, (*halash da'ateih*—his mind became ill), and then Reish Lakish becoming deathly[141] ill, (*halash*—he became ill). In part three, Yohanan's sister, also Reish Lakish's wife, comes before her brother, begging him to reconcile with Reish Lakish, so that he will heal. Yohanan refuses to do so and promises that he will take care of her and her children in Reish Lakish's place. In part four, Reish Lakish dies from his illness and Yohanan becomes inconsolable in his grief. In an attempt to console Yohanan, the rabbis send him another study partner, but their plan doesn't work. Yohanan continues mourning until his *da'at* changes (*shanei da'ateih*), and he dies. In this chapter I will demonstrate how reading this story in its literary context—as one of several *hulshat da'at* stories and as located in the midst of Elazar and Batya's story—adds new depths, expands upon past scholarship on the porosity and fluidity of

[141] Note that *halash* only means "ill," the "deathly" qualifier comes from the context of the story.

the bodymind in rabbinic thought, and emphasizes that relationality is at the core of the Babylonian storytellers' understandings of madness.

2.1 The Porosity and Fluidity of Bodyminds

Scholars have demonstrated how part one of Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story establishes the two characters as representative figures for a host of binaries: Jew and Roman, rabbinic Jew and nonrabbinic Jew, feminine and masculine, colonized and colonizer, and teacher and student. Past scholarship has analyzed the ways in which these categories overlap, and how the story subverts, flips, and complicates them.[142] In this section of the story, Reish Lakish—a "Romanized" masculine Jew—attempts to rape Yohanan—a femme rabbi—but Yohanan grasps the dominant role when he becomes Reish Lakish's teacher. Their struggle for dominance continues throughout this story, and results in a weakening of Yohanan's, his sister's, and Reish Lakish's bodyminds.

יומא חד הוה קא סחי בירדנא חזייה ריש לקיש סבר איתתא הוא בפתיה לירדנא אבתריה דצייה לרומחא בירדנא ושוור לאידך גיסא דירדנא

One day, Rabbi Yohanan was swimming in the Jordan River. Reish Lakish saw (*hazeih*) him and thought[143] he was a woman. He jumped to the Jordan after him: he stuck his spear in the Jordan['s

[142] Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, 2013, 158–68; Bar-Asher Siegal, "Ethics and Identity Formation"; Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 127–50; Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 216–19.

[143] The verb סבר has many meanings, including "to look out for, hope; to speculate, plan; to imagine believe," "to show a bright face, to be pleasant," "to be bright, intelligent," and "to conclude, argue, understand; to have an idea." *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, s.v. "סבר." Yohanan's beauty has already been described as brightly and femininely beautiful previously on this folio, and it appears that this verb is an intentional nod to that. For more on the brightness and femininity of Yohanan's beauty, see Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, 2013, 159–67. Also of note, of the textual witnesses that include this line, some instead say "he appeared like a woman." See for example Munich 95 which states, "'אדמיי' באיתת." The other manuscripts that include this version are Vatican 115a (though it uses the preposition ב- instead of כ-), and Vatican 117. The corresponding line in Frankfurt, U: Ms. Barth. 107 is a bit hard to read, but it appears to say אירמייה באיתתא, which would mean "he threw/snatched away" like a woman. But I believe it's more likely that the scribe accidently wrote a ר instead of a ד.

riverbank] [144] and leapt to the other side of the Jordan.	
When Rabbi Yohanan saw (*hazeih*) Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish [Reish Lakish],[145] he said to him, "You have the strength of Torah!"	כי חזא ר' יוחנן לר' שמע' בן לקיש אמ' ליה האי חילך[146] לאוריתא
Reish Lakish said to Yohanan, "You have the beauty of women!"	אמ' ליה האי שופרך לנשי
Yohanan said to Reish Lakish, "If you retract,[147] I will give you my sister, who is more beautiful than me."	אמ' ליה אי הדרת בך יהיבנא לך אחתי דשפירא מנאי
Reish Lakish accepted [this/him] upon himself. He wanted to retract/return and to bring his gear, but he was unable to do so.	קביל עליה בעא למיהדר לאיתויי מאניה ולא אמצייה
Yohanan taught him [Torah][148] and rabbinic teachings, and Reish Lakish equaled a great man.	אגמריה ואתנייה ושוייה גברא רבה

As is characteristic of the Talmud, this story's concise brevity leaves us with various ambiguities, generating multiple readings of this scene. What is not left in doubt is Reish Lakish's

[144] It is safe to assume that the text means that Reish Lakish stuck his spear into the riverbank and not the river itself, since he then proceeds to use his spear to vault himself across the river. The Escorial manuscript further supports this reading since it says Reish Lakish "stuck his spear in the ground (בארעא)."

[145] The line "When Rabbi Yohanan saw Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish," does not appear in any other textual witness.

[146] *Hayil* means "strength, health" the translation "health" and seems to be the opposite of *halash*, "ill, weak." It has the connotation of military might and is seemingly a nod to Reish Lakish as a gladiator/bandit. Neis and Boyarin read this a reference to both Reish Lakish's spear and penis, implying that it was Reish Lakish's spear/penis that Yohanan specifically laid his eyes upon. Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, 2013, 162–63; Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 212–19.

[147] I would like to thank Rafael Neis for their guidance on how to translate the use of *hadar,* "retract," in these last three lines. It was their suggestion that "retract" and "he accepted it/him upon himself" could be read as referring to sexual positions and penile penetration. They also apply this reading in their analysis of this story, stating that "not only does R. Yohanan escape Resh Lakish's rapacious gaze, but the feminine rabbi actually appears to topple, or at least top, the masculine bandit […]," *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, 2013, 163.

[148] Every other textual witness uses אקרייה (*aqareih*) instead of אגמרייה (*agamreih*). While that *aqareih* more directly implies teaching Torah, *agamreih* can have that implication too. See for example, bKiddushin 29b in which the latter is used when discussing the obligation to learn Torah and to teach Torah to your children (the rabbis also here limit both obligations to men and sons).

troubling intent when vaulting himself to the other side of the river. The penetration of Reish Lakish's spear into the riverbank forecasts his intent to penetrate Yohanan, and the violence of this action suggests that Reish Lakish does not consider Yohanan's consent.

Reish Lakish's depiction as a strong and violent rapist fits certain late antique images of masculinity. As Neis describes, this opening moment invokes imperialist imagery and messaging that depicts Rome's colonization of other peoples and places through images of a hyper masculinized Roman raping a highly feminized (according to contemporary gender norms) figure (either a woman or feminine man) of the conquered people.[149] Though Jewish himself, rabbinic lore depicts Reish Lakish as a previously Romanized, non-rabbinic, Jew: elsewhere the rabbinic literature describes him as a gladiator (yGittin 4:9, 46a–b), fig-orchard guard (yMoed Katan 3:1, 81d), or bandit (the present story).[150] The present narrative uses this association to craft a story about a feminized Jewish man subverting and averting Roman domination.

Directed and submissive gazes were often central to this Roman imagery of masculine dominance at the expense of a feminine/feminized figure, as Neis shows in their analysis of Roman coins that marked their quelling of the Jewish Revolt from the 70s CE. These *Judea capta* coins depict "an armed Roman soldier towering over a mournful, seated woman who leans on her arm, head downcast, as the soldier looks down at her." Other times the woman is replaced by a man "often bound and sometimes nude." Both man and woman are meant to represent Judea, made "feminine" by the "masculine" Romans. This gender coding is expressed in part

[149] Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, 2013, 158–67. Michal Bar-Asher Siegal also discusses this in her article, "Ethics and Identity Formation."

[150] For discussion on Reish Lakish serving as both a Roman and Jewish figure see Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, 2013, 166.

through the gaze: with the Roman gazing at the Judean woman/feminized man, and the Judean in turn submissively gazing downward.[151]

Neis tracks various rabbinic responses to this Roman "Jewsploitation," reading the opening scene of Yohanan and Reish Lakish's narrative as one of these responses. Reish Lakish gazes ("Reish Lakish saw him") at Yohanan. Yohanan in turn begins this scene with a distinctly feminine coding. As I mentioned above, the passages preceding this story include discussions and descriptions of Yohanan's feminine beauty. The second sentence of this story, "Reish Lakish saw him and thought he was a woman," reasserts this message. In contrast to Reish Lakish, Yohanan symbolizes the woman/nation to be conquered, the female object of the male gaze, and the feminized rabbinic Jew who chooses Torah study over physical strength.[152]

As Neis argues, the tale quickly subverts these established narratives with the simple inclusion of Yohanan's gaze and voice, and a fight for dominance ensues. Yohanan shifts from object to subject when he looks at and speaks to Reish Lakish. He immediately moves to redirect Reish Lakish's strength from that of dominant conqueror to Torah scholar, which in turn would fully free Yohanan from Reish Lakish's feminizing, dominating, and objectifying intentions. [153] Reish Lakish, however, resists Yohanan's strategic move, insisting instead that Yohanan has the "beauty of women" and thus must remain the feminized, dominated, object of Reish Lakish's violent masculine desire.[154] Yohanan smoothly side steps Reish Lakish's insistence with a

[151] Neis, 151–52.

[152] For further discussion of the feminization of rabbinic Torah study in relationship to this story see Neis, 158–67; Bar-Asher Siegal, "Ethics and Identity Formation," 62–71; Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 216–18. Additionally, the whole of *Carnal Israel* explores the feminization of Torah study more broadly.

[153] Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, 2013, 162–63.

[154] Note that when I use words such as "feminized" I am referring to Greco-Roman and Late Antique Jewish gender norms.

compromise. Reish Lakish can have his sister instead, allowing Reish Lakish to continue his performance of masculinity while freeing Yohanan from any involvement.

The mention of Yohanan's unnamed sister at this point in the story brings to the forefront the stark difference between the experiences of a woman and feminized man in late antique Greco-Roman and rabbinic cultures.[155] While men had the option of taking on masculine or feminine roles in terms of power dynamics, women did not have this option. As such, Yohanan's sister remains unnamed, is absent from the scene, and does not participate in the two men's conversation of her arranged marriage. She returns in part three of this story, where her lack of agency and power continues to serve as a contrast to her brother. As I have done with Batya in the previous chapter, I have given Yohanan's sister a name to remind us of her subjectivity. I chose the Aramaic name Ya'ita (meaning "beauty, grace") given that she is described as outdoing Yohanan in this regard.[156]

With Yohanan and Reish Lakish's relationship renegotiated, at the expense of Ya'ita, part one becomes a scene of subverted power. No longer the feminized object, Yohanan can now take on the dominant, masculine role in his relationship with Reish Lakish through the role of teacher. When Yohanan asks Reish Lakish to retract, the text does not specify *what* he is meant to retract: his advances on Yohanan, his penis from Yohanan's body, his bandit lifestyle, or some combination thereof? What is clear, is that this vague retraction involves submitting (in some form) to Yohanan, "Reish Lakish accepted [this/him] upon himself." Read as figuratively or

[155] Besler also discusses the difference between women and feminized men in her analysis of the gendering of Rabbi Tzadok and Martha bat Boethus in rabbinic stories about the destruction of the Second Temple, Belser, *Rabbinic Tales of Destruction*, 86–89.
[156] Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity Part II: Palestine 200-650*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 148 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), s.v. "יאיתה."

explicitly, the sexual imagery remains in the story with Yohanan becoming the masculine "top," and Reish Lakish the now feminized "bottom."[157] The story emphasizes this point home further with the words, "he wanted to retract/return and to bring his gear, but he was unable to do so."[158] The word that I have translated as "gear (*mana*)" has many meanings including "vessel," "garment," and "instrument."[159] In this context it's clearly referring to whatever clothes, armor, and weapons that Reish Lakish needed for his banditry. This includes his spear, which has already served as a phallic symbol of Reish Lakish's masculinity. This is similar to the way Batya uses an armor and axe and a shepherd's pitcher to allude to genitalia.[160] We can thus suggest that when Reish Lakish is unable to retrieve his phallic gear, he is symbolically, or perhaps even physically, castrated.[161] Yohanan's compromise, it turns out, is not much of a compromise at all.

Posthumanist thought conceptualizes bodies as "constituted—both from within and without—through perpetually unfolding relations with multiple other agents and forces which transgress and confound the imagined boundaries of the human individual, the human self, and the human social domain."[162] Our narrative showcases that despite the seeming constraints of physicality and embodiment—Yohanan's feminine beauty, Reish Lakish's masculine martial

---

[157] I would like to thank Rafael Neis for their guidance on how to translate the use of *hadar,* "retract," in these last three lines. It was their suggestion that "retract" and "he accepted it/him upon himself" could be read as referring to sexual positions and penile penetration. They were the first to apply this reading in their analysis of this story, stating that "not only does R. Yohanan escape Resh Lakish's rapacious gaze, but the feminine rabbi actually appears to topple, or at least top, the masculine bandit […]," *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, 2013, 163.

[158] This sentence is often interpretated according to the commentary of the medieval rabbi Rashi, who says that Reish Lakish was unable to leap back across the river because since taking on the "yoke of Torah, his strength was weak."

[159] *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic,* s.v. "מנא, מאנא."

[160] Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, 2013, 162n208.

[161] Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 212–19. The penis was figured as a weapon frequently in Roman sexual discourse, Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 139.

[162] Nimmo, Richie, "Posthumanism," in *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*, ed. Paul Atkinson, Sara Delamont, Alexandru Cernat, Joseph W. Sakshaug, and Richard A. Williams (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2019), 2, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036807683.

prowess (the spear, the gaze, and the threat of coercive violence) are not the whole story. Yohanan counters Reish Lakish's gaze, words, and "spear" with his own look, retort, and counteroffer. The disturbing transaction he proposes—to transfer Reish Lakish's sexual violence from his bodymind to his sister's bodymind—disrupts the top/down (or top/bottom) power dynamic such that Reish Lakish's strength is ineffective. The story thus demonstrates a dynamic and shifting account of gender, power, and bodies—notably setting them in highly attuned, interconnected relationships with each other and thereby undermining ideas of immutable bodies with fixed boundaries.

Disability scholars often draw from posthuman concepts when thinking about the ways in which the body is always in flux, constantly being expanded, changed, and interconnected with other beings and technology. This is most common in discussions of cyborgs and assistive technologies such as protheses, ventilators, gastronomy tubes, etc. But it is also true of other bodies. Barbara E. Gibson, for example, considers the transgressive connectivity of a blind man and his service dog who when walking together are both alone and not alone: "Within this coupling, the (blind) man and (seeing) dog oscillate between alone and together, selves and not-selves, becoming multiple selves. Identity is at once univocal and multiple, partial and transitory."[163] When discussing a case of a woman and her attendant, Gibson writes, "the attendant is in frequent intimate contact with the disabled woman, acting as 'her arms and legs,' feeding her, bathing her. They depend on one another—for assistance and for employment.

[163] Barbara E. Gibson, "Disability, Connectivity and Transgressing the Autonomous Body," *Journal of Medical Humanities* 27, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 191, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-006-9017-6.

They are profoundly connected."[164] Such observations allow us to understand how all bodies (whether labeled as disabled or abled by contemporary society) are fluid and interconnected, changing due to their changing relationships with the people, animals, and objects around them.

Balberg draws from these same ideas and fields of thought when she argues that rabbinic purity discourse and Greco-Roman medical discourse share "an underlying perception of the body as a fluid and mutable entity, which is constantly transformed through its contact with its human and nonhuman environment."[165] In rabbinic thought this perception manifests in a myriad of ways. Bodies can be extended, for example, through the use of a tool,[166] they can change gender (to a limited degree),[167] and as Charlotte Fonrobert demonstrates, they can change from Gentile to Jewish.[168] Balberg and Fonrobert also both demonstrate that such bodily changes happen only insofar as humans inscribe meaning on these bodies and objects. It is how one intends to interact with an object or body that determines *if* it matters, *how* it matters, and *to what extent* it matters.[169]

While Yohanan and Reish Lakish are not using the purity system to change each other's bodies, they are changing their bodies through their intentions and interactions with each other.

---

[164] Gibson, 192. For further discussion about the intersection of disability studies and posthumanism see Barbara E. Gibson, Franco A. Carnevale, and Gillian King, "'This Is My Way': Reimagining Disability, in/Dependence and Interconnectedness of Persons and Assistive Technologies," *Disability and Rehabilitation* 34, no. 22 (November 1, 2012): 1894–99, https://doi.org/10.3109/09638288.2012.670040; Luna Dolezal, "Representing Posthuman Embodiment: Considering Disability and the Case of Aimee Mullins," *Women's Studies* 46, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 60–75, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2017.1252569.

[165] Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature*, 57.

[166] Balberg, 97, 101–2.

[167] Balberg, 140–46.

[168] Charlotte Fonrobert, "Blood and Law: Uterine Fluids and Rabbinic Maps of Identity," *Henoch* 30, no. 2 (2008): 243–66.

[169] "Thus, while the Mishnah describes the material world as pervaded with impurity, it also makes clear that this material world is shaped, defined, classified, and governed by human consciousness and through dependence on human mental processes" Balberg, *Purity, Body, and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature*, 64–65. Fonrobert, "Blood and Law," 253.

Indeed, while intention and interaction are central to the rabbinic purity system, they also form and inform bodies outside of the purity system. We have already witnessed the transformative power of the gaze in Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story. But this is not the only text in the Bavli, or even in rabbinic literature in which gazing facilitates bodily interconnections.

Neis traces the effects of gazing throughout rabbinic literature. One passage they analyze is a narrative from the Yerushlami (yBetsah 5:2, 63a) wherein Rabbi Yehudah the Patriarch looks at Rabbi Meir, and gains knowledge. Yehudah is now transformed. He knows things that he didn't before, purely by a physical interaction (this time through the interaction of a gaze, which Neis explains was considered a physical interaction in late antiquity). In this same passage, Yohanan and Reish Lakish then receive this same Torah knowledge by gazing at Yehudah's toes.[170] This is not to say all ancient rabbis in Palestine and Babylonia conceived of gazes and bodies in the same way. But it does go to show that there was an idea within rabbinic culture that bodyminds were porous and fluid, and thus relational:[171] affecting each other when they interacted.

Yohanan and Reish Lakish's bodyminds are altered by their interactions and changing relationship. If their story's sexual undertones are read explicitly, these men's very bodily comportment changes with a reversal of sexual positions. Even if read figuratively, we see Yohanan's body changing from feminine to masculine "despite" it's supposed beardless

[170] Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, 2013, 205.
[171] In *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*, Neis pays attention to the differing notions about bodies and gazing across rabbinic literature. For example, Neis notes that the motif of Jewish men becoming "a thing of beauty eliciting a homoerotic gaze" appeared "particularly, and most explicitly, in Babylonian sources," 169.

