



Levi Bar Sisi on the Bima

After saying the blessing before study, read the texts below and answer the questions in small groups. Be prepared to share your responses to question #4 with the entire group.

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת יבמות פרק יב דף יג עמוד א

בני סימונייא אתון לגבי רבי אמרין ליה בעא
תתן לן חד בר נש דריש דיין וחזן ספר מתניין
ועבד לן כל צורכינן ויהב לון לוי בר סיסי.

עשו לו בימה גדולה והושיבוה עליה אתון ושאלון
ליה הגידמת במה היא חולצת ולא אגיבון רקה דם
ולא אגיבון אמרין דילמה דלית הוא מרי אולפן נישאול
ליה שאלון ליה דאגדה...

לגבי דרבי אמרון ליה הדין פייסונא דפייסנתך אמר
לון חייכון בר נש דכוותי יהבית לכון שלח אייתיתיה...

ולמה לא אגיבתיון אמר ליה עשו לי בימה גדולה
והושיבו אותי עליה וטפח רוחי עלי וקרא עליו אם
נבלת בהתנשא ואם זמות יד לפה מי גרם לך
להתנבל בדברי תורה על שנישאת'

The people of Simonias came to Rabbi (Judah) and said, "We wish you to give us one person who will be a preacher, judge, *hazan* (cantor), teacher of Bible and Mishna, will fulfill all our needs." He gave them Levi bar Sisi.

They made him a big *bima* (dais or platform) and set him upon it, and asked him, "How does an armless woman perform the *halitzah* ceremony?" and he did not answer them. "And what if, in the *halitzah* ceremony, she spat blood?" and he did not answer. They said, "Perhaps he is not a master of [legal] instruction. Let us ask him a question of *aggadah* (legends)." . . . he did not answer.

They returned to Rabbi and said, "Is this the mediator we petitioned you for?" He said, "By your lives! I've given you a man like myself!"

[Rabbi then summons Levi and asks him the same questions and he

answers them easily.] Rabbi said, “Why did you not answer the villagers?” He said, “They made me a big *bima* and sat me upon it and my spirit swelled.” And Rabbi . . . said, “Who caused you to become foolish in the words of Torah? It was only because you elevated yourself through them.”

Talmud, Yevamot 12:7, 13a, Cited in Seth Schwarz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*

1. How does Levi Bar Sisi explain his memory lapse?
2. How does Rabbi explain it?
3. What are the implications of the two different explanations?
4. Please read the follow text and its introduction and be prepared to share your answer to the study question with the group:

Some would argue that the root of the problem was not only the *bima* on which Levi was placed, but the impossible job description the villagers gave at the outset. Is it really possible for one person to fulfill the needs of the entire congregation?

The REIMAGINE project is based on the assumption that collaborative leadership is required to create and support enduring change, as explained in the following quotation from Ronald Heifetz:

Rather than define leadership either as a position of authority in a social structure or as a personal set of characteristics, we may find it a great deal more useful to define leadership as an activity. This allows for leadership from multiple positions in a social structure. ... It also allows for the use of a variety of abilities depending on the demands of the culture and situation. Personal abilities are resources for leadership applied differently in different contexts. ... By unhinging leadership from personality traits, we permit observations of the many different ways in which people exercise plenty of leadership every day without “being leaders.”

Leadership Without Easy Answers, p.20

Each member of your Leadership Team brings different talents and abilities to this project. Take a few moments to identify the gifts that each member of your leadership has to offer to your team and to the REIMAGINE task force.

Background

Halitzah -- The *halitzah* ceremony was a ceremony by which the brother of a man who died without children was relieved of the obligation to marry his brother’s widow. The ceremony requires the woman to remove his shoe and spit at her brother in law as an expression of her disdain at him for neglecting his brotherly duty..