

The relationship of R. Meir and Bruria

Rebbe Meir is known as being one of the most sexist men in the Talmud. He has a wandering eye and the Talmud tells us constantly that, Satan was watching over him. He had 80 students and did not think that they were concentrating enough, so he had them all give gets to their wives on the same day. Interestingly, he marries the most important woman teacher in the Torah, Bruria, who is said to know more Baraita- teachings than he does.

1) [Avodah Zarah 18a:14-18b:5](#) (Avodah Zara is false worship)

a) **Berurya, the wife of Rabbi Meir, was a daughter of Rabbi Ḥanina ben Teradyon.**

She said to Rabbi Meir: It is a disrespectful matter for me that my sister is sitting in a brothel; you must do something to save her. Rabbi Meir took a vessel [tarkeva] full of dinars and went. He said to himself: If no transgression was committed with her, a miracle will be performed for her; if she committed a transgression, no miracle will be performed for her. Rabbi Meir went and dressed as a Roman knight, and said to her: Accede to my wishes, i.e., engage in intercourse with me. She said to him: I am menstruating [dashtana] and cannot. He said to her: I will wait. She said to him: There are many women in the brothel, and there are many women here who are more beautiful than I. He said to himself: I can conclude from her responses that she did not commit a transgression, as she presumably said this to all who come. Rabbi Meir went over to her guard, and said to him: Give her to me. The guard said to him: I fear that if I do so, I will be punished by the government. Rabbi Meir said to him: Take this vessel full of dinars; give half to the government as a bribe, and half will be for you.

The guard **said to him: But when the money is finished, what shall I do?** Rabbi Meir **said to him: Say: God of Meir answer me! And you will be saved.** The guard **said to him: And who can say that this is the case, that I will be saved by this utterance?** Rabbi Meir **said to him: You will now see. There were these carnivorous dogs that would devour people;** Rabbi Meir **took a clod of earth, threw it at them, and when they came to devour him, he said: God of Meir answer me!** The dogs then **left him alone, and** after seeing this the guard **gave the daughter of Rabbi Hanina ben Teradyon to Rabbi Meir. Ultimately the matter was heard in the king's court, and the guard, who was brought and taken to be hanged, said: God of Meir answer me!** They then **lowered him down, as they were unable to hang him. They said to him: What is this? He said to them: This was the incident that occurred, and he proceeded to relate the entire story to them. They then went and engraved the image of Rabbi Meir at the entrance of Rome where it would be seen by everyone, and they said: Anyone who sees a man with this face should bring him here. One day, Romans saw Rabbi Meir and ran after him, and he ran away from them and entered a brothel to hide. Some say he then escaped capture because he saw food cooked by gentiles and dipped [*temash*] this finger in the food and tasted it with that other finger, and thereby fooled them into thinking that he was eating their food, which they knew Rabbi Meir would not do. And some say that he escaped detection because Elijah came, appeared to them as a prostitute and embraced Rabbi Meir. The Romans who were chasing him said: Heaven forbid, if this were Rabbi Meir, he would not act in that manner. Rabbi Meir arose, fled, and arrived in Babylonia. The Gemara notes: There are those who say that he fled because of this**

incident, and there are those who say that he fled due to embarrassment from the incident involving his wife Berurya (and her sister).

2) [Berakhot 10a:2-7](#)

- a) **There were these hooligans in Rabbi Meir's neighborhood who caused him a great deal of anguish. Rabbi Meir prayed for God to have mercy on them, that they should die. Rabbi Meir's wife, Berurya, said to him: What is your thinking? On what basis do you pray for the death of these hooligans? Do you base yourself on the verse, as it is written: "Let sins cease from the land" (Psalms 104:35), which you interpret to mean that the world would be better if the wicked were destroyed? But is it written, let sinners cease?" Let sins cease, is written. One should pray for an end to their transgressions, not for the demise of the transgressors themselves. Moreover, go to the end of the verse, where it says: "And the wicked will be no more." If, as you suggest, transgressions shall cease refers to the demise of the evildoers, how is it possible that the wicked will be no more, i.e., that they will no longer be evil? Rather, pray for God to have mercy on them, that they should repent, as if they repent, then the wicked will be no more, as they will have repented. Rabbi Meir saw that Berurya was correct and he prayed for God to have mercy on them, and they repented. The Gemara relates an additional example of Berurya's incisive insight: A certain heretic said to Berurya: It is written: "Sing, barren woman who has not given birth, open forth in song and cry, you did not travail, for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, said the Lord" (Isaiah 54:1). Because she has not given birth, she should sing and rejoice? Berurya responded to this heretic's mockery and said: Fool! Go to the end of**

the verse, where it is written: “For the children of the desolate shall be more numerous than the children of the married wife, said the Lord.” Rather, what is the meaning of: “Sing, barren woman who has not given birth”? It means: Sing congregation of Israel, which is like a barren woman who did not give birth to children who are destined for Gehenna like you.

3) [Midrash Mishlei 31:2](#)- Midrash on the Prophets

"A valiant woman, who can find" (Proverbs 31:10):

There was a story about Rabbi Meir who was sitting and expounding in the study hall on Shabbat afternoon, when two of his sons died. What did his mother do? She placed both of them on the bed and spread a sheet over them. At the end of Shabbat, Rabbi Meir came home from the study hall. He said to her, 'Where are my two sons