"feminine beauty," and Reish Lakish's from masculine to feminine despite its "spear"—his bodymind is physically changed as a direct result of his changing relationship with Yohanan.

When we read this story from posthumanist and disability studies perspectives, we can interpret the narrative's final line as precisely summarizing the pairs interconnected and interdependent bodyminds: "Yohanan taught him [Torah] and rabbinic teachings, and Reish Lakish equaled a great man." The word I have translated as "great (*ravah*)" can also mean "to grow, increase"[172] and is the word from which the titles *rabbi* (Hebrew) and *rav* (Aramaic) are derived. Thus, Yohanan weakened and demasculinized Reish Lakish by removing his strength and "spear," but grew his bodymind back into greatness/bigness through rabbinic style Torah study.

Each of these men's bodies, it turns out, are as porous and fluid as the Jordan River in which they meet. This same porousness facilitates the intimacy between Yohanan and Reish Lakish, an interconnectedness that they use to influence and change each other's bodyminds throughout their struggle for dominance. This notion of relational and interconnected bodyminds primes the readers for the drama between Elazar and Batya on the next folio. Elazar, like Yohanan, asserts his dominance through feminine-coded power—Elazar through the literal and symbolic usurpation of house/uterus, and Yohanan through his feminized rabbinic body. Batya, like Reish Lakish, is in an intimate relationship with a rabbi and struggles with said rabbi for dominance. So too, Elazar and Batya's bodyminds inform and change each other. Elazar's unsettled *da'at* leads him to accept nightly sufferings upon himself, inciting Batya to move back to her father's home. Later, when Batya returns, her *hulshat da'at* corresponds to Elazar's supposed decomposition.

[172] *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature,* s.v. "רבה, רבה, רבי."

2.2 The Relationality of Madness

Part one tells a story in which the paradigmatic rabbi, Yohanan, conquers the Hellenized Jew, Reish Lakish, winning him over to the rabbis' way of doing things. A close analysis of part one makes the case that the rabbis who wrote and transmitted this story understood bodyminds—even those that are seemingly opposite and in conflict—to be interconnected and malleable. When we remember the "mind" of the term *bodymind,* it becomes clear that these same concepts can be applied to a study of madness. The mind, and thus madness, is just as fluid and relational as the rest of the body in which it resides. I will combine these theories with concepts about the fluidity and relationality of madness as I analyze part two of Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story to argue that the rabbis also viewed madness as relational.

Part two follows a similar pattern as part one, but this time the men's struggle is not between people of opposing communities, each trying to conquer the other, but between teacher and student located in the heart of rabbinic society, the *beit midrash.*[173] The story jumps ahead to a time when Reish Lakish is becoming Yohanan's equal, and perhaps even superior, in Torah study. Once again, the pair are caught in a struggle for dominance, and their bodyminds are altered in the process when Yohanan experiences *hulshat da'at* and Reish Lakish experiences *hulshah* (illness).

יומא חד הוה קא מיפלגי בי מדרשא הסייף והסכין והפיגיון ומגל יד ומגל קציר מאימתי מקבלין טומאה [משעת גמר מלאכתן

One day the *beit midrash* was split [over this *baraita*]:[174] "The sword, knife, dagger, knife-saw, and the sickle:[175] When can they begin to

[173] For a discussion about teacher-student relationships in Palestinian rabbinic society, see Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 332–52. For Babylonian rabbinic society see Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, 91–149.

[174] A *baraita* is an early rabbinic tradition that was not included in the Mishnah.

[175] Every other textual witness includes "spear" in this list, alluding to the spear Reish Lakish used to propel himself to the other side of the Jordan river, and which he later lost.

contract impurity? When their [the smiths'] work is finished."	
And when is their work finished?	ומאימתי נגמרה מלאכתן]
Rabbi Yohanan said, "When he smelts them in the furnace."	ר' יוחנן אמ' משיצרפן בכבשן
Reish Lakish said, "When it's polished in the water."	וריש לקיש אמ' משיצחצחן במים
Rabbi Yohanan said to Reish Lakish, "A robber does know about robbery…"	אמ' ליה ר' יוחנן לסטאה בלסטיותיה ידע
Reish Lakish responded, "And how have you benefited me? There they called me master [*rabbi*], and here they call me master [*rabbi*]."	אמ' ליה מאי אהנית לי התם ר' קרו לי והבא ר' קרו לי
Rabbi Yohanan said to him, "I did not benefit you at all!?"[176]	[אמ' ליה לא אהניי לך ולא מידי]
Rabbi Yohanan's *da'at* became ill [*halash da'ateih*], Reish Lakish became ill [*halash*].	חלש דעתיה דר' יוחנן חלש ריש לקיש

The opening scene begins in the middle of a lively debate between the sages in the *beit midrash:* at what stage of a weapon's creation, does the weapon become susceptible to contracting ritually impurity? Yohanan and Reish Lakish give contradicting answers: when the blade is smelted (Yohanan) and when the blade is polished in the water (Reish Lakish). Reish Lakish's answer alludes back to the first scene where he (once associated with a blade), was also transformed in water (from Hellenized Jew to rabbinic Jew.) His answer also foreshadows his position in their forthcoming argument: just as a blade is completed in the water, so too was

[176] Every other textual witness (except for Oxford: Heb. C. 17/69-78 which omits Yohanan's final response entirely), instead has Yohanan say a variation of the line "I benefited you by brining you near, beneath the wings of the shekinah [God's presence on Earth]." I argue that Yohanan is using this verse to depict himself as a god-like caregiver (thus a caregiver with power over those he cares for), just as he does in his conversation with his sister (which I will discuss in part three).

Reish Lakish, and thus he is no longer dependent upon Yohanan his maker, who made him into a great, and arguably equal, man.

Instead of continuing with the intellectual debate, Yohanan lashes out with an insult, "A robber does know about robbery…" This insult both shames Reish Lakish for his sordid past in front of his colleagues and reminds Reish Lakish that Yohanan was the one to make him a rabbinic Jew. Thus, in these few words, Yohanan moves to reassert his dominance as the one whose past is flawless by contrast, and whose role is as teacher/maker. Reish Lakish's comeback, "And how have you benefited me? There they called me master (*rabbi*), and here they call me master (*rabbi*)," effectively undermines Yohanan's claim. By expressing pride over his past life, Reish Lakish refuses to be shamed by it. Rather, he uses it as proof that *he* is capable of greatness with or without Yohanan's help thus negating Yohanan's claim of power over him. He also equates his previous mastery and status as brigand to his current status as rabbi.

Incredulous, Yohanan has no more clever replies and only shouts, "I did not benefit you at all?!" He experiences *hulshat da'at* and Reish Lakish subsequently experiences *hulshah.* Their bodyminds are once again affected by their shifting relationship. This time, however, Yohanan's changed bodymind is not that of triumphant conqueror, but rather of someone who is losing his high status amongst his peers. While he still maintains his authority in the community (as we will see in part three), his place in the hierarchy in the *beit midrash* has been threatened.

In five of thirty-one *hulshat da'at* stories the offending party immediately undergoes a change in their bodymind when the offended person's mind weakens: bar Kippok and bar Avin's

"knees were reversed" so that they could no longer perform *halitsah,*[177] Rav Rehumi falls to his death after neglecting his wife,[178] Rav Kahana dies when Rabbi Yohanan misunderstands his actions and takes offense,[179] Rav Ahadvoi becomes silent and loses his learning,[180] and in our present case, Reish Lakish falls ill and eventually dies. The stories portray this phenomenon as a cause-and-effect situation in which the rabbi's madness at least indirectly has repercussions for the person who instigated said madness.

That the mad person may even be able to exercise some kind of control over the ill effects of his *hulshat da'at*, including those of the person who has offended him, is implied in two *hulshat da'at* stories and explicitly acknowledged in a third. In part three of Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story, and in another that parallels it, a rabbi experiencing *hulshat da'at* is asked to forgive, and thereby, heal his offender. Both will be analyzed below. A story on bHagigah 5b is the one time that directly states that a mad rabbi has some control over the situation. When Rav Idi's mind weakens from being mocked by his fellow rabbis, Yohanan asks him, "I beg you, do not punish these rabbis."[181] This simultaneously ascribes causality and maybe even intention or at least power, to the mad rabbis. It may also imply that a person can "get over" their madness. In setting up causality between a person's *hulshat da'at* and the physical or psychic ill effects on others, there is a sense that some kinds of illness and disability were viewed by the rabbis as

[177] bMoed Katan 25b, the Aramaic that I have translated as "knees were reversed" is ואתהפוך ברעייהו. *Halitza* is a Jewish ritual in which a man removes his shoe to opt out of a levirate marriage.
[178] bKetubot 62b. This is the only one of two times a (human) woman experiences hulshat da'at (the other time is on bBava Metsia 84b, whe Rabbi Elazar's wife whose *da'at* becomes ill when his incorruptible corpse seems to be decomposing, as discussed in chapter one).
[179] bBava Kamma 117a, Yohanan resurrects him once he realizes his mistake.
[180] bBava Batra 9a-b, this story will be analyzed further on in this chapter since it closely parallels Yohanan and Reish Lakish's tale.
[181] "במטותא מינך לא תעניש רבבן," bHagigah 5b MS Munich 6.

consequences of social offense or "punishment."[182] It also demonstrates the interconnectedness between offender and offended, and the complex web of power dynamics between them. In our story this relationship is particularly vivid with the mirroring language of *hulshat da'at* of Yohanan and Resh Lakish's subsequent *hulshah.*

Alison Kafer's political/relational model for thinking about disability is useful when analyzing the interrelatedness of these characters' bodyminds. As I discussed in the dissertation's introduction, this model asserts that disability is always experienced in relationship with other people: disability socially affects a disabled person's friends and family, and ableist ideals inform medical treatments that are not all that necessary (e.g., growth hormones).[183] I use this model to trace the effects of *hulshat da'at* more broadly, and to give attention to its relational aspects.

Similar ways of thinking with and about madness appear in mad studies, particularly in scholarship that engages with the effects of colonialism on indigenous people. Erin Soros makes it clear that colonial violence can *create* madness in two ways: the first is simply by labeling an experience or certain behaviors as madness, usually by assigning them with a psychiatric diagnosis, when the colonized culture would not have viewed the experience as such.[184] Secondly, the horrors colonialism forces indigenous people to experience creates an environment conducive to madness.[185] Both forms of creating madness are rooted in

[182] Disability is of course *not* a punishment, and not necessarily a negative thing. Unfortunately a deeper analysis of when and why rabbinic literature treats disability as a punishment (even in just the *hulshat da'at* stories) is beyond the scope of this dissertation.
[183] Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 8.
[184] Erin Soros, "Writing Madness in Indigenous Literature: A Hesitation," in *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, ed. Elizabeth J. Donaldson, Literary Disability Studies (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 75–77, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92666-7_5.
[185] Soros, 78–80.

relationships, both individual relationships (such as a western doctor's diagnosis of an indigenous person as mentally ill), and broader relationships (for example, the large-scale effects of colonizers asserting their culture on an indigenous population).

While colonialism only appears in the first scene of Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story, the core principles of the observations described above inform my reading of the whole tale. By noting how Western culture maps madness onto people who would not be considered mad in their own culture, scholarship on madness and colonialism demonstrates quite vividly the social and cultural constructedness of madness, as well as the fact that madness cannot exist in a vacuum—one cannot be mad without a sane person to be defined against, and one cannot talk about madness without considering the wider context in which madness occurs (political, environmental, cultural, social, etc.).

This relationality implies a fluidity of mind: a person may be deemed mad in one cultural context and not another. But, as Shadya Kafai argues, madness itself can be fluid.[186] Drawing from Chicana/o studies and women's studies scholar Gloria Anzaldúa, and queer studies scholar Jacquelyn N. Zita, Kafai asserts that just as "one can live *in-between* the strict binaries that regulate race, gender, and sexuality,"[187] so too we can live in between the binary that regulates sane and mad minds. Sharing her own experiences with madness in which she is sometimes more mad, sometimes more sane, but never exclusively one or the other, Kafai coins the term "mad border body" to describe a bodymind that "exists in-between the fixed definitions of sanity

[186] Shayda Kafai, "The Mad Border Body: A Political In-Betweeness," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2013), https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v33i1.3438.
[187] Kafai.

and madness."[188] In chapter one, we read how Elazar experienced a similarly fluid madness. Indeed, his moments of a settled/rested mind are so fleeting, that he could also be read as never fully "sane." Yohanan's madness will exhibit a similar fluidity in the fourth section of his narrative.

Elazar and Batya's and Yohanan and Reish Lakish's stories also exhibit the effects of bodyminds and madness relationality to the cultures and societies in which they exist. Both are set in the broader contexts of Greco-Roman and rabbinic Jewish culture; the storytellers themselves live in the cultural complex of Mesopotamia under Persian rule, and also live side by side with various ethno-religious communities (including Christians), and in contact with their rabbinic brethren living in Roman Palestine.

The tensions of Roman oppression unsettle the relationships between Elazar and his community, which in turn unsettles his and then Batya's bodyminds. The language and iconography of colonial violence informs the narration of Yohanan and Reish Lakish's first meeting. Rabbinic notions of gender and sex influence the ways in Elazar and Batya vie for power. Similarly, gender and sex norms of both Roman and rabbinic societies dictate the ways in which Yohanan and Reish Lakish interact with each other, forcing them to vie for the dominant, masculine position.

The culture of the *beit midrash* also informs both pair's bodyminds. Jeffery Rubenstein has shown that Babylonian *beit midrash* culture was intensely focused on social hierarchy,[189] and Catherine Heszer has noted the same about Palestinian rabbinic culture.[190] While both stories

[188] Kafai. While she does not use the term bodymind, she also troubles the body/mind binary.
[189] Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, 13–17; *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*, 54–66.
[190] Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 255.

are set in Palestine, both stories appear in the Babylonian Talmud and were transmitted and edited by Babylonian authors, as such discuss and reflect Babylonian rabbinic culture. This is demonstrated in the way that Elazar, and later Batya, use *da'at* to raise their positions in society, and experience unsettled *da'at* when those positions are threatened. Similarly, Yohanan and Reish Lakish would also not experience the effects of *hulshat da'at* (Yohanan directly, and Reish Lakish indirectly) but for their relationship to each other and how it informed both of their positions in the *beit midrash*.

The relationality of madness is not confined to the intimate relationships of both pairs. Their bodyminds are not just interconnected with each other. As we will see in part three of Yohanan and Reish Lakish's tale, the *hulshat da'at* that these relationships, conflicts, and cultures engender ramify outwards, affecting the bodyminds of other people as well.

2.3 Power, Gender, and Madness

So far, the story has centered tightly on Yohanan and Reish Lakish's interactions. Part three reintroduces "Ya'ita" (Reish Lakish's wife and Yohanan's sister) and we see that the effects of these men's relationships extend to the other people in their lives. With Reish Lakish on the brink of death, Ya'ita faces the distressing prospect of being a widow and single mother during a time when women largely relied on men for sustenance. Weeping, she goes to Yohanan begging him to take note of her distress, and to care for her by forgiving and healing Reish Lakish. Yohanan refuses, saying that he will care for her not by healing her husband, but by providing for her himself. Ya'ita also continues to function as a foil for Yohanan's character and just as their gender impacts how they each experience femininity, it also affects their experiences of madness.

His [Rabbi Yohnan's] sister came before him weeping. She said to him, "Look (*hazi*) at me!"[191]	אתיא אחתיה וקא בביא קמיה אמרה ליה חזי לדידי
He would not regard (*ashgah*) her.	לא אשגח בה
"Look at these orphans!"[192]	חזי להני יתמי
He said to her, "Leave your orphans, I will keep them alive… [Jeremiah 49:11]."	אמ' לה עזבה יתומיך אני אחיה
"[Act][193] for the sake of my widowhood!"	בשביל אלמנותי
He said to her, "…and let your widows trust in me [Jeremiah 49:11]."[194]	אמ' לה ואלמנותיך עלי תבטחו

When Ya'ita begs her brother to look at her, she is begging him to acknowledge her distress and tears and to accept that she is someone worth intervening for, that she too is a person with wants and needs—wants and needs that Yohanan has put in jeopardy. Ya'ita uses the same word *hazi* (to look, see) that is used when Reish Lakish and Yohanan look at each other in part one. But here the gaze functions not as a method for sexualization and objectification, but rather as an acknowledgment of Ya'ita's existence and personhood. When Yohanan refuses

[191] The word that I have translated as "at me (*l'didi*)" usually means "according to my opinion." However, the preposition *l'* is also simply the preposition that often accompanies the verb "to see." Without that preposition, *didi* means "of mine; my." Thus, another way to translate Yohanan's sister's words is "See my opinion," or perhaps, "look at my [situation/distress]" (if we took more liberties with the translation). Also of note, this whole first exchange (her saying, "look at me," and her brother refusing to do so) only appears in one other manuscript (MS Florence 8-9).

[192] In most of the textual witnesses she instead says, "Act for the sake of my children." A notable exception is Florence 8-9, in which she says, "Look at my sons and daughters," (note that "sons" and "children" are the same word, *benei*).

[193] Every other textual witness of this line includes the word עשה "to do, act ['asah]."

[194] Both parts of this verse are according to the NRSV translation. I normally use my own translation, but I wouldn't have translated this verse any differently.

to regard her, *hazi* is not used, but rather *shegah* (to look upon, pay attention to)[195] and thus further explains what type of gaze Ya'ita is requesting.

When she is not enough to win her brother's consideration and compassion, Ya'ita switches tactics, directing Yohanan's gaze to her soon-to-be orphaned children. This strategy is enough to draw his regard but is not enough to get him to grant her request. Yohanan refuses her by quoting the first part of Jeremiah 49:11, "Leave your orphans, I will keep them alive," and when she directly mentions her impending widowhood, he responds with the rest of the verse, "and let your widows trust in me."

In the verse's context in Jeremiah, God's voice promises to care for Israel's orphans and widows and to punish Edom (a rival country that presumably created these orphans and widows). I argue that Yohanan applies these words to himself. He paints himself as a god-like caregiver and implies that Reish Lakish is not needed. Stubbornly, Yohanan clings to what power he still has. Reish Lakish's taunts may have threatened Yohanan's status amongst his peers, but Yohanan is *still* a rabbi and brother. Both of these positions put him in a position of power over Ya'ita: widows could go before a rabbinic court to ask for their alimony, and it's quite possible that as Ya'ita's male relation he would be the one now responsible for her care.[196] Yohanan also has power over her through his madness since it is his *hulshat da'at* that's making Reish Lakish ill. Letting go of his *hulshat da'at* and healing Reish Lakish would put this power into jeopardy, since

[195] *The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*, s.v. "šgḥ," accessed May 20, 2023, https://cal.huc.edu/oneentry.php?lemma=%24gx%20V&cits=all.

