POST THE TALMUD / DISCUSSION GUIDE

Beruriah, Rabbi Meir & the end of the verse

Berakhot 10a:2–7 | Beta teaching adaptation

THE CORE QUESTION

What changes when you read a verse all the way to its end?

THE ARGUMENT IN FOUR MOVES

1. Lawless neighbors torment Rabbi Meir, and he prays that they die. His wife Beruriah asks what he is relying on: Psalm 104:35 says chatta'im, which she reads as sins, not chot'im, sinners.

2. She sends him to the end of the verse, "and the wicked will be no more," and tells him to pray that they repent. He does, and they repent.

3. A sectarian mocks Isaiah 54:1: why should a barren woman sing? Beruriah calls him a fool and sends him to the end of that verse too: the desolate one's children outnumber the married one's.

4. She identifies the barren woman with the Congregation of Israel and adds a harsh retort about children destined for Gehinnom. The same reading technique serves two very different encounters.

WHERE THIS GOES NEXT

Read Berakhot 9b:29–30 on Psalm 104:35, then 10a:8–11 for another sectarian challenge. For further reading: Gila Fine, The Madwoman in the Rabbi's Attic, chapter 5 on Beruria. Her book explores how careful rereading complicates initial portraits of Talmudic women: https://gilafine.com/the-madwoman-in-the-rabbis-attic/

DISCUSS

1. Beruriah's first argument is about one word and her second about the end of the verse. Which carries more weight for you, and why?

2. What is the difference between asking for wrongdoing to end and asking for the wrongdoers to be gone?

3. How does the sharp second exchange complicate the compassionate first one? What would you miss by reading only one of them?

TEACHING NOTE

Compare Rashi on Berakhot 10a:2.2 with Rashi on Psalms 104:35: sins in one reading, sinners in the other. Keep interpretation distinct from a simple grammar correction. The second story contains polemical language about Gehinnom; examine its tension with the first. This handout stays within Berakhot 10a and does not import later stories about Beruriah.

Source: https://www.sefaria.org/Berakhot.10a.2-7

Classroom thread: https://postthetalmud.com/beruriah/?mode=study&classroom=1

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