[196] For examples of women asking rabbis for their alimony (and advocating for better alimony based on their standard of living pre-widowhood) see bKetubot 65a. The story does not mention if Ya'ita's father was still alive (if she was, she could go to his house like Batya did), or whether she could seek care from Reish Lakish's family (though if they are not rabbinic Jews it's quite possible, she would not have wished to go to them even if they were able to take her in).

Reish Lakish would be able to return to the *beit midrash* and continue to contest Yohanan's high status. So Yohanan refuses to pray for and heal Reish Lakish, clinging to the power he still has at the expense of his sister and her children.

Community and the relationality of bodyminds are integral to conversations about care. Ideal care improves a person's quality of life, and poor, harmful care can have grave consequences for all participants involved. The concept of care is thus fraught with conflicting definitions, critiques, and histories. Feminist scholarship and activism have long criticized the gendering of care that acts to put the burden of caregiving largely onto women, especially women of color, and often does so with little to no acknowledgement or compensation of their labor.[197] In both mad and disability communities, the word "care" invokes a history of oppression and abuse thinly disguised as "care." Forced institutionalization, medicalization, and loss of autonomy have been, and still are, used to keep those deemed too unusual for society locked up and controlled. This is also true of non-white populations in colonized countries, who are more frequently pathologized as "mad" by western society as an excuse to exert control.[198]

Some communities push back against this abusive "care" by doing away with the word "care" altogether. The Independent Living movement, for example, advocates that people with disabilities have a right to independence and self-autonomy, a right to care, and a right to *direct* their care. Informed by this movement, Christine Kelly describes the terminology she uses when assisting her disabled friend Killian:

---

[197] Kelly, "Building Bridges with Accessible Care," 786, 792.

[198] See Sarah Redikopp, "Out of Place, Out of Mind: Min(d)Ing Race in Mad Studies Through a Metaphor of Spatiality," *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 10, no. 3 (December 8, 2021): 96–118, https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v10i3.817; Soros, "Writing Madness in Indigenous Literature."

> I will never provide "care" for Killian. Out of respect for his agency, for the contributions of IL [Independent Living], and in light of the history of institutionalization and ongoing potential for institutionalized approaches to disability, I "support," "assist," or whatever term is suggested by disability communities.[199]

Other communities seek for and discuss alternative forms of care. The field of mad studies, for example, grew out of the psychiatric survivor movement, and the majority of mad studies scholarship still focuses on critiquing the psychiatric system and/or seeking out alternative forms of care and community.[200]

The importance of community features heavily when mad scholars analyze alternative care practices. Indeed, communities "that can accommodate mental difference"[201]—instead of cultivating an emphasis on illness that ostracizes mad people— are the antithesis of western psychiatric practices. Community is similarly essential in disability studies' discussions of anti-ableist communities and caregiving practices. Like mad studies, disability studies seek to establish communities and societies that don't measure a person's worth based on their independence, ability to be "productive members of society," or possession of a "rational" mind. Instead, disability studies seek to define humans by their frailty and weakness, and to define society, "not as a collection of autonomous beings, some of whom will lose their independence, but as a community of dependent frail bodies that rely on others for survival."[202]

---

[199] Kelly, "Building Bridges with Accessible Care," 796.

[200] LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, *Mad Matters*, 2; PhebeAnn M. Wolframe, "Going Barefoot: Mad Affiliation, Identity Politics, and Eros," in *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, ed. Elizabeth J. Donaldson, Literary Disability Studies (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 14.

[201] Rose Miyatsu, "'Hundreds of People Like Me': A Search for a Mad Community in The Bell Jar," in *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, ed. Elizabeth J. Donaldson, Literary Disability Studies (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 54.

[202] Tobin Anthony Siebers, *Disability Theory* (University of Michigan Press, 2008), 182, https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.309723.

Just as feminist, disability, and mad studies use intersectionality to trace the power dynamics for care and the opportunity for abuse caregiving power creates, so too we can trace the power dynamics of care in our two stories. In chapter one, we read how Batya, due to her roles as woman and wife, was made to care for Elazar after nightly, self-imposed, sufferings. When she leaves, sixty, likely foreign (considering they were brought by sailors), enslaved people take over his care. As a free woman, Batya is able to subvert her caregiving role upon her return, using it to exert dominance over Elazar's undead bodymind. The fate of the sixty enslaved persons, on the other hand, is left unknown.

Unlike Batya, Ya'ita is unable to subvert gendered caregiving roles for her own benefit. She is most likely caring for Reish Lakish in his illness, but his bodymind is not as incorruptible as Elazar's. In the face of his impending death, Ya'ita finds herself not a woman caregiver, but rather a woman in need of care. Yohanan, on the other hand, finds himself in the role of caregiver. And instead of letting Ya'ita dictate her own care by granting her requests, he abusively wields his care for his benefit. He does this first by withholding care, refusing to even look at her, and secondly by solidifying himself as the caregiver for her and her children. In doing so, he effectively solidifies his power over her and her reliance on him.

When we use the disability and mad studies' definition of society as a community of interdependent bodies, we are able to read how Ya'ita is forced to be interrelated and interconnected with Reish Lakish and Yohanan throughout this story. And so her bodymind is continually interrelated and interdependent to theirs. Just as Ya'ita was absent when her brother and future husband arranged her marriage, so too she was absent in the *beit midrash* when the argument that resulted in her husband's illness and her brother's madness occurred. Yet both

conversations between these men would have drastic impacts on her life. Ya'ita is just as interconnected with them as they are with each other. And as such the relationality of madness extends to her and distresses her bodymind: in this sense she too goes mad.

Ya'ita's madness is not the same as Yohanan's *hulshat da'at*. Yohanan experienced *hulshat da'at* when Reish Lakish rejected Yohanan's dominance and importance to him, threatening Yohanan's position in the *beit midrash* hierarchy. Yohanan effectively lashes out at Reish Lakish, arguably an assertion of power. Ya'ita, on the other hand, does not have much power to lose. Rather, it is her powerless state that leads her to desperation, and there is no power to be had in her madness. All she has are tears—tears that her own brother will not even acknowledge. *Hulshat da'at* is thus only one type of madness, a type that most women cannot access despite the effects it has on their bodyminds.

Another *hulshat da'at* narrative parallels the scene between Ya'ita and Yohanan. Found on bBava Batra 9b, this story contains the same themes of gender, power, and madness but at a heightened level. It showcases women's vulnerability to rabbis' actions and experiences of *hulshat da'at,* casting into starker relief their powerlessness. In this parallel story, Rav Ahadvoi engages Rav Sheishet in rabbinic style debate, and Ahadvoi takes on a mocking tone as he continues to find counters to Sheishet's arguments. Sheishet experiences *hulshat da'at* and Ahadvoi becomes silent and loses his learning. Ahadvoi's mother weeps before Sheishet pleading with him to heal her son, just as Ya'ita begged Yohanan to heal her husband.

Like Ya'ita, Ahadvoi's mother has no name. I have decided to refer to her as Imma Orhata, Mother Manners, borrowing this format from another named woman in rabbinic literature, Imma Shalom, Mother Peace. This name acknowledges how Imma Orhata changes her

"manners," rejecting proper female comportment and subversively embracing the sexualization of her breasts, to achieve her goals. Her name is also a reference to how she is first introduced, as an element of her son's appellation: "The foal who debased his mother's manners." The root of the verb that I have here translated as "debased," שגש, *sh.g.sh,* is the same root for the verb "to be confused, perplexed, excited."[203] The word that I have translated as "manners" אורחתא*, orahta* means "paths" in addition to one's customary manners or ways.[204] This "mother," as we will see, is a woman who had a path from which she has been diverted, or from which she diverged. Her offspring's own improper conduct leads her to act outside the boundaries of her normal behavior, or more simply, as a mad woman. Here is her story, masked under the guise of being Rav Ahadvoi's story:

אמ' רבה אשתעי לי אילא משגש אורחתא דאימיה משמיה דר' אלעזר [...]	Rava said, "The foal who debased his mother's manners [lit., ways] told me the following in the name of Rabbi Elazar [...]"
ואמאי קרו ליה אילא משגש אורחתא דאימיה	Why do they call him "the foal who debased his mother's manners?"
דבעא מיניה רב אחדבוי בר אמי מרב ששת מניין למצורע שמטמא אדם בימי ספרו	Because Rav Ahadvoi bar Ami asked Rav Sheishet, "What is the proof text that a leper can make a person impure during his days of counting?" [referring to the time during a leper's purification process, which lasts several days.]
[...]	[Sheishet responds and the two rabbis engage in a halakhic debate about transmitting impurities, discussing leprosy, animal corpses, and seminal

[203] *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, s.v. "שגש"

[204] *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic,* s.v. "ארחא, אורחא"

discharge from Jewish males. I have omitted the debate.]	
Rav Ahadvoi was responding mockingly [to what Rav Sheishet said].	הוה קא מהדר ליה בבדיחותא
Rav Sheishet's mind became ill. Rav Ahadvoi bar Ami became silent and lost his learning.	חלש דעתיה דרב ששת אישתתק איעקר תלמודיה מיניה דרב אחדבוי בר אמי
His [Rav Ahadvoi's] mother came crying and crying, but he [Rav Sheishet] did not regard (*ashgah*) her.	אתאי אמיה צוחא צוחא ולא אשגח בה
She said to him, "Look at these breasts from which you suckled!"	אמרה ליה חזי להני דדי דמצית מיניהו
Rav Sheishet asked for mercy upon Rav Ahadvoi, and he was cured. [205]	בעא רחמי עילויה ואיתסי

After Rava cites a tradition attributed to "the foal who debased his mother's manners" the Talmud wonders who this sage is and answers its question with a story which bears both formal and substantive similarities to parts two and three of Yohanan and Reish Lakish's tale. Both scenes open with a halakhic discussion about ritual purity. This time, the topic is leprosy—specifically about when a person cured of their leprosy is able to return to the community.[206] Once again the conversation under debate fits thematically—one's position in the community—with the events that are about to unfold. Ahadvoi and Sheishet's relationship is established from the beginning of their conversation—in asking Sheishet a question, Ahadvoi treats him as his superior, the more learned rabbi.[207] Just as in Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story, the collegial

[205] bBava Batra 9b, MS Hamburg 165.

[206] People affected by leprosy had to live outside of the community until they were healed. See Numbers 5:1-3, Leviticus 13-14, mNegaim and tNegaim.

[207] While it is equally possible that a rabbi would ask his students questions as a pedagogical method, it is reasonable to assume that in this the case the story is using their interactions as a shorthand to establish the hierarchy between these two men, especially when read as a parallel to Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story.

debate turns sour when the student-teacher relationship is challenged. Ahadvoi feels that he has bested Sheishet and takes evident delight in having done so. Sheishet's *da'at* weakens and this causes Ahadvoi to become silent and lose his learning—in a sense, his mind,[208] using the same formulaic line that appears in Yohanan and Reish Lakish's scene: "Rabbi Yohanan's *da'at* became ill [*halash da'ateih*], Reish Lakish became ill [*halash*]."

The women in the two stories, Ya'ita and Imma Orhata, also mirror each other. Like Ya'ita, Imma Orhata comes weeping before the offended rabbi to ask him to make amends with her male relative, so that he might be healed. Unlike Ya'ita, Imma Orhata's behavior is more greatly dramatized and heightened. Whereas Ya'ita "came before him weeping," Imma Orhata "came crying and crying." Significantly in both cases the crying women are not regarded by the rabbis, a fact both stories state in exactly the same words: "he did not regard (*ashgah*) her." Also significant, both women are not only related to the men afflicted by *hulshat da'at*, they also have a relationship with the rabbi whose *hulshat da'at* caused the affliction. In the one case, Ya'ita is Yohanan's sister; in the other Imma Orhata is Sheishet's wetnurse (In his commentary of the Talmud, the medieval rabbi Rashi tells us that Imma Orhata was Sheishet's wetnurse, something that was already implicit in her words[209]). And while Ya'ita verbally invokes her motherhood by telling Yohanan to look at her children, Imma Orhata does so by exposing her breasts, saying "Look at these breasts from which you suckled!"

---

[208] "He became/was silent," *ishtiq*, is a rabbinic term of art that a rabbi either did not know the answer, agreed with his colleague's objection and thus had no response, or "ignored what was said to him, because he was not impressed by it." *The Practical Talmud Dictionary,* s.v. "אישתיק, אשתיק, שתיק." In this story, it's possible to also read this as a change to Ahadvoi's bodymind e.g., that he became non-verbal.

[209] As a historian, I am normally hesitant to rely on Rashi's commentary since he lived after the Bavli's redaction. But in this case, it is our only explanation for why Sheishet also nursed from Imma Orhata.

In exposing her breasts, she positions herself in a mothering, nurturing role, while also drawing Sheishet's gaze through her provocative actions. Having fore fronted the story by describing her son as "debasing her manners," it is clear that Imma Orhata's self-exposure is out of desperation. In addition to the distress over her son's loss of learning and non-verbal bodymind, it is also possible that he is her financial support, and that she is just as at risk as Ya'ita of losing material stability. As such, Imma Orhata's relationship to Sheishet has flipped. Where once Imma Orhata was Sheishet's caretaker/nursemaid, now she is reliant on Sheishet to reinstate her son/caregiver. Unlike Ya'ita, Imma Orhata succeeds in persuading Sheishet to heal her son, but only does so by "debasing" herself, to use the language of the text. She must lean into her culture's idea of a mad woman and use her body as a shock factor to obtain her goal. Imma Orhata is forced to resort to drastic measures to get Sheishet to look at her and consider her plea and performs madness and non-normativity for doing so. Both of these women's bodyminds are affected by the rabbis' disputes: they weep and wail, they gesture and point, they ask to be seen. They are just as interconnected to these rabbis as the rabbis are to each other.

2.4 Changing *Da'at:* A Rabbinic Self Critique

Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story concludes with their deaths. In the absence of Yohanan's intervention Reish Lakish dies. Yohanan grieves intensely. His fellow rabbis try to comfort him, with no success. Operating within the context of rabbinic culture and *beit midrash* hierarchy, they assume that Yohanan's *da'at* will be settled if they give him a subordinate that constantly affirms Yohanan's reasoning, rather than challenging it. Indeed, it was Reish Lakish's unabashed challenge and his ultimate refusal of Yohanan's dominance that seemed to result in his death. Yet in a surprising twist, this does not work. Yohanan realizes that Reish Lakish meant much

more to him than a prop to solidify his status, and his madness only intensifies. His colleagues pray for mercy for him, and he dies.

נח נפשיה דריש לקיש הוה קא מצטער ר' יוחנן בתריה טובא	Reish Lakish's *nafsha* [soul] rested [he died], and Rabbi Yohanan was suffering greatly after him.
אמרי רבנן מאי נעביד דמיתבא דעתיה נתיוה לר' אלעזר בן פדת דמחדדן שמעתתיה ונותבוה קמיה	The rabbis said, "Who will settle [*d'meitva*] his *da'at*? Let Rabbi Elazar ben Padat[210] come, since his [knowledge of] legal traditions is sharp and let him sit [*v'notvuh*] before Yohanan [at the *beit midrash*]."
אתיוה לר' אלעז' בן פדת ואותבוה קמיה כל מלתא דהוה קאמ' הוה אמ' ליה תניא דמסייעא לך	Rabbi Elazar ben Padat came, and they sat him [*'otivuh*] before Yohanan. For everything that Yohanan would say, Elazar ben Padat responded, "there is a *baraita* that supports you."
אמ' וכי להדין צריכנא בר לקישא כל מלתא דהוה קאמינא הוה מקשי לי עשרין וארבעה קושיאתא ופריקנא ליה ארבעה ועשרין פירוקי עד דרווחא שמעתא ואת אמרת תניא דמסייעא לך אטו אנא לא ידענא דשפיר קאמינא	Yohanan said, "Is this what I need!? [For] everything that I might have thought, Bar Lakish [Reish Lakish] would raise twenty four difficulties to me, and, I would bring twenty four solutions to him, until the legal tradition was widened. But you say, 'there is a *baraita* that supports you.' Do I not know that what I say is right!?"[211]
הוה קא אזיל וקארי אבבי בר לקישא היכא את עד דשני דעתיה בעו רבנן רחמי עליה ונח נפשיה	He would go to [various] doors and call, "Son of Lakish where are you!?" until his *da'at* changed. The rabbis prayed for mercy upon him, and his *nafsha* rested [he died.]

[210] This is not Batya's husband, but rather a different Elazar.

[211] The word that I have translated as "is right (*d'shapir*)," can also mean "is beautiful" and is the same word Reish Lakish uses to describe Yohanan's beauty in part one: "You have the beauty [*shuphrach*] of women!"

In the previous chapter we saw how a rabbi sought to "settle" his own "unsettled" mind. Here and elsewhere, we see others attempting to intervene to settle an afflicted person's mind. Usually, this settling takes the form of reassuring a mad rabbi of his rank in the social hierarchy. For example, in a story on bShabbat 51b-52a, Rav Huna bar Hiyya's donkey overtakes Rabba bar Rav Huna's donkey when they were riding together on the road. Rabba's mind is weakened (*halash da'ateih)*, so Huna asks him a *halakhic* (legal) question and chastises his own donkey. On bSotah 40a, Rabbi Hiyya experiences *hulshat da'at* when his audience leaves him to listen to Rabbi Abbahu's lecture instead. Abbahu reassures him by likening himself to a seller of small items, and Hiya to a seller of precious stones. Everyone flocks to Abbahu's small items/lectures because they are affordable/easy to understand, whereas Hiyya's precious stones/lectures are expensive/complex. This practice speaks to a rabbinic notion of communal care, when a fellow rabbi's *da'at* weakens, the rabbis respond with comfort and reassurance.

In chapter one, the rabbis also try to assure Elazar, saying that his *da'at* was actually correct for condemning the washerman to capital punishment. In the present story, the rabbis' introduction of Elazar ben Padat to Yohanan serves this same function. It was Reish Lakish's disagreement during a halakhic debate, treating him as equal instead of a superior, that began this series of events. From the rabbis' perspective, replacing Reish Lakish with a "yes person" was the perfect strategy—they would settle Yohanan's mind by affirming his prominence. The story makes this link clear through the repetition of *yatav*, "to sit, settle," just as Elazar's story repeats this verb to track his un/settled *da'at*. When the rabbis ask, "Who will settle [*d'maitva'*] his *da'at*?" they conclude that Elazar ben Padat should "sit [*v'notvuh*] before Yohanan," and so they "sat him [*'otivuh*] before Yohanan."

Their strategy, however, fails. It turns out that Yohanan was not truly bothered by a lack of respect or a challenge to his rank, but rather by the fracturing of his relationship with Reish Lakish. With Reish Lakish gone, Yohanan is no longer concerned about proper respect or power dynamics in a relationship, and instead values the ways Reish Lakish would challenge him. His grieving intensifies to the point that his *da'at* changes from him, *d'shanei da'atei*.[212] At a loss for how to comfort him further, his fellow rabbis pray for him and he dies—the euphemistic phrase, "his *nafsha* rested," suggesting that he finally found his peace in death.

The verb that I have translated as "changed (*shenei*)" can mean "to repeat," or "to change, to be different"[213] and when paired with *da'at* it is translated as "to become insane."[214] The use of *shenei* to express madness and sickness more generally is more common in Syriac, another eastern Aramaic dialect that was also spoken at the time.[215] The Syriac equivalent of *shenei* has a variety of possible definitions, most deriving from the general translation "to be altered for the worse," and is used to express both physical and mental illness, which results in definitions such as "to be changed in mind, to go mad, rave."[216] The use of this verb could also be read as a way to emphasize Yohanan's iterative actions when he goes to unspecified "doors" and calls out for Reish Lakish.[217] Stuck in the emotion of intense grief, Yohanan seems to no

---

[212] Other textual witnesses instead say דשף דעתיה מיניה, *shaf da'ateih mineih,* "his mind slipped from him." MS Oxford: Heb. c. 17/69-78 notably says, "his mind settled," *deshav da'ateih.*

[213] *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature,* s.v. "שנא, שני"

[214] *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, s.v. "שני;" *The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*, s.v. "šny," accessed June 4th 2023, https://cal.huc.edu/oneentry.php?lemma=%24ny%20V&cits=all.

[215] The Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud is called Babylonian Jewish Aramaic, or simply Babylonian Aramaic. There are three eastern Aramaic dialects total: Babylonian Jewish Aramaic, Syriac, and Mandic. The use of a Syriac phrase indicates the lateness of the source and its composition, as we start to see Syriac in the Bavli from around the fourth century CE, expressing Christian-Jewish Aramaic interactions.

[216] *J. Payne Smith's (Mrs. Margoliouth), A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, s.v. "shana,'" accessed May 22nd 2023, https://www.dukhrana.com/lexicon/PayneSmith/index.php?p=586.

[217] All other textual witnesses have Yohanan repeat the words he calls.

longer be able to do anything but seek out his dead colleague. It appears his mad border body has reached the "mad" end of the sane-mad spectrum. His *da'at* is not simply ill (*halash*) but "changed for the worse."

Part four can thus be read as a narrative critique of late antique Babylonian rabbinic society. With Reish Lakish's death and the unsettling presence of a poor substitute, Yohanan realizes that there was more to his relationship with Reish Lakish than that of the conquered becoming the conqueror, and that Reish Lakish is worth more to him than as a student upon which he can prop up his standing in his community's hierarchy. But this realization comes too late, Reish Lakish is already dead. His fellow rabbis also don't fully understand this point, and whether they ever do is left unclear. Not only is Yohanan isolated in the absence of his unique companion, but he is also isolated in the feeling that none of his peers understand his loss. The story thus breaks the mold of other *hulshat da'at* stories. It is not an example of how we must comfort mad rabbis by reaffirming their rank, but rather a critique that rank matters so much in late antique rabbinic society. Unlike those stories in which rabbis' ill minds are settled by affirming their standing in rabbinic ranks, this story demonstrates the limits and failures of status and power based rabbinic sociality. Yohanan is left enacting his loss, over and over, to the seeming confusion of his community whose last recourse of care is to pray for mercy to end his suffering.

In chapter one, I said that we did not know why Elazar was dying. Was it because of his suffering, or because of something else? When read in light of Reish Lakish and Yohanan's tale, I suggest that we are meant to read Elazar's (un)death as having a similar cause to Yohanan's—his disconnection with his fellow rabbis. Indeed, when he tells Batya about his impending death, he

says “I know that the rabbis are angry with me and will not properly tend to me [upon my death].” Their lack of care echoes the way in which Yohanan’s fellows did not understand his grief. The communal system of care falls short in both instances. However, while Elazar is eventually returned to his father (a rabbi) and properly buried by his peers, Yohanan’s death is left uncertain. Did he find peace in death? Did he find Reish Lakish in the afterlife? Was his mind ever truly settled?

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that reading Yohanan and Reish Lakish’s story through the lenses of disability and mad studies furthers our understanding of rabbinic conceptions of bodyminds—that bodyminds are entities that are fluid and interconnected. This in turn makes for forms of madness that are equally relational and dynamic. Yohanan, Reish Lakish, and Ya’ita rely on each other in various ways, Yohanan relies on Reish Lakish to prop him up as a great rabbi/teacher, Reish Lakish relies on Yohanan’s tutelage to enter the rabbinic community (despite his attestation otherwise), and Ya’ita relies on Yohanan and Reish Lakish for material sustenance. When Yohanan’s reliance upon Reish Lakish is threatened, he experiences *hulshat da’at,* a madness that intensifies when Reish Lakish dies. When Yohanan experiences *hulshat da’at,* Reish Lakish becomes ill/weak. When Ya’ita no longer has a husband to support her, she experiences her own form of madness as she weeps before her brother and begs him to acknowledge her. Yohanan and Reish Lakish’s story uses themes of madness, reproductive organs/gender/sex, and social relations and status to tell a story of a dyad doomed by “Greco-Roman” and rabbinic social and cultural power structures.

A powerful narrative in its own right, Yohanan and Reish Lakish's tale was at some point placed where we have it today, in the middle of Elazar and Batya's tale. And as such, it not only functions as a self-critique of top-down dyadic power relations in rabbinic hierarchies, but also as a lead-in to the drama of Elazar and Batya's own tense relationship. As I mentioned in the introduction, Yohanan and Reish Lakish's tale is inserted right after Elazar's abdominal surgery-test, which is right before Batya's entrance and care for Elazar in his intestinal travails. Yohanan and Reish Lakish's story of interrelated bodyminds, fluid madness, and broken systems of care prime us to read about these same themes in Elazar and Batya's story. I will continue to analyze themes of interconnected bodyminds, community, and care in chapter three.

Chapter 3 (Eco)Systems of Care: Madness, Community, and Non-Humans

CONTENT WARNING: Discussion of suicide in a footnote

In chapter two, I argued that *hulshat da'at* stories demonstrate a rabbinic understanding of madness as relational and fluid and bodyminds as interconnected and interdependent. Like disability, madness does not occur in a vacuum. Madness is a marker of difference–a type of neurodiversity that society does not want to make room for and so pathologizes and often treats with the goal of conformity and/or elimination. In this sense, madness is created by society and culture. Madness born out of trauma and stress is also caused and created by society, though in this case by the harms that society can mete out on those it others. As a kind of mediating understanding between these two approaches, madness can be viewed as emerging in a neuronormative and emotional-normative world. Such a world only provisions for highly constrained ways of being in the bodymind. Its failure to create space for a variety of bodyminds produces these "nonconforming" bodyminds as necessarily painful and ill. In this way, the very strictures of social "bodyminding" both produce madness and recursively add trauma to the mix. When factoring a host of other social/personal variations, such as gender, race, species, and the like, madness can, depending on the circumstances and social conditions, absorb these other difference markers into its socially stigmatizing functions.

Madness is thus intrinsically social and relational. In chapters one and two I explored the relational aspect of madness between humans, but the stories analyzed in the present chapter

demonstrate that the rabbis understood this relationality to extend beyond human-human relationships. Indeed, the following stories contain characters such as the trees, clouds, and rain, all of whom affect and are affected by each other and the humans they interact with. These effects include changes to minds and bodies: fasting bodies, un/moving clouds, and *hulshat da'at* experienced by humans and nonhumans are but a few examples of what we will read in these stories.

I also discussed in chapter two how community and the relationality of bodyminds factor into conversations about care. Interconnected bodyminds have the capacity to both harm and help. The same is true when we expand the concept of bodymind to include more than humans. As we will read in these stories, clouds can withhold rain (something that, from the point of view of humans, plants, and animals, is decidedly *not* care) and the ground can protectively wrap around a person while they sleep. When paying attention to the way care works in these stories, we learn that, in these texts, the rabbis viewed the ecosystem itself as a system of care that at times breaks and at other times sustains.

In this chapter I will analyze six stories, all found within the Babylonian Talmud's tractate Ta'anit. As I explained in the introduction, the Bavli is divided thematically into six orders, and each order contains multiple tractates. Tractate Ta'anit is found in the order Moed (Festivals). Other tractates in this order include Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish new year), Pesachim (Passover), and Shabbat (the Sabbath). Ta'anit, however, does not reference a specific holiday. Translated as "fast," tractate Ta'anit contains rabbinic discussions about communal fasting and prayer to bring rain during times of drought. These fasts were ad-hoc, communal, ritualized undertakings that prescribed ways in which humans could interact with and influence the environment (e.g.,

responding to drought, bringing rain). As such, the stories found within are ripe for thinking about the relationality between humans and nonhumans.[218]

This chapter is divided into three main parts. In part one, I analyze two rainmaking stories found on bTa'anit 25a in which the rabbis converse with the sky and clouds to bring rain (without involving God). The first features Rabbi Hama bar Hanina and his community who go through the motions of rabbinic rainmaking rituals (including fasting and prayer)66, but rain does not come. Ultimately, Hama addresses the sky directly. Only when he accuses the sky of insolence does the sky cover its face with rainclouds. In the second story, Rabbi Hiyya bar Lulyani overhears the clouds conspiring to rain on Israel's enemies instead of on Israel. Hiyya reminds the clouds that Israel was the only nation to accept God's Torah and is thus more deserving of rain. He demands that they pour rain over Israel, and they do. While neither of these stories include *hulshat da'at*, I highlight them because they incorporate nonhuman characters and address what happens when God is absent and systems of care fail. They also demonstrate how human and nonhuman bodyminds affect each other. Hama and his community fast, changing their bodies in response to the absent rain and dry land. The sky eventually covers its *face* with clouds at Hama's rebuke. Similarly, Hiyya's objection halts the clouds' movement away from Israel, and makes them rain in their current location. These themes are also present in companion and nearby *hulshat da'at*

[218] Julia Watts Belser studies human and nonhuman (including divine) relationships in Bavli Ta'anit in her book *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity: Rabbinic Responses to Drought and Disaster* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). She continues this study in her analysis of Bavli Gittin in her second book *Rabbinic Tales of Destruction*. Both of these works greatly inform this chapter. See also the article by Devora Steinmetz, who argues that the whole of bTa'anit chapter three be read as one literary unit, in part by tracing the shared themes in many of the chapter's stories which include the stories I analyze here. Devora Steinmetz, "Perception, Compassion, and Surprise: Literary Coherence in the Third Chapter of Bavli Ta'anit," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 82–83 (2012): 61–117.

tales (located only a few folios earlier, bTa'anit 23a, 24a, 24b), which I analyze in parts two and three.

Part two focuses on a Babylonian narrative (bTa'anit 23a) about the legendary rainmaker Honi the Circle Drawer, who lived in Roman Judea (which is renamed Palestine by the time of the Bavli) during the Second Temple Period, specifically during the first century BCE.[219] However in this story, which I entitle Honi's Sleep, he does not bring rain, or even try to. Rather, after a conversation with a farmer planting a carob tree, Honi eats a meal (perhaps a carob) and falls into a deep sleep. The ground forms a barrier around him, and he slumbers for 70 years. When he awakens, his community and family do not recognize him. As a result, he experiences *hulshat da'at*, prays for mercy for himself, and dies.

Part three reads three *hulshat da'at* stories (embedded amongst other rainmaking stories on bTa'anit 24a-b) that all feature prominent rabbis who decree communal fasts and pray for rain: Rabbi Yehudah haNasi (late 2nd and early 3rd century CE, Palestine), Rav Nachman (late 3rd and early 4th century CE, Babylonia) and Rav Papa (fourth century CE, Babylonia). But when rain does not come, they experience *hulshat da'at.* Only after these sages go mad at their failures does rain finally fall.

I am not the first scholar to analyze these stories. Richard Kalmin analyzes Palestinian and Babylonian rainmaking stories side-by-side to gain historical insight into the differences between these two rabbinic communities.[220] Belser has written an entire book on Bavli Ta'anit and

[219] Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, eds., "Honi Ha-Me'aggel," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 9 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 518–19, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587509174/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=3dd7fed7.
[220] Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity*, 75–79.

discusses most of the stories I discuss in this chapter. She focuses on the way the Bavli rereads ancient Jewish understandings of natural phenomena as divine signs to counter non-Jewish polemics that God had abandoned the Jewish people and uses stories of failed rainmakers for internal/self-critique and theological reflections. Through this work she analyzes the role of status in rainmaking rituals, and how human bodies mirror the parched earth through fasting.[221] Belser further explores the interrelatedness of human bodies and the natural world in her second book.[222] This chapter is indebted to Belser's work, and I engage it frequently throughout the chapter. My own readings of these texts contribute to the field by applying disability and mad studies to my analyses and focusing primarily on human-nonhuman relationships. By reading closely throughout these stories to trace human and nonhuman relationships, the power dynamics between them, and their interrelated bodyminds, I argue that these texts contain a rabbinic view of bodyminds, madness, community, and systems of care that extends beyond human relationships.

3.1 An Insolent Faced Sky and Conspiring Clouds: The Interconnectedness of Non-Human Bodyminds

Rain gained significance in ancient Israelite, and later ancient Jewish,[223] practice due to the ecosystem in the region now known as Israel and Palestine. Rain falls only during one season, and the land and creatures who reside in it must subsist on that water until the next year. As Belser writes, "In an ecosystem so dependent upon rain in a certain season, people awaited the

[221] Belser, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity*.
[222] Belser, *Rabbinic Tales of Destruction*.
[223] I phrase it this way, because "Judaism" and "Jewish" identity did not begin to emerge until the second temple period (516 BCE- 70 CE). Prior to this the Israelites conceived of themselves as a nation.

coming of rain with particular urgency and hoped for a sufficient supply."[224] It makes sense that something so crucial to survival would take on religious and ritual importance. Its importance within Judaism was so strong that it prevailed even in late antique Babylonia, where rain was not as necessary due to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers which would flood unpredictably (and dangerously without the proper preparation via dikes and levees) in the late spring.[225]

Late antique rabbis, whether in Palestine or Babylonia, were thus in constant relationship with their environmental surroundings–either eagerly awaiting rain in Palestine or worriedly anticipating and preparing for extreme flooding in Babylonia. When the rain fell in Palestine and the rivers didn't flood too harshly in Babylonia, the Jewish communities (and their non-Jewish neighbors) were sustained by the environment–crops could grow and feed them for the upcoming year. The ritualized fasting and prayers discussed in Bavli Ta'anit function as a way for the rabbis and their communities to communicate with and even manipulate the environment for a more favorable outcome. In Ta'anit's descriptions of these rituals, the rabbis do this by beseeching God to send (the right amount) of rain. But in some of the stories found in Ta'anit God is not prominent in this way, and is either distant, or simply not there. In these stories, the rabbis and their communities interact with the environment directly and we find non-human characters who are active agents.

Two narratives on bTa'anit 25a illustrate the typical rabbinic rainmaking rituals, as well as what a rabbi and his community might do if God is absent, and these practices fail to be efficacious. In both stories, these circumstances lead the rabbis to deal directly with the

---

[224] Belser, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity*, 34.

[225] Belser, 34–35; Arnold A. Lasker and Daniel J. Lasker, "The Jewish Prayer for Rain in Babylonia," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 15 (1984): 135, https://doi.org/10.1163/157006384X00079.

environment itself. It becomes clear through these interactions that environmental elements such as the sky and the clouds have bodyminds that are interrelated with humans as much as they are with each other.

In the first tale, Rabbi Hama bar Hanina (a third century CE Palestinian amora[226]) declares a fast during a drought. When rain does not come, his community brainstorms with him about what went wrong, and concludes it is his low social status. The community decides to direct their minds and break their hearts through prayer, but the rain remains absent. When Hama confirms with his community that they feel they have suitably repented, he addresses the sky directly, calling it "insolent" for not covering itself with rain clouds. Only then does rain fall.

Rabbi Hama bar Hanina decreed a fast, but rain did not come.	רבי חמא בר חנינא גזר תעניתא ולא אתא מיטרא
They said to him, "But Rabbi Yehosuah son of Levi decreed a fast and rain came!"	אמרו ליה והא רבי יהושע בן לוי גזר תעניתא ואתי מיטרא
He said to them, "I'm just me, he is son of Levi."	אמ' להו הא אנא הא בר ליואי
They said to him, "Then let's go and direct our minds (*datin*—plural of *da'at*). Perhaps if the community breaks their hearts, rain will come."	אמרו ליה דניתי וניכוין דעתין איפשר דתברי ציבורא לבייהו דאתי מיטרא
They prayed for mercy, but rain did not come.	בעו' רחמי ולא אתו מיטרא

[226] "Amora" designates a rabbi who lived and operated in the generations following the compilation of the Mishnah in 220 CE.

He said to them, “Are you satisfied (*niha*)[227] that rain should come for us?”	אמ' להו ניחא לכו שיבא מטר בשבילנו
They said, “Yes.”	אמרו ליה הין
He said, “Sky! Sky! Cover your face [with rain clouds]!”	אמר רקיע רקיע כסי פניך
He [the sky] did not cover himself.	לא איכסי
He said, “How hard/strong is your face [or: insolent], Sky!”	אמר כמה עזין פני רקיע
He [the sky or Hama] covered himself and rain came.[228]	איכסי ואתא מיטרא

In this story, Hama and his community go through three strategies to bring about rain during a drought: a charismatic figure advocating on behalf of/leading the community, communal repentance, and the charismatic individual addressing the sky directly. The first two strategies are the standard forms of rainmaking presented in Bavli Ta’anit. They both hinge upon an understanding of drought as a message from God, a sign of displeasure that the Israelites have been disobedient and need to repent. A charismatic figure, someone who has great favor with God, can advocate on the community’s behalf. Alternatively, the community itself can duly repent, and the falling rain is then seen as a sign of God’s forgiveness.[229] But in our story neither

[227] Note the use of the verb *nah,* “to rest,” to expresses the emotion satisfaction. This same verb was used throughout Elazar and Batya’s story (bBM 83b, 84b) as discussed in chapter one. Elazar’s *da’at* rests (*d’nah da’ateih*) after he arrests the washerman, and he rests (*heiniah*) his hand on his belly after the rabbis assure him that the washerman was guilty of a capital crime. Elazar also rests in his (un)death (*nayeiah*).

[228] bTa’anit 25a, Pesaro.

[229] For a more in-depth discussion of these practices see Belser, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity*, 116–83. Heszer also discusses the charismatic status of rainmakers, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 289–92.

of these strategies work. At first, the community assumes that it's because Hama is not great enough to have sway with God. They contrast him to another rabbi, Yeshoshua ben Levi, who is a Levite, and thus of higher status.[230] The community then takes responsibility, notably couching their second strategy in terms of their bodyminds: they collectively direct their *da'at* and they shatter their hearts! But when this form of utter repentance and entreaty also doesn't work, Hama and his community realize something more is going on. The standard forms of rainmaking are not working.

Notably, God is absent in this story. Hama and the community pray, presumably to God, but get no response. So instead, in the third attempt, Hama addresses the sky, establishing the heavens as a sentient character and dialog partner. Hama commands the sky, "Sky! Sky! Cover your face!" demanding that the sky cover itself with rain clouds. When the sky does not respond, Hama chastises it, ascribing to it a term that connotes insolence, which points to bodymind, "hardness" or "strength of face."[231] This hardness of face comports also with the physicalized, embodied understanding of rain itself as a covering for the heavens face.

The final line of the story, "he covered himself and rain came," can be interpreted as referring to either Hama or the sky. I argue that we read "he" as Hama, because such a reading aligns with the syntax of three of the *hulshat da'at* stories we will read below: "his *da'at* became ill, and rain came." According to this interpretation, it is only when Hama covers himself—and

[230] Levites were the tribe of Israel tasked with being the temple's priests. Even after the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE, Levites still kept track of their lineage. To be a Levite is to have higher status, even in most Jewish communities today. For example, during the Torah service various congregants will be called up to read aloud from a Torah scroll. Traditionally, the first person to read is someone descended from the high priests, a Cohen, and the second person called to read is someone descended from the priests, a Levite. Only then can other members of the congregation be called upon to read from the Torah.

[231] *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature,* s.v. "עז."

arguably his own face—that the sky mimetically responds by raining (i.e. "covering its face"). Thus, the sky does not respond to commands or rebuke verbally, but it listens, it has bodymind characteristics (perhaps rain is a form of humility, as is covering one's face; the inverse of the arrogance of bare-facedness), and it sees: covering itself in response to Hama's actions of the same. The sky is not a member of Hama's immediate, human, community, but it is a sentient character in the world. It can be unmoved and it can be moved.

On the same page (bTa'anit 25a) we find a second narrative involving non-human characters. This story features Rabbi Hiyya bar Lulyani, who most likely lived in Tiberius during the mid to late 300s CE.[232] In this story Hiyya overhears the clouds speaking amongst themselves and making plans to leave and pour rain over Israel's neighbors, and biblical enemies, instead of over Israel. Rather than talking directly the clouds, Hiyya continues this indirect mode of communication and addresses God, letting the clouds overhear his justification that Israel is more deserving of rain. The clouds seemingly hear this, stay put, and pour rain on Israel.

ר' חייא בר לולייני שמעינהו להנך ענני דקאמרי ניתו ונישרי מיא בעמון ומואב	Rabbi Hiyya bar Lulyani heard the clouds saying to each other, "Let's go and [pour][233] water on Ammon and Moab [present day Jordan]."

[232] Ben-Zion Rosenfeld hypothesizes that he is the son of Rabbi Luliani bar Tibri who lived in the fourth rabbinic generation (320-350/360 CE), this leads him to place Hiyya in the fifth generation (350/360 CE-380 CE). *Torah Centers and Rabbinic Activity in Palestine, 70-400 CE: History and Geographic Distribution*, trans. Chava Cassel (Boston: Brill, 2010), 125n41, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/umichigan/detail.action?docID=634911.

[233] A more literal translation would be "strengthen water" or "direct water." The verb used here is אשר/ישר (*yishar, ashar*) which means "to direct, make firm, to straighten." *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature,* s.v. "ישר;" *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic,* s.v. "אשר." The majority of the textual witnesses, however, use the verb אשד (*ashad*) which means to "pour out, shed, deposit." *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature,* s.v. "אשיד, אשד, אשד." It's likely that this was the intended verb. Especially since it proceeds to use *ashad* when throughout the rest of the story: "Pour here!" and "They poured it in their place."

Rabbi Hiyya said before him [God], "Master of the Universe! When you gave Torah to your people Israel you went around to all the nations of the world, but they did not accept it. And now you're giving them rain?! Pour here!"	אמר לפניו רבונו של עול' כשנת' תורה לעמך ישראל חיזרת על כל אומות העולם ולא קבלוה ועכשיו אתה נותן להם מטר שדו הבא
They poured it [rain] in their place [Palestine].	שדיוה אדובתיהי

The story begins with Hiyya overhearing the clouds talking amongst themselves, making plans to bring rain to Israel's enemy nations Ammon and Moab, instead of Roman Palestine. Hiyya objects to this, but does not address the sky directly. Instead, he speaks to God, with the understanding that the clouds will overhear him. Hiyya argues to God that Israel merits rain because they were the only people to accept the Torah. This references a Tannaitic (early) rabbinic tradition in which God initially offers the Torah to the rest of the world, but no nation is willing to accept the ten commandments: only the children of Israel do.[234] Hiyya's strategy seems to work, because upon hearing his argument the clouds send down rain "in their place," meaning Palestine.

Despite Hiyya's words, God is still largely absent in this story. There is no indication that God heard Hiyya's argument, and the story doesn't describe God as an actor, just an addressee. Instead, it is the clouds that respond to what Hiyya says. The fact that Hiyya addresses God and speaks of the covenant between God and Israel (which was established when Israel accepted

[234] Mekhilta deRabbi Yishmael, *Baqodesh*, 5.

God's Torah), makes us feel God's absence more keenly. In fact, in most of the manuscripts Hiyya directly addresses the clouds, never speaking to God.[235] MS Munich 95, for example, reads thus:

He said to them, "When The Holy One Blessed be He [God] brought his Torah around to every nation and language and no one accepted it until he came to Israel and they accepted it. But you abandon Israel and pour [rain] on Ammon and Moab!? Pour [rain] in your place!"	אמ' להו בשהחזיר הק'ב'הו' את תורתו על כל אומה ולשון ולא קבלוה עד שבאו ישראל וקבלוה ואתון שבקיתון ישראל ?וש?ר?יתון[236] מיטריכו בעמון ומואב שדו אדובתייכו
They poured rain in their place.	אשדו אדובתייהו

In this version, Hiyya uses the same argument, but gives it directly to the clouds. Even more so, he commands them: "Pour [rain] in your place!" It appears that Jews are in a tenuous relationship with God. Their acceptance of his Torah is enough to sway the clouds, but that's it. When they seek out rain, they must negotiate with the sky and clouds. God's absence in these manuscripts coupled with Hiyya's direct address to the clouds is in some ways the less pious version of the tale and hence, while not necessarily seeking an "original" version of this story, we might suggest that these versions are more persuasive and coherent.

Here the clouds are not described as having faces like the sky does in Hama's tale. But they speak to each other in a way that Hiyya can hear and in a language that he can understand (in the story clouds speak Aramaic and Hiyya speaks a combination of Aramaic – his command – and Hebrew). They also have agency, being able to decide where they will go, and where they will pour rain. Just like the sky, the clouds have bodyminds. If we take the liberty of reading

[235] MSS Munich 95, Munich 140, Oxford 366, Karlsruhe: U. H. Frg. 34, CUL: Add. 1009.1, Vatican 134, Göttingen 3, British Library 400, Vatican: Vat. ebr. 487/86-91.
[236] These question marks indicate a blur or tear in the manuscript that makes the letters difficult to discern.

across these two stories, we come to realize that their bodyminds are just as interrelated as the human bodyminds we've encountered in previous chapters. In Hama's story the sky covers its face with clouds, and in Hiyya's story we learn that the clouds are equally agentive. The sky alters the position of the clouds' bodyminds, demonstrating their interrelatedness.

These narratives in Bavli Ta'anit are not the only rabbinic passages that incorporate non-human ecological actors. A vivid example on bRosh HaShanah 23b converges nonhuman actors with bodymind. On this folio, rabbis discuss the positions of the sun and the moon asking whether the sun faces the moon's concave side or full side. A teaching by Yohanan is cited for the answer: The sun never faces the moon's concave side, to prevent her from experiencing *hulshat da'at.*

Rabbi Yohanan said, "What is the meaning of the verse 'Rule and fear are with him, he makes peace in the heights' [Job 22:5]?"	דאמ' ר' יוחנן מאי דכת' המשל ופחד עמו עושה שלום במרומיו
It means that the sun never sees the moon's concave side, nor the rainbow's concave side.	שמעולם לא ראתה חמה פגימתה של לבנה ולא פגימתה של קשת
The moon's concave side: because of the moon's illness of mind (*mishum halshut da'atah shel levanah*). The sun doesn't see the concave side of the rainbow so that the sun worshipers do not say that she [the sun] shoots arrows [with the rainbow].[237]	פגימתה של לבנה משום חלשות דעתה של לבנה ולא פגימתה של קשת דלא לימרו עובדיה גירי קא משדייה

[237] bRosh Hashana 23b, MS Munich 140.

In this passage, Yohanan asks what the book of Job means when it says that God "makes peace in the heights." He concludes that this refers to God's orchestration of peace between the sun and moon as well as God's attention to how this affects humans. If humans never see the sun positioned behind the concave side of a rainbow, then sun worshipers cannot claim the sun's divinity or power by claiming she uses the rainbow as a bow to shoot arrows. And the sun does not face the concave side of the moon—presumably because this is where the moon's face and eyes are located and if the moon were to behold the sun, she would experience *hulshat da'at.*

The latter idea is drawn from a rabbinic tradition found in both Palestinian midrash (Genesis Rabbah 1:16) and elsewhere in the Bavli (bHullin 60b) that the moon's protest about being the same size as the sun (arguing that one *must* be greater than the other) is answered when God diminishes her in comparison. In both versions of the story, God and the moon continue to negotiate how to express the moon's greatness in ways other than size. Both versions of these negotiations end when God realizes that her *da'at* is still unsettled, using the same verb, *yatav* (or its Hebrew counterpart, *yashav,* in the case of Genesis Rabbah), that is used to described Elazar's and Yohanan's unsettled minds.[238] God gives her either the stars (Genesis Rabbah) as reconciliation, or a sacrificial goat every new moon to atone for diminishing her (Bavli Hullin).

In the same chapter, in bRosh HaShanah 25a, the rabbis compare the moon to a human woman when describing moon phases. A new moon (when the moon is not visible) is described as a woman who has just given birth, and a full moon (when the whole moon is visible) is

[238] bHulin 60a, MS Vatican 122, reads לא הוה מיתבה דעתה, (*lo havah meitavah*, "her mind was not settled"). Genesis Rabbah 1:16 says, כיון שראה הקב"ה שלא נתיישבה דעתה, (*keivan shera'eh hakadosh barukh hu shelo nityeishvah datah*, "When The Holy One Blessed be He saw that her mind was not settled").

described as a woman so pregnant her "belly is between her teeth." The non-human elements in these stories have faces and bellies, they speak, listen, and act independently—they can even experience *hulshat da'at*! They are characters with bodyminds just like the women and rabbis populating the Bavli, and their relationships with each other affect their bodyminds.

This relationality between non-humans and their bodyminds also exists between non-human and human bodyminds. The sun can never face the concave side of the rainbow lest humans worship her. Humans seek to control, command, importune, or even persuade the sky and clouds by fasting, praying, talking, and gesturing, by directing their *da'at* and by breaking their hearts. Indeed, these stories paint a picture of a wide ecological community within which Jews live. A community of interdependent bodyminds, human and nonhuman alike.

In chapter two, I used concepts from disability studies and posthumanism to guide my analysis that the rabbis also viewed their bodyminds as fluid and interconnected with each other. I also drew upon notions of care as interdependent and reciprocal from both mad and disability studies to discuss how care factors into this relationality, and incorporated voices from feminist, race, and colonial studies to remind us that care is not always well intentioned, and even when it is, it is it can still be quite harmful. While my focus in chapter two was on the relationality between and systems of care for human bodyminds, in this chapter I will focus on the interconnectedness and interdependence between humans and nonhumans such as the sky and clouds.

Conversations between the fields of disability studies and the environmental humanities (environmental studies, ecocriticism, environmental justice, etc.) use posthumanism to include the environment and animals in Siebers' definition of society as "as a community of dependent

frail bodies that rely on others for survival." [239] Indeed, we are not only in relationship with other humans. We impact non-humans and non-humans impact us. [240] The environment nourishes us through its natural resources, and we nourish it through efforts of sustainability, nature preservation, etc. Conversely, we also disable the environment through our mistreatment of our planet, and natural disasters can disable us.

Today, in the global North, when we talk about the relationality between us and the environment, we tend to think about greenhouse gasses, recycling, and our dying earth. But when we apply the notion of an interconnected world to stories such as Hama and Hiyya's, a world emerges in which human's relationality with the environment is expressed through matters such as the cycles of an ecosystem (rainy and dry seasons), fasting bodyminds, and conspiring clouds. I will apply these same methodologies to my analyses of the Talmudic tales in parts two and three. Doing so will yield readings that further our understandings of rabbinic conceptions of community, madness, and systems of care: That community is comprised of more than humans, that madness can come from being disconnected from one's community, and that the whole community (human and nonhuman alike) are interdependent and responsible for each other's welfare.

[239] Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 182.

[240] The role disability plays in the relationship between humans and their environments is complex, and a full discussion of these complexities are beyond the scope of this dissertation. A great starting point to exploring these conversations further is the anthology Sarah Jaquette Ray and Jay Sibara, *Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities : Toward an Eco-Crip Theory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), http://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=1506507&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

3.2 Honi's Sleep

The protagonist of our next story, bTa'anit 23a, is Honi HaMe'aggel (Honi the Circle Drawer). He was a well-known figure in Jewish culture, also mentioned by the first century historian Josephus.[241] Most scholars attribute Honi's title to a story that appears in rabbinic literature in which Honi draws a circle in the ground and refuses to move from it until God sends rain. At first God only sends a little rain, and Honi demands more. The rain becomes a downpour, and the community is in danger of flooding. Honi demands for the rain to stop, and it does. A few variations of this story appear in rabbinic literature, one of which appears right before the story of Honi's Sleep.[242] In telling the story of Honi's fabled rainmaking right before Honi's Sleep, the Bavli invites us to read these stories side by side–and when we do, we are struck by the stark difference of Honi's portrayal in each. When demanding rain from God, Honi says, "Master of the Universe, your children have placed their faces on me [i.e. they are looking to me], since I am like a member of your house. Before you, I take an oath by your great name that I will not move from here until you have mercy for your children." In doing so, he establishes himself as the leader and savior of the community, "your children have placed their faces on me," and comes very close to replacing God, "since I am like a member of your house," likening himself to God's divinity. Honi uses the status conferred upon him by his community's turning faces to demand when rain falls and to what extent.

We see a very different version of this character in Honi's Sleep, where Honi finds himself out of touch with God, out of control of the environment, and disconnected from his peers and

[241] Berenbaum and Skolnik, "Honi Ha-Me'aggel."
[242] mTa'anit 3:8; bTa'anit 23a; yTa'anit, 3:10–12, 66d.

family. This story starts with his inability to understand the clearly stated simile in a Bible verse. Then he encounters a farmer who is planting a carob seed (or sapling) and doesn't understand why someone would plant a tree that will not bear fruit for 70 years, a time well after the farmer's life expectancy. After the farmer explains his reasons for planting the tree, Honi sits down to eat. He falls asleep, and the ground encircles him for 70 years until he awakes. Honi returns to his house and to the *beit midrash*, but no one recognizes him. As a result, he experiences *hulshat da'at*, prays for mercy, and dies. Honi's Sleep thus contains themes of interdependent community—composed of both human and non-humans, estrangement, care, and madness. Through these themes, it reveals a rabbinic lesson that not only are bodyminds interconnected, but that we *need* that relational interdependence to survive.

Many scholars have written about Honi, but never before from a disability and mad studies perspective. The scholarship is too robust to mention extensively, so a sampling will have to suffice: a comparison and contrast of Honi's two stories found in the Bavli to earlier rabbinic tellings in order to draw conclusions about the Bavli's redaction,[243] comparison between Honi's Sleep and Josephus' account of Honi,[244] and a reading of Honi's circle drawing practice as legal instead of magical in character.[245] Belser analyses Honi's two stories in Bavli Ta'anit through the context of rabbinic narratives about charismatic rainmakers. She concludes that the Bavli's version of Honi's rainmaking tale (as opposed to the five Mishnaic versions it incorporates) depicts a more powerful version of Honi, and uses this to ask questions about the limits of

[243] Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, 62–76. He also writes about these stories in Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Rabbinic Stories* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 128–32.
[244] Zvi Ron, "The Death of Honi the Circle Maker," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 20, no. 2 (2017): 235–50, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700704-12341328.
[245] Suzanne Last Stone, "Rabbinic Legal Magic: A New Look at Honi's Circle as the Construction of Law's Spaces," *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 17, no. 1 (2005): 97–24.

human power, especially when wielded against God. In her analysis of Honi's Sleep, Belser argues that the rabbis rabbinicize Honi (i.e. retroactively depict him as a rabbi) in order to "confront the existential problems of power and charisma within rabbinic culture."[246] My analysis adds new perspectives to Honi's Sleep, and thus contributes new conclusions to scholars' understanding of this story. Paying close attention to the role of nonhuman characters, Honi's shifting status, and systems of care, and reading this story in the context of other *hulshat da'at* narratives, I use this narrative to further my argument that these texts present a rabbinic worldview in which nonhumans are just as interrelated and interdependent members of society as humans. I also argue that Honi's disconnect from his community is also a loss of status, thus triggering his *hulshat da'at*. As such, Honi's Sleep supports my assertion that *hulshat da'at* is mostly a response to a threatened or lowered social status.

אמר רבי יוחנן כל ימיו של אותו צדיק היה מצטער על מקרא זה שיר המעלות בשוב השם את שיבת ציון היינו כחולמים אמר איבא דניים שבעין שנין	Rabbi Yohanan said: For all of his days, this same righteous man [Honi] was troubled over this verse, "A song of ascents: When the Lord restored Zion[247] we were like those who dream."[248] He said, "Who is there who can sleep 70 years!?"[249]
יומא חד הוה אזיל באורחא חזייה לההוא גברא דהוה נטע חרובא אמר ליה האי עד כמה שנין טעין	One day he was walking along a path and saw a certain man who was planting a carob [seed/sapling]. Honi said to him, "How many years will it take to bear [carobs]?"

[246] Belser, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity*, 166. For Belser's complete analysis of Honi's stories, see pages 152-166.

[247] The Hebrew uses the verb שוב, *shuv,* twice here. A more literal translation would be "In returning Zion's return…"

[248] Psalm 126:1, translation my own. Honi interprets this psalm to be about Israel's 70-year exile in Babylonia, and taking the verse literally (despite the clearly stated simile), he wonders how it is possible to sleep for 70 years.

[249] Honi is referring to the 70 years that Judeans were exiled in Babylon in 586 BCE until they returned under Cyrus to build the second temple in 516 BCE.

אמר ליה עד שבעין שנין	The man responded, “70 years.”
אמר ליה פשיטא לך דחיית שבעין שנין	Honi said to him, “Is it self-evident to you that you will live 70 years?”
אמ' לי' האי עלמ' בחרובא אשכחתיה כי היכי דשתלי לי אבותי שתלי נמי לבראי	The man replied, “This one [referring to himself] found a world with carob [trees]. Just as my ancestors planted for me, I also plant for my children.”
יתיב קא כריך ריפת' אתא לי' שינתא נים אהדרא ליה משוניתא איכסי מעינא ונים שבעין שנין	Honi sat and made a sandwich wrap. Sleep came to him. He slept. A mound of earth formed around him, he was hidden from sight, and he slept for 70 years.
כי קם חזייה להההוא גברא דהוה קא מקלט מיניהו אמר ליה את הוא דשתלתיה	When he arose, he saw a certain man picking from them [the carob trees]. Honi said to him, “Are you the one who planted this [carob tree]?”
אמר ליה בר בריה אנא	He replied, “I am the son of the son [of the one who did so].”
אמר ליה שמע מינה דניימי שבעין שנין חזא לחמריה דאתיילידא ליה רמכי רמכי	Honi said to him, “Learn from this that I slept for 70 years.” He [also] saw that his donkey had birthed many herds.
אזל לבייתיה אמר להו בריה דחוני המעגל מי	He went to his house. He said to them, “Who is the son of Honi HaMe’aggel?”
קיים אמרו ליה בריה ליתא בר בריה איתא	They rose and said to him, “He is not his son, he is Honi’s son’s son.”
אמ' להו אנא חוני המעגל	Honi said to them, “I am Honi HaMe’aggel.”
לא הימנוהו	They did not believe him.
אזל לבית המדרש שמעינהו לרבנן דקאמרי נהירן שמעתתין כבשני חוני המעגל	He went to the *beit midrash* [the study house]. He heard the rabbis saying that so and so’s (lit. his) traditions (halakhot) are as clear/bright as in the years of Honi HaMe’aggel.

אמר להו אנא ניהו	Honi said to them "I am him."
לא הימנוהו ולא עבדי לי' יקרא כדאבעי ליה	They did not believe him, and they did not honor him in the way that was required for him.
חלש דעתיה בעא רחמי ומית	His mind became ill. He prayed for mercy, and he died.
אמר היינו דאמרי אינשי או חברא או מיתותא	He[250] said, "It is as people say, 'either a companion or death.'"[251]

The opening line, "For all of his days, this same righteous man [Honi] was troubled over this verse…" serves a few functions. It immediately takes on a different tone from Honi's more well-known rainmaking story which cultivates Honi as a charismatic holy person. Instead, this opening gambit makes Honi both more of a rabbinic sage and it also sets in play an emotional, bodymind theme that persists for the protagonist throughout the narrative. The Bavli uses variations of the phrase, "for all of his days so-and-so was troubled over this verse…" to express a sage or righteous man's continual struggle with understanding a passage of scripture.[252] In Honi's story, it also functions to retroactively claim him as a rabbinic figure.

Living in the Second Temple period, specifically within the first century BCE, Honi is not exactly a rabbi. The rabbis emerged as a scholarly sect of Judaism only after the Second Temple's destruction in 70 CE. In an effort to claim that rabbinic Judaism was the *right way* to practice Judaism, early rabbis often linked themselves to past Jewish leaders and rabbinic figures, going

[250] Opposed to Pesaro, an early printing of the Talmud which I use here (see my explanation as to why in section three), most manuscripts it is either Rava or Rabba who says this last line. MS Munich 95 is the only other attestation where Honi says these words.
[251] bTa'anit 23a, Pesaro. Note that this is the only textual witness that uses the phrase *halash da'ateih*. That this phrase was included in even one extant textual witness is proof that this version of Honi's Sleep did/does exist. However, even without these words, it is not too far of a stretch to read Honi as mad by the end of his story.
[252] It occurs to many times to list them all. Three examples can be found on bBava Kamma 50a, bBerakhot 5b, and bYoma 12a.

so far as to retroactively describe or even label those historical figures as rabbis. A main example is Moses, a leader of the Israelites in the Bible, who received God's Torah from Mount Sinai. Passages in rabbinic literature anachronistically call him "Moshe Rabbenu," which translates to "Moses Our Rabbi." There are also rabbinic traditions that God gave Israel *two* torahs as Sinai: the Written Torah, which he gave Moses, and the Oral Torah, which was transmitted orally first to Moses and then down through the generations of various Israelite and Jewish leaders until reaching the rabbis. It is now the rabbis, so they claim, who continue this transmission through their teachings, studies, and literature. Building this narrative allows the rabbis to claim status in their wider Jewish communities, while also establishing the antiquity of their movement.[253]

A similar rhetorical move is being made in Honi's Sleep, when the Bavli depicts him as partaking in distinctly rabbinic practices and behavior. Besides spending a lifetime puzzling over the reading of one Bible verse, he later uses the rabbinic term of art usually applied to biblical verses "learn from this (*shema minah*)" to his own experience. Furthermore, his second stop after his own house is the local *beit midrash*, and he is characterized as such an established rabbinic sage, that seventy years later the local rabbis nostalgically remember the shining clarity of his generation's scholasticism as "the years of Honi HaMe'aggel."[254]

---

[253] For a deeper discussion of rabbinic traditions about Oral Torah, including rabbinic sources that *don't* make this claim about Oral Torah, see Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, "The Orality of Rabbinic Writing," 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), 38–57. For a study of Palestinian rabbinic claims to Oral Torah and the rabbinizaton of Moses see, Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, 450–66. For a more thorough conversation about the rabbinization of Honi specifically see Belser, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity*, 163–66.

[254] Belser provides a more nuanced argument of this in her book, where she reads Honi's character functioning both as rabbi and outsider, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity*, 166.

However, the story also depicts Honi as vulnerable, unsure, and weak. The verb I've translated as "was troubled over," *mitsta'er,* can mean "to feel pain," "to feel grief," or "to trouble oneself."[255] Valler writes that the Talmuds (Yerushalmi and Bavli) use this word in three different situations: "A. A state of physical suffering or illness [including the mental and physical suffering of hunger]; B. The exertion of effort or endeavor on behalf of someone or something; C. A state of sadness and emotional distress."[256] And while the Bavli often treats rabbinic distress over biblical exegesis as common and unalarming, its usage here sets us up for Honi's increased distress and lack of control over his situation.

The verse troubling Honi is Psalm 126:1, "A song of ascents: When the Lord restored Zion, we were like those who dream." Honi interprets this psalm to be about the Israelite's 70-year exile in Babylonia (c. 598 - c. 538 BCE). Their exile ended when a new Persian king, Cyrus II, gave the Israelites permission to return to Judah and rebuild their temple, inaugurating what scholars dub the Second Temple Period in which Honi lived, and during which this story takes place.[257] The verse's clearly stated simile, "we were *like* those who dream," can be read as either comparing the joyful yet surreal experience of returning to one's home after 70 years to dreaming, or as comparing the 70 year exile to a nightmare—or at the very least a state of suspension much like sleep. Honi, however, takes this verse literally. He fails to understand how the simile works – how can someone sleep for seventy years?

---

[255] *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature,* s.v. "צער".
[256] Valler, *Sorrow and Distress in the Talmud*, 17.
[257] Uriel Rappaport, "Cyrus," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), Gale eBooks, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587504786/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=5853803c.

Honi's continued distress over understanding a Bible verse contrasts greatly to how he is portrayed in his fabled rainmaking story that precedes this one (and which was summarized above). There he claims he was a member of God's house, "since I am like a member of your house"–how can a member of God's house not understand God's written word? Like Hama and Hiyya, Honi is a "rabbi" disconnected from God. Honi is similarly disconnected from his community and environment when he fails to understand the dual importance of planting carob trees: to tend the earth, and to provide for future generations. His conversation with the carob farmer shows his inability to conceive of a community beyond his own lifetime, or to think about his responsibilities to future generations.

The environment and its relationality to both humans and nonhumans begins to emerge as a theme in Honi's interaction with the farmer. The carob seed is planted in the ground, from which it will receive nourishment and stability throughout its whole life. The farmer plants and tends to the tree, and in turn the tree will nourish his descendants with its fruit. The farmer's relationship with the carob tree reminds us of our reliance on the land, the reciprocal relationship inherent in farming–nourish the plants now, receive nourishment later. Wrapped up in these relationships between human and tree, tree and ground, is a sense of duration. The carob tree will outlive its human planter and will spend more than 70 years connected to the ground.[258] Additionally, the carob tree's relationship is not primarily with one human, but with several generations of humans: the original planter, his son, and his grandson at the very least.

Sitting down to eat, Honi falls asleep and stays asleep for 70 years. The cause of his sleep is left vague. The immediate shift from him talking to the carob farmer to sitting to eat implies

[258] Carob trees bear fruit in 6-7 years (in contrast to the story) but can live for a century.

that he sat down right there. Perhaps there were other carob trees in the area that he sat under, maybe he even ate a carob. The words I have translated as "made a sandwich wrap (*kerech rifta*)" literally translates to "he wrapped (*kerech*) bread (*rifta*)" and can be used simply to mean "to begin a meal, to dine."[259] Perhaps Honi made himself a carob wrap, and that wrap is what sent him to sleep; but the story does not specify.[260] What it does tell us is that as he sleeps, "A mound of earth formed around him, he was hidden from sight," protecting him during his 70-year slumber.

In Honi's fabled rainmaking story, Honi drew a circle in the ground and refused to move from it until rain came. This action expressed Honi's power and confidence, while also symbolically separating himself from his community as a godlike leader and master of rain. In Honi's sleep, however, we see him in a vulnerable state, asleep with no shelter and thus at risk of exposure. But instead of suffering from 70 years of rain, wind, wild animals, and other dangers, the very earth that Honi once incised in order to set himself apart, now draws him in and protects him from the elements. In many ways, Honi is like the carob seed that was just planted. The ground incubates both until they are ready to breach the soil. In 70 years, the tree is grown and fruit bearing, and Honi emerges from the earth's womb-like embrace a new man, finally understanding the relationality between trees and ground, and having literally experienced the possibility of sleeping for 70 years. Now living in the future, he's also primed to learn more about the importance of human-arboreal and human-human relationships.

[259] *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature,*, s.vv. "ברוך, בריך, ברך," "ריפתא."
[260] In MS Oxford: Heb. e. 22/10 Honi drinks from a fountain before falling asleep.

Honi's connection to the carob tree is further emphasized when it's the first thing he sees upon waking. The planted seed has grown into a tree, and the farmer's grandson is harvesting its fruit. This materializes the farmer's teaching, that we must tend to the earth for more than just immediate gain, and for the benefit of future generations. Also learning from this conversation how many years have passed, Honi returns to his house and seeks out his children.

When Honi arrives home, however, it is not his son who lives there, but rather his grandson. A person he has presumably never met. When he tries to tell his family who he is, no one believes him. So, Honi goes next to the *beit midrash*, the rabbinic study house, where he overhears the rabbis reminiscing about the greatness of Honi's generation. When Honi reveals who he is they also do not believe him and do "not honor him in the way that was required for him." Immediately after not being recognized or honored, Honi's mind becomes ill (*halash da'ateih*), he prays for mercy, and subsequently dies. The story ends with what is cited as an idiom, "either a companion or death."[261]

In the Babylonian rabbinic storytellers' telling, Honi's madness comes right after his fellow rabbis do not believe he is himself and so treat him without the requisite honor. The word I've translated as honor, *yikara*, can also mean "dignity," "value," and "price."[262] Due to his great reputation, Honi expects to be treated as valuable and with honor. But his seeming colleagues do not believe his claim, much less give him the honor he is due. A rabbi's honor and status inform his standing in his community, and the way he interacts with and operates within a

[261] Note a version of this idiom also appears bBava Batra 16b when the rabbis discuss Job and his friends. Rava (the same person to cite the this idiom in many of the attestations of Honi's story) says, "As people say, a friend like Job's friends, or death."
[262] *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, s.v. "יקר, יקרא."

community. Honi's legacy has lived on, but he has become detached from it, and as such is detached from his community.

The expression "either a companion or death," also addresses the ways in which madness and community are interrelated. The word I have translated as "companion (*havra*)" can mean "friend, neighbor, fellow-being" or "scholar," or "fellow-student." The second definition is similar to the way we use "fellow" today in academia.[263] Thus, this adage could be read in two ways: as referring to the basic human need for interaction with other humans, or as highlighting the essentiality with which late antique Babylonian rabbinic culture treated the social mores of the *beit midrash*. I argue that rabbis were keenly aware of both meanings when they told this story.

When Honi finds himself detached from his community, he experiences social death. No one knows who he is, and thus they do not associate him with his legacy, honor him, or welcome him into his family and rabbinic homes. Honi's exile is not from the land, but from his human community. His social status is not just lowered, it is eradicated.

The stories I have analyzed in each chapter similarly end in death when a rabbi can no longer be connected with his fellow(s). Elazar tells his wife on his deathbed that the rabbis will not give him a proper burial—they are still angry with him even after his *da'at* was proved right by 60 women and their sons. When Yohanan's mind changes, i.e. when he goes from *hulshat da'at* to another type of madness, he is no longer able to function as a rabbi. All he can do is mourn and search for Reish Lakish, which effectively cuts him off from his fellow rabbis. Unable

[263] *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, s.v. "חברא."

to pray for mercy himself, as Honi does, Yohanan's fellow rabbis pray for him. Like Honi, the answer to that prayer is death.

Yohanan's and Honi's deaths include a troubling (to modern readers) implication that sometimes the only answer to madness is death. [264] But on a closer reading, it becomes apparent that the stories' message is a bit more complicated. Firstly, we cannot assume that the prayers of Yohanan's colleagues and Honi were specifically asking for death. Prayers for mercy yield many results. Take for example, Ahadvoi who became non-verbal and lost all of his learning after causing Sheishet's *hulshat da'at.* Like Yohanan, Ahadvoi is effectively cut off from his rabbinic community when he no longer has his knowledge. At best, he'll have to restart his years of study. But when Sheishet prays for mercy, Ahadvoi doesn't die. Instead, he is healed. Yohanan's colleagues could have similarly been seeking healing, and perhaps Honi was praying to be sent back to his time or for his family and fellows to recognize him.

Secondly, these stories may view death as a type of restoration. Not all *hulshat da'at* stories include instances of care for those experiencing a weakened mind. But those that do

[264] If we interpret the prayers for mercy as prayers for death, these texts also raise the topic of assisted suicide (by God in Honi's case, and by the rabbis and God in Yohanan's case.) And while such a reading would undoubtably lead to a fruitful discussion, it is not clear that the prayers for mercy are so specific. Additionally, a deeper discussion of suicide is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it is prudent to state that suicide survivor communities have brought into question and problematized our often assumed linkage between suicide and madness. Equating suicide with a mental illness allows our society to ignore the many societal factors that can lead to suicidal thoughts and/or actions. It can also be used as an excuse to forcibly hospitalize, medicate, and/or call the cops one someone who is "not in their right mind." For more on this see the series of blog posts by Sera Davidow, "Suicidal Tendencies, Part I: I'm Suicidal Because I'm Mentally Ill Because I'm Suicidal," *Mad In America* (blog), January 24, 2016, https://www.madinamerica.com/2016/01/suicidal-tendencies-part-i-im-suicidal-because-im-mentally-ill-because-im-suicidal/; "Suicidal Tendencies, Part II: The Real 'Stigma' of Suicide," *Mad In America* (blog), March 2, 2018, https://www.madinamerica.com/2018/03/suicidal-tendencies-part-ii-real-stigma-suicide/; "Suicidal Tendencies, Part III: So, When Do I Get to Call the Cops?," *Mad In America* (blog), August 8, 2018, https://www.madinamerica.com/2018/08/suicidal-tendencies-part-iii/.

mostly enact a form of care that is recovery, or restoration, focused.[265] This is most likely because in cases of *hulshat da'at* narratives there is always an inciting incident that can often be addressed and reversed. A lot of times, people with *hulshat da'at* are comforted by reassurances that they are secure in their status, and/or that whatever was causing them distress was actually a misperception.[266] Even Yohanan's and Honi's deaths could be read this way. Yohanan goes mad at the upset in his relationship with Reish Lakish, and that madness only increases when Reish Lakish dies. Rabbinic conceptions and beliefs of the afterlife are complex and nonuniform, but it is possible that these stories are informed by a belief that Yohanan would be restored to Reish Lakish in the afterlife.[267] Perhaps Honi is similarly restored to his generation.

As we have seen through the expression for death, "*nah nafshei* (his soul rested)," the story of Honi, and even the appearance of Elazar to his wife in a dream, the latter being a common mode of communication between the dead and the living in the Talmud, the rabbis saw a strong link between death and sleep. Sleep, says bBerakhot 57b, is one sixtieth of death. Honi's own 70-year sleep is itself a kind of burial (in addition to being read as rebirth), when he is effectively swallowed up by the earth. In Honi's case, he seemingly outlives his generation, but not exactly by living. His sleep/mini-death is a kind of suspended animation. Times passes but he has not *lived* its duration. That he was not meant to live 70 more years, is stated in his

---

[265] Recovery focused care can also be problematic because it hinges on and reaffirms that idea that to be "healthy" (however a society define health) is the ideal. Such an ideology is harmful especially to people whose madness or disability is not something from which they can every "fully" recover and contributes to societal devaluing of disabled and mad people.

[266] List all of the stories that fall under this category

[267] Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, eds., "Afterlife," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 441–42, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587500512/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=73c2256f; Harry Sysling, *Tehiyyat Ha-Metim: The Resurrection of the Dead in the Palestinian Targums of the Pentateuch and Parallel Traditions in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996).

incredulous exclamation to the carob farmer, "Is it self-evident to you that you will live 70 years?" Additionally, those who remember *him* (and not his legacy) are already gone. Like Yohanan and Elazar, Honi rejoins his community in death.

Honi's sleep thus depicts a rabbinic worldview in which humans and nature live in reciprocal relationship to each other. Humans and the ground nourish carob trees allowing the trees' bodies to grow, carob fruit nourishes the bodies of generations of humans. Like the carob seed, the ground encircles Honi, birthing him anew after 70 years underground to teach him the importance of human-arboreal relations and to help him better relate to the dreamlike experiences of his ancestors' exile from and return to their holy land. Human and nonhuman bodyminds affect and support each other.

This narrative also takes the story of a mad sage's threatened/lowered honor to great extremes. Honi's *hulshat da'at* is caused not by one person threatening his status, but by a whole generation *forgetting* his status. His great distress and resulting death further emphasize that while Babylonian rabbinic culture could be toxically competitive and hierarchical, the rabbis also found great value in their communities and relationships with each other. So much so that Honi and Yohanan both only found rest when they were reunited with their peers in death.

Finally, Honi's Sleep serves as another example of rabbinic interrogations about the complexity of care. Elazar and Batya's story discusses the gendering of care and explores the complex power dynamics between the caregiver and cared for. Yohanan and Reish Lakish's tale similarly discusses the gendering and complex power dynamics of caregiving, while also offering a critique of common rabbinic care practices for mad rabbis. In Honi's narrative, we find a rabbinic exploration of what happens when even well-intentioned care fails. The ground

succeeds in ending Honi's distress over his struggle to understand Psalm 126:1, but in doing so causes him *hulshat da'at* and death.

3.3 Fasting for Rain

Honi's two stories begin a series of *sugyot* (a literary unit)[268] that mostly deal with fasting and/or praying for rain during drought. Included in these *sugyot* are three more *hulshat da'at* tales. Each features a prominent rabbi–Rabbi Yehudah the patriarch, Rav Nachman, and Rav Papa– who declares a communal fast for rain, but rain does not come. The rabbi's mind then weakens (*halash da'ateih)*, and rain falls. Like Honi's Sleep, these three stories envision a community not limited to humans, explore the relationship between status and community, and ask questions about effective and ineffective care. All three stories follow a very similar literary structure, and as such I'll cite and analyze them together.

Rabbi Yehudah haNasi (Rabbi Yehudah the Patriarch)'s story appears in bTa'anit 24a. Yehudah lived from approximately 135 to 220 CE. This is the same community leader who called Batya evil and later proposed to her. In addition to being a rabbi, he was the political leader of the Jews in Roman Judea and is credited as leading the project to collect rabbinic teachings and edit them into the Mishnah.[269] One might think that such a strong figurehead would be able to successfully bring about rain, but in the telling of bTa'anit 24a this is not the case:

Note: I have bolded the parallel lines that each of these three stories share, for easy comparison.

---

[268] *Sugyot* is the plural for *sugya*, which Strassfeld helpfully defines as "In the Talmud, a literary unit compiled from disparate sources into a coherent discussion, often organized around from a single passage from the Mishnah. A *sugya* typically includes a series of questions, back-and-forth responses, and sometimes narrative." Strassfeld, *Trans Talmud*, 240.

[269] The *Mishnah* is a foundational rabbinic text, containing rabbinic teachings from 70 CE to 220 CE. The coupling of these traditions into one literary work unified the rabbis as a subsection of Judaism. The Babylonian Talmud, 220 CE to roughly 800 CE, is structured as a commentary on the Mishnah.

Rabbi Yehuda haNasi **decreed a fast, prayed for mercy, but rain did not come.**	רבי יהודה נשיאה **גזר תעניתא בעא רחמי ולא אתא מיטרא**
He said, "How different is Samuel of Ramah to [me,] Yehuda ben Gamaliel! Woe to the generation that is stuck here [with me]! Woe to he who has had this happen in his days!"	**אמר** כמה איבא משמואל הרמתי ליהודה בן גמליאל אוי לו לדור שבן נתקע אוי לו למי שעלת' בימיו כך
His da'at became ill [*halash da'ateih*] and rain came.[270]	חלש דעתיה ואתא מיטרא

Further down on the same page resides a remarkably similar story about Rav Nachman, a prominent Babylonian rabbi in the late third and early fourth century CE:

Rav[271] Nachman **decreed a fast, prayed for mercy, but rain did not come.**	רב נחמן **גזר תעניתא בעא רחמי ולא אתא מיטרא**
He said, "take Nachman, knock [him] off the wall to the ground!"	**אמר** שקלוה לנחמן חבוטו מן גודא לארעא
His *da'at* became ill [*halash da'ateih*] and rain came.[272]	**חלש דעתיה ואתא מיטרא**

Rabbi Yehudah and Rav Nachman's stories are almost exactly the same: First, a rabbi decrees a fast and prays for rain, to no avail. Second, that rabbi disparages himself for his failed fast and prayers. And third, the rabbi's mind becomes ill/weak, and it finally rains. Yehudah contrasts himself to the biblical prophet and leader Samuel, who was able to cause rain to come during the wheat harvest (when rain would not naturally fall) solely for the purpose of instilling the fear of God (and of Samuel) in rebellious Israelites.[273] Yehuda is unable to bring rain even during the

[270] bTa'anit 24a, Pesaro.

[271] Rav is Aramaic for rabbi.

[272] bTa'anit 24a, Pesaro.

[273] 1 Samuel 12:16-18. Verse 18 reads, "So Samuel called upon the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel" (New Revised Standard Version).

rainy season, when the purpose is to stave off a famine and save lives. He chastises himself and bemoans the current generation that have him as a leader. Similarly, Nachman berates himself, saying "take Nachman, knock [him] off the wall to the ground!"

After Yehudah and Nachman's stories, one page later, 24b, another similar story appears, this time featuring Rav Papa, who was the head of a rabbinic academy in fourth century CE Babylonia.

Rav Papa **decreed a fast, but rain did not come.**	רב פפא **גזר תעניתא ולא אתא מטרא**
His *da'at* became ill [*halash da'ateih*], he swallowed a plate of pounded grain and **prayed for mercy, but rain did not come.**	חלש דעתיה שרף פינבא דדיסא
Rav Nachman son of Ushpatzi[274] **said** to him, "If the master [Rav Papa] swallows another plate of pounded grain, rain will come."	**אמר** ליה רב נחמן בר אושפרתי אי שריף מר פינבא אחריתי דדייסא אתי מטרא
His *da'at* became ill [*halash da'ateih*], and rain came.[275]	**חלש דעתיה ואתא מטרא**

Papa's story has some slight, yet significant differences to Yehuda and Nachman's tales. Most notably, he experiences *hulshat da'at* twice! Here is a side-by-side table to help compare where the third story diverges from the first two. This time I've bolded the *differences* in the literary structure, since that is the focus of this chart:

[274] This is not the same person mentioned above. When Rav Nachman appears without a patronymic the Babylonian Talmud is referring to Rav Nachman son of Jacob. David Joseph Bornstein, "Nahman Ben Jacob," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 14 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 738–39, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587514479/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=eec2b040.
[275] bTaanit 24b, Pesaro.

Structure of Rabbi Yehudah and Rav Nachman's Stories:	Structure of Rav Papa's Story:
Rabbi X decreed a fast, **prayed for mercy**, but rain did not come.	Rabbi X decreed a fast, but rain did not come.
	His *da'at* becomes ill/weak, he breaks his fast, and he prays for mercy, but rain did not come.
The rabbi disparages himself.	**The rabbi's colleague encourages him to eat more food.**
His *da'at* became ill and rain came.	His *da'at* became ill and rain came.

As the above table demonstrates, Papa's story splits the first stage. The phrase "prayed for mercy" is removed from the opening sentence, and a new stage of the literary structure is added—Rav Papa's *da'at* becomes ill and he breaks his fast too soon. Only then does the phrase, "prayed for mercy" appear along with the repetition of the words, "rain did not come." Moving the phrase "prayed for mercy" after the event of Rav Papa's weakening *da'at* imbues the phrase with a new depth. Yehduah and Nachman's prayers are a request for rain, Papa's can also be read as a request that God have mercy on him for breaking his fast, and/or that God provide reprieve from his *hulshat da'at.*

The second change in this story is the role of verbal statement. Yehuda and Nachman both speak aloud to disparage themselves. But in Papa's story, the moment of speaking aloud is repurposed to create an additional scene in the story: As is common in *hulshat da'at* stories, Papa's colleague, Rav Nachman son of Ushpatzi (a different Rav Nachman from the one in the second story), comforts his mad fellow by reaffirming his status. Nachman son of Ushpatzi does so by reframing Papa's broken fast and *hulshat da'at* as part of the rain making process, instead

of as a failure of the rainmaking process. As we saw in Hama's story in the chapter's introduction, intentional—through directed *da'at*— and ritualized inducement of extreme distress—broken hearts—is a normal rabbinic strategy for pleading for rain.[276] Nachman son of Ushpatzi's encouragement suggests that he views Papa's weakened *da'at* similarly–i.e. the fact that Papa's *da'at* became so ill that he had to break his fast should be proof to God/the sky that he has sufficiently repented. Taking his colleague's encouragement to heart, Papa again prays for mercy. But when he is still unable to bring rain, his *da'at* again weakens, and only then does rain come. This second occurrence of *hulshat da'at* is not incorporated into traditional rabbinic rainmaking practices—Papa does not pray for mercy this time. Papa's story thus draws the failed system of care into further relief: he experiences *hulshat da'at* twice before rain comes, and rain does not come as an answer to prayer.

It's also worthwhile to note that Papa's story varies greatly across textual witnesses. In this chapter I use Pesaro, an early printing of Ta'anit, because it preserves a tradition that repeats *hulshat da'at* throughout the stories of Honi, Yehudah, Nachman, and Papa. But other versions of Papa's story are equally relevant to my argument. The Pesaro edition is actually the only version that includes two moments of *hulshat da'at* in the Papa narrative. The majority of manuscripts and early printings replace the first "*halash da'ateih*" with "*halash libeih*"— "his *heart* became ill/weak." This more directly ties Papa's first moment of distress to the practice of intentionally breaking one's heart. And in MS Munich 95 Papa's heart weakens twice instead of

[276] For an in depth discussion of this and other rabbinic rain making practices see Belser, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity*.

his *da'at.* This further demonstrates how heart and *da'at* are often treated interchangeably in rabbinic texts, as I argued in chapter one.

Also of note, MS Yad Harav Herzog does not include *hulshat da'at* at all. Rather Papa's initial distress is described as "*halash libeih*" and his final moment of distress as "*ikesif*" which translates to "he was shamed." While this word only appears here and in the Vilna edition (there it precedes *halash da'ateih*, "he was ashamed and his *da'at* became ill/weak"), this verb does appear in two attestations of Yehduah's story and in one of Nachman's story. Manuscripts Munich 140 and Vatican 134 insert *ikesif* after Yehudah's self-disparagement,

> "What is the difference between Samuel of Ramah to [me,] Yehuda ben Gamaliel!" He was shamed. He said [to them/him],[277] "Woe to the generation that is stuck here [with me]! Woe to he who has had this happen in his days!"[278]

MS Yad Harav Herzog's version of Nachman's story replaces *"halash da'ateih"* with "*ikesif*" just as it does for Papa's story. *Ikesif* can also be translated as "he was made pale" or "he blanched" or "he was frightened," "he was embarrassed," "he was chagrined," or "he was reluctant."[279] The use of the word *ikesif* in some manuscripts (either in place of or alongside *hulshat da'at*) demonstrates just how intense this shame, heartbreak, and madness was.

We read in part one that people would direct their minds and cause heartbreak during communal fasts. This heartbreak was facilitated not just through fasting and directed *da'at* but also through ritually induced shame such as communal processions with people putting ashes upon their head.[280] This ritualized shame also functioned to "underscore an intimate connection

---

[277] MS Vatican 134 uses the abbreviation א'ל' which means "he said to…" and we are left to guess the pronoun based on context. MS Munich 140 uses the abbreviation אמ' which means "he said," but it was added in the margin, either by a scribe who accidently left it out, or by a later reader who wanted to "correct" the manuscript.

[278] אמ' מה בין שמוא'ל הרמתי ליהודה בן גמליא'ל איבסיף א'ל' אוי לו לדור שנתקע לכך אוי לו למי שעלתה בימיו כך

[279] Jastrow s.v. "בסיף, בסף," and Sokoloff s.v. "בסף."

[280] Belser, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity*, 126–32.

with God, Israel, and the Torah."[281] However, Yehudah, Nachman, and Papa do not face this shame and madness as part of a ritual. And neither God nor the Torah are present in their stories. Rather, as I will explain in the rest of this section, these three stories are about what happens when rain does not fall and God does not fix the situation: ritualized shame and/or madness become actual shame and madness, and such distress is felt so keenly that rain falls without divine intervention.

Another form of rainmaking discussed in Ta'anit (also mentioned in part one) relies on the power of charismatic leaders whose merit wins God's favor, thus allowing them to intercede on their community's behalf and request rain from God. Honi's rainmaking story, summarized in part two of this chapter, serves as one example of this (and in that story Honi demands, rather than requests, rain.) God's answer to an individual's request for rain thus reflects on the person's status: do they merit a response from God or not?[282] Thus, when God does not answer Yehudah, Nachman, and Papa's prayers for mercy, their shame is not that of ritual inducement, but rather of God's apparent lack of regard— or lack of care—for them. This in turn lowers the rabbis' status in their communities which causes them to experience *hulshat da'at*. They are not shaming themselves and breaking their hearts *for* God, rather their distress is caused *by* God, and the result is *hulshat da'at*.

[281] Belser, 131. Belser describes how in these rituals the congregation would places ashes on themselves and on the Torah scroll and process with it into the center of town. The Torah scroll stood in for God's body, thus including God in the ritual, 126-132.

[282] Belser also discusses the link between shame, status, and rainmaking in *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity.* See especially the sixth chapter of her book, "Hiddenness and Holiness: Gender, Class, Concealment, and the Critique of Rabbinic Status-Seeking," 184-211, in which she analyzes how some rainmaking stories in Ta'anit critique rabbinic status seeking and call into question the typical rabbinic views of who deserves merit.

Just as rabbis step in to comfort their mad colleagues in other *hulshat da'at* stories, here the *rain* intervenes to bring comfort. Indeed, when we pay attention to the characters and bodyminds present in these god-free stories, the ecosystem itself emerges as a system of care, in place of the systems expressed in communal fasts and charismatic intercessions. While the falling rain at each story's conclusion could be read as a response from God, Hama's story stands as proof that rain does not always fall at *God's* behest. In that story, Hama convinces the clouds to send rain, not God. In Yehudah, Nachman, and Papa's stories we are simply told "and rain came (*ve'ata meiteira*)." Rain itself is the subject of this clause and can arguably be read as a character in this story, deciding to come in response to the three rabbis' *hulshat da'at.*

While not mentioned explicitly, the presence of increasingly parched land also looms large as the surface on which the events are staged. The rabbis and their communities mirror this dryness through their fasting: denying their bodies just as the land is denied. Belser describes this correlation between humans and land, "Fasting for rain underscores the deep connection between the ecological vulnerabilities of the land and the corporeal vulnerabilities of human flesh. The fasting body reveals the profound ties that bind human life to the vitality of the land."[283] Indeed, one could even argue that a fasting body is a sympathetic expression with the land. Recall how this sympathy is strategically deployed when Hama covers himself to trigger the heavens covering themselves with rain clouds.

Thus, as a collection, these stories paint a picture of communities composed not of humans and God, but of humans and non-humans, whose bodyminds are deeply interconnected and interdependent on each other. From this depiction of community, it becomes clear that the

[283] JWB, Power, *Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity,* 121.

ideal system of care is one where rain falls during the rainy season, the land is irrigated, crops grow, and humans are fed. But this ecosystem does not always function ideally. Sometimes insolent skies and conspiring clouds halt the expected rain. Sometimes, as Bavli Ta'anit states, the community is at fault and must repent and entreat. When this happens, the human community fasts in commiseration with the dry land and parched plants, and sometimes they pray to God. But this second system of care (one where fasting, shame, and broken hearts or charisma convince God to intervene) does not always work. And when God is just as absent as the rain, rabbis experience madness. But these rabbis are not totally forsaken. In God's place, the rain itself reaches out to care for and comfort these rabbis.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have drawn from the intersecting conversations between disability and environmental studies to read six stories with an attention to the interactions between humans and nonhumans. In doing so, I have demonstrated how the rabbis imagined non-humans as members of their communities who had fluid and porous bodyminds of their own and were interdependent and interrelated with each other and humans.

Each of these stories also explore questions of systems of care, and what to do when they fail. The stories in parts one and three feature rabbis who must find new ways to bring about rain when God is absent. Hama and Hiyya treat with the sky and the clouds when they cannot use rabbinic ritual fasts or charismatic power to ask God for rain. Yehudah, Nachman, and Papa similarly cannot use these rabbinic rainmaking strategies, and experience *hulshat da'at* when their lack of success threatens their standing in the community. But the rain participates in another—rabbinic—system of care, that of comforting mad rabbis, when it decides to fall and in

doing so fortifies these rabbis' status. Honi's Sleep, conversely, demonstrates how even well-intentioned care can lead to *hulshat da'at.* Honi's environment (the ground, and possibly a carob tree or fruit) puts him to sleep for seventy years. The intent is for Honi to finally understand a Bible verse and to also understand the important relationship between humans and their environments. But gaining this understanding leaves Honi out of time and torn from his community, and his story ends in madness and death.

Conclusion

In chapters one and two I drew upon rabbinic scholarship while allowing insights from disability and mad studies to guide my reading of two interconnected narratives. I argued that both the stories of Elazar and Batya and that of Yohanan and Reish Lakish conceive of *da'at* as rooted in the body, intertwined with the soul, self, and emotions, and of key importance to a rabbi's social status and sense of self. In chapter two, I argued that these Babylonian tradents, editors, and authors thought of bodyminds as interconnected and relational, and that they thought of *hulshat da'at,* and madness more broadly, as similarly fluid and porous. Rabbinic madness, according to these tales, is thus something experienced on both an interpersonal and communal level. I have sought to show that for the Babylonian rabbis, society and culture affects intimate relationships, and both the community and individuals participate in caregiving as well as cause harm. In chapter three I expanded upon these arguments, engaging in rabbinic scholarship, disability studies, and environmental studies to argue that six stories in Bavli Ta'anit portray a world view in which humans and nonhumans alike have interconnected and interdependent bodyminds.

In chapter one we read a story that focused primarily on the relationship between the married couple Elazar and Batya. But others were also involved: their daughter carries messages between them; Batya's father's house provides her with refuge; sailors and enslaved persons take over Elazar's care; Batya talks to her neighbors, and so on. Informed by social and cultural

norms, each person affects another, proving bodyminds to be interconnected and interdependent. Batya's daughter travels between houses at the direction of her parents, becoming extensions of their mouths and ears. Enslaved people are brought by sailors to care for a suffering Elazar. Women's arguments spread word of Elazar's domestic internment in the attic. Each actor is formed by social and cultural norms; bodyminds interconnected and interdependent.

Additionally, the culture and society in which these people existed informed their interactions and dictated how they cared (or did not care) for each other. Batya, in her role as woman and wife, was expected to spend down her dowry and efforts treating Elazar's sufferings. In his role as rabbi, Elazar also had caregiving responsibilities such as helping women determine if they were ritually impure or pure based on their vaginal emissions (which is itself indicative of rabbis using their *halakhic* authority to exert control over women's bodies). Elazar uses this "care" to verify his *da'at* through these women's flesh and assert his strong *da'at* and independence from Batya in front of his colleagues. Systems of care are used to control and abuse. But sometimes, when these systems break, the subjugated can subvert these systems for their own benefit. Indeed, when the tensions between Elazar and his fellow rabbis interrupt traditional care for the dead, Batya's care of Elazar allows her to reap the social benefits of his *da'at* and increase her autonomy—an autonomy she seeks to preserve even (or especially) after his burial, when she soundly rebuffs Rabbi Yehudah the Patriarch's proposal.

Chapter two was mainly set in the *beit midrash.* A communal gathering place for the rabbis, but mostly inaccessible to others, the *beit midrash* is both private and public. And as I argued, the intimate relationship between Yohanan and Reish Lakish was informed by

hierarchical *beit midrash* culture, and itself informed the lives of those outside the *beit midrash*—primarily that of Ya'ita and her children. In the story's conclusion, the rabbinic system of care for *hulshat da'at* fails alongside rabbinic hierarchy. *Beit midrash* culture necessitated that Yohanan prop up his social standing on a subordinate student/colleague, and when Reish Lakish's greatness challenges Yohanan's own, both their bodyminds weaken. This hierarchical system breaks when Yohanan's love and grief for Reish Lakish is greater than his need for status. This subsequently shatters the rabbis' system of care—affirming a mad rabbi's status does not help when his madness is caused by something else.

In chapter three, I used disability and enviromental studies to analyze six stories from Bavli Ta'anit, which I argued present a view of communities and systems of care comprised of humans and nonhumans. In these stories, the rabbis imagine that the sky and clouds have bodyminds—bodyminds that affect humans and the earth when they decide not to rain, and bodyminds which humans affect through fasting and words (prayer and in/direct dialogue). As such, the ecosystem itself can be viewed as a system of care, and when that system of care breaks—by an absent God and/or uncaring clouds and sky—other systems of care are engaged to rectify the situation. Extending *beit midrash* culture outwards, the rabbis imagine that rain itself intercedes to shore up a rabbi's social position and thus comfort (and perhaps even heal) his weakened *da'at*. Honi's Sleep, in turn, explores what happens when even well-intentioned care has ill effects. The ground (and possibly a carob tree or fruit) puts Honi into a 70-year sleep, so that he will know the exilic trauma the Israelites experienced, and better understand the interdependent relationship between humans and the natural world. But this sleep severs him from his community, and just like Elazar and Yohanan, this disconnect ends in death.

Over the past years of researching and writing this dissertation, my bodymind has gone through its own series of changes, and I have participated in my own communities' systems of care. I found myself reflecting on the similarities between the ancient texts I studied, the thoughts of disability and mad theorists, and my own experiences as a person with a bodymind that interrelates with those around me.

I felt the brokenness of the psychiatric system of care most keenly in the last days of writing my dissertation, when my ADHD medication was out of stock at my local pharmacies due to a nationwide shortage. Like the rain stepped in to care for their mad rabbis, my parents stepped in to call every pharmacy in town searching for one that had my medication. Meanwhile, I experienced anew the vulnerabilities of my bodymind as I struggled to force complex thoughts into linear arguments, as demanded by an ableist and sanist academe. When my parents found a pharmacy with the medication I needed, the tablets were a different strength and there were only ten. My psychiatrist wrote me a new prescription, but because the medication is a controlled substance, my insurance would not cover it without prior authorization. I could not afford to go another day without my medication as I waited for this authorization to go through. So I chose to pay out of pocket for a medication that I needed in order to function according to societal demands.

This is only one story about how my surroundings have influenced my bodymind, and how systems of care have both helped and failed me. During the pandemic (which is still ongoing) I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease and later long COVID. When I was healing from a stay in the hospital, my sister Frankie visited every morning to cook me breakfast. When symptoms started to resurge, my sister Havah kept me company in the ER. When my bodymind

was too weak to keep up household chores and continue my research, my mother did my laundry and my father brought me bagel and lox sandwiches. When my medical expenses exceeded my limited income, members from my both my religious and ADHD communities sent me financial support without being asked. All of this support was essential to this dissertation's completion. Bodyminds may be fragile, but that fragility strengthens us when we acknowledge it and rely on each other for support.

I am not claiming to unearth some universal wisdom. The rabbis (as I hoped I have demonstrated) were just as flawed as humans are today. Disability and mad studies are but two frameworks through which we can view the world. I am merely demonstrating how a confluence of thought across time and space can be generative in our own self reflections. And it is my hope that my dissertation facilitates reflections of our bodyminds, communities, and systems of care, that can in turn lead to development of accessible and inclusive communities.

Bibliography

Abrams, Judith Z. *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 1998.

Alexander, Elizabeth Shanks. "The Orality of Rabbinic Writing." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, edited by Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee, 38–57. Cambridge Companions to Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Avalos, Hector. *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*. Edited by Sarah J. Melcher and Jeremy Schipper. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Aviv, Alex. "Appendix: Hulshat Da'at and Self-Psychology." In *Sorrow and Distress in the Talmud*, 273–86. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011.

Baker, Cynthia M. *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

Balberg, Mira. *Purity, Body, and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014. http://muse.jhu.edu/book/30545.

Bar-Asher Siegal, Michal. "Ethics and Identity Formation: Resh Lakish and the Monastic Repentant Robber." *L'identité à Travers l'éthique: Nouvelles Perspectives Sur La Formation Des Identités Collectives Dans Le Monde Greco-Romain*, 2015, 53–72.

Belser, Julia Watts. *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity: Rabbinic Responses to Drought and Disaster*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

———. *Rabbinic Tales of Destruction: Gender, Sex, and Disability in the Ruins of Jerusalem*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Berenbaum, Michael, and Fred Skolnik, eds. "Afterlife." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., 1:441–42. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587500512/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=73c2256f.

———, eds. "Honi Ha-Me'aggel." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., 9:518–19. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587509174/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=3dd7fed7.

Beresford, Peter. "'Mad', Mad Studies and Advancing Inclusive Resistance." *Disability & Society* 35, no. 8 (September 13, 2020): 1337–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1692168.

Beresford, Peter, and Jasna Russo. "Supporting the Sustainability of Mad Studies and Preventing Its Co-Option." *Disability & Society* 31, no. 2 (February 7, 2016): 270–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2016.1145380.

Bornstein, David Joseph. "Nahman Ben Jacob." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., 14:738–39. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA,

2007. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587514479/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=eec2b040.
Boyarin, Daniel. *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
———. *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis*. University of Chicago Press, 2009. https://doi.org/10.7208/9780226069180.
———. *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
———. "Why Is Rabbi Yoḥanan a Woman? Or, a Queer Marriage Gone Bad: 'Platonic Love' in the Talmud." In *Authorizing Marriage?: Canon, Tradition, and Critique in the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions*, edited by Mark Jordan et al, 52–67 and 178–84. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
Brewer, Elizabeth. "Coming Out Mad, Coming Out Disabled." In *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, edited by Elizabeth J. Donaldson, 11–30. Literary Disability Studies. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92666-7_2.
Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew English Lexicon*. Reprint edition. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979.
Carastathis, Anna. "The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory." *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 5 (2014): 304–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12129.
Cleveland Clinic. "Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD): Symptoms & Treatment." Accessed August 9, 2023. https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/24099-rejection-sensitive-dysphoria-rsd.
Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *U. Chi. Legal F.* 1989 (1989): 139–67.
Davidow, Sera. "Suicidal Tendencies, Part I: I'm Suicidal Because I'm Mentally Ill Because I'm Suicidal." *Mad In America* (blog), January 24, 2016. https://www.madinamerica.com/2016/01/suicidal-tendencies-part-i-im-suicidal-because-im-mentally-ill-because-im-suicidal/.
———. "Suicidal Tendencies, Part II: The Real 'Stigma' of Suicide." *Mad In America* (blog), March 2, 2018. https://www.madinamerica.com/2018/03/suicidal-tendencies-part-ii-real-stigma-suicide/.
———. "Suicidal Tendencies, Part III: So, When Do I Get to Call the Cops?" *Mad In America* (blog), August 8, 2018. https://www.madinamerica.com/2018/08/suicidal-tendencies-part-iii/.
Dolezal, Luna. "Representing Posthuman Embodiment: Considering Disability and the Case of Aimee Mullins." *Women's Studies* 46, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 60–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2017.1252569.
Fonrobert, Charlotte. "Blood and Law: Uterine Fluids and Rabbinic Maps of Identity." *Henoch* 30, no. 2 (2008): 243–66.
Fraenkel, Yonah. *Studies in the Spiritual World of the Aggadic Story*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1981.
Frank, Rabbi Yitzhak. *The Practical Talmud Dictionary*. Second. Jerusalem: Maggid, 2001.

Friedman, Shamma. “Shamma Friedman, ‘Aristotle in the Babylonian Talmud? A Scholastic Interpolation by the Talmud’s Anonymous Glossator,’ Maarav, Vol. 21, No. 1-2 (2014): 311-317.” Accessed August 10, 2023. https://www.academia.edu/38101986/Shamma_Friedman_Aristotle_in_the_Babylonian_Talmud_A_Scholastic_Interpolation_by_the_Talmud_s_Anonymous_Glossator_Maarav_vol_21_no_1_2_2014_311_317.

Gibson, Barbara E. “Disability, Connectivity and Transgressing the Autonomous Body.” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 27, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 187–96. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-006-9017-6.

Gibson, Barbara E., Franco A. Carnevale, and Gillian King. “‘This Is My Way’: Reimagining Disability, in/Dependence and Interconnectedness of Persons and Assistive Technologies.” *Disability and Rehabilitation* 34, no. 22 (November 1, 2012): 1894–99. https://doi.org/10.3109/09638288.2012.670040.

Gorman, Rachel, and Brenda A. LeFrancois. “Mad Studies.” In *Routledge International Hanbook of Critical Mental Health*, edited by Peter Beresford and Jasna Russo, 107–14. New York: Routledge, 2022.

Hezser, Catherine. “Classical Rabbinic Literature.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, edited by Martin Goodman. Oxford University Press, 2004. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199280322.013.0006.

———. *Rabbinic Body Language: Non-Verbal Communication in Palestinian Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity*. Boston: Brill, 2017.

———. *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997.

Ilan, Tal. *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity Part II: Palestine 200-650*. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 148. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012.

Jastrow, Marcus. *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*. New York, NY: Judaica Press, 2004.

Judith Hauptman. “A New View of Women and Torah Study in the Talmudic Period,” no. 9 (2010): 249–92.

Kafai, Shayda. “The Mad Border Body: A Political In-Betweeness.” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2013). https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v33i1.3438.

Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013. http://muse.jhu.edu/book/23617.

Kalmin, Richard. *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Kelly, Christine. “Building Bridges with Accessible Care: Disability Studies, Feminist Care Scholarship, and Beyond.” *Hypatia* 28, no. 4 (ed 2013): 784–800. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2012.01310.x.

Klein, Gil P. “Torah in Triclinia: The Rabbinic Banquet and the Significance of Architecture.” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 102, no. 3 (2012): 325–70.

Lapin, Hayim. “The Origins and Development of the Rabbinic Movement in the Land of Israel.” In *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, edited by Steven T. Katz, 4:206–29. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521772488.010.

Lasker, Arnold A., and Daniel J. Lasker. “The Jewish Prayer for Rain in Babylonia.” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 15 (1984): 123–44. https://doi.org/10.1163/157006384X00079.

Last Stone, Suzanne. “Rabbinic Legal Magic: A New Look at Honi’s Circle as the Construction of Law’s Spaces.” *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 17, no. 1 (2005): 97–24.

Lawrence, Louise J. *Bible and Bedlam: Madness, Sanism, and New Testament Interpretation*. London: T&T Clark, 2018.

LeFrançois, Brenda A., Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, eds. *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2013.

Lev, Sarra L. “They Treat Him As a Man and See Him As a Woman: The Tannaitic Understanding of the Congenital Eunuch.” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (2010): 213–43.

McRuer, Robert, and Emma Cassabauam. “Crip Theory.” obo. Accessed June 2, 2023. https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0109.xml.

Melcher, Sarah J., Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong, eds. *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017.

Miyatsu, Rose. “‘Hundreds of People Like Me’: A Search for a Mad Community in The Bell Jar.” In *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, edited by Elizabeth J. Donaldson, 51–69. Literary Disability Studies. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018.

Moss, C., and J. Schipper. *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Muehlberger, Ellen. “Simeon and Other Women in Theodoret’s Religious History: Gender in the Representation of Late Ancient Christian Asceticism.” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23, no. 4 (2015): 583–606. https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2015.0050.

Neis, Rafael. “Directing the Heart: Corporeal Language and the Anatomy of Ritual Space.” In *Placing Ritual Texts: The Rhetorical and Ritual Use of Space*, edited by Mika Ahuvia and Alexander Kocar, 131–65. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018. https://www.academia.edu/34834234/Rafael_Neis_Directing_the_Heart_Corporeal_Language_and_the_Anatomy_of_Ritual_Space_in_Placing_Ritual_Texts_The_Rhetorical_and_Ritual_Use_of_Space_proofs_.

———. “The Reproduction of Species: Humans, Animals and Species Nonconformity in Early Rabbinic Science.” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (2017): 289–317.

———. *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

———. *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Ways of Seeing in Late Antiquity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Nikolsky, Ronit, and Tal Ilan. “Mehata LeHatam, from There to Here (BSanh 5a), Rabbinic Traditions between Palestine Adn Babylonia: An Introduction.” In *Rabbinic Traditions between Palestine and Babylonia*, 1–31. Boston: Brill, 2014.

Nimmo, Richie. “Posthumanism.” In *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Sara Delamont, Alexandru Cernat, Joseph W. Sakshaug, and Richard A. Williams. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2019. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036807683.

Pomeranz, Jonathan A. “Did the Babylonian Sages Regard the Ammei-Ha’Aretz as Subhuman?” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 87 (2016): 115–43. https://doi.org/10.15650/hebruniocollannu.87.2016.0115.

Price, Margaret. *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life*. University of Michigan Press, 2011. https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.1612837.
———. "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain." *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 268–84.
Rappaport, Uriel. "Cyrus." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 5:350–51. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. Gale eBooks. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587504786/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=5853803c.
Redikopp, Sarah. "Out of Place, Out of Mind: Min(d)Ing Race in Mad Studies Through a Metaphor of Spatiality." *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 10, no. 3 (December 8, 2021): 96–118. https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v10i3.817.
Ron, Zvi. "The Death of Honi the Circle Maker." *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 20, no. 2 (2017): 235–50. https://doi.org/10.1163/15700704-12341328.
Rosenfeld, Ben-Zion. *Torah Centers and Rabbinic Activity in Palestine, 70-400 CE: History and Geographic Distribution*. Translated by Chava Cassel. Boston: Brill, 2010. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/umichigan/detail.action?docID=634911.
Rubenstein, Jeffrey L. *Rabbinic Stories*. New York: Paulist Press, 2002.
———. *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*. JHU Press, 2010.
———. *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*. JHU Press, 2004.
Russo, Jasna, and Peter Beresford. "Between Exclusion and Colonisation: Seeking a Place for Mad People's Knowledge in Academia." *Disability & Society* 30, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 153–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2014.957925.
Safrai, Shmuel. "Eleazar Ben Simeon." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., 6:308. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587505763/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=78b6e539.
Sarah Jaquette Ray and Jay Sibara. *Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities : Toward an Eco-Crip Theory*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. http://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=1506507&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
Schalk, Sami. *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.
Septimus, Zvi. "Revisiting the Fat Rabbis." In *Talmudic Transgressions: Engaging the Work of Daniel Boyarin*, edited by Charlotte Fonrobert, Ishay Rosen-Zvi, and Moulie Vidas, 181:419–56. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism. Boston: Brill, 2017. https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1163/9789004345331_017.
Siebers, Tobin Anthony. *Disability Theory*. University of Michigan Press, 2008. https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.309723.
Smith, Mark S. "The Heart and Innards in Israelite Emotional Expressions: Notes from Anthropology and Psychobiology." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 427–36. https://doi.org/10.2307/3266440.
Sokoloff, Michael. *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
Soros, Erin. "Writing Madness in Indigenous Literature: A Hesitation." In *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, edited by Elizabeth J. Donaldson, 71–87. Literary

Disability Studies. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92666-7_5.

Steinmetz, Devora. “Perception, Compassion, and Surprise: Literary Coherence in the Third Chapter of Bavli Ta’anit.” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 82–83 (2012): 61–117.

Strassfeld, Max K. *Trans Talmud: Androgynes and Eunuchs in Rabbinic Literature*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2022.

Sysling, Harry. *Tehiyyat Ha-Metim: The Resurrection of the Dead in the Palestinian Targums of the Pentateuch and Parallel Traditions in Classical Rabbinic Literature*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996.

Thorneycroft, Ryan. “Crip Theory and Mad Studies: Intersections and Points of Departure.” *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 9, no. 1 (February 27, 2020): 91–121. https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v9i1.597.

Valler, Shulamit. *Sorrow and Distress in the Talmud*. Translated by Sharon Blass. Judaism and Jewish Life. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011.

Vartejanu-Joubert, Madalina. “Representations of Madmen and Madness in Jewish Sources from the Pre-Exilic to the Roman-Byzantine Period.” In *The Routledge History of Madness and Mental Health*, edited by Greg Eghigian. Routledge, 2017.

Wolframe, PhebeAnn M. “Going Barefoot: Mad Affiliation, Identity Politics, and Eros.” In *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, edited by Elizabeth J. Donaldson, 31–49. Literary Disability Studies. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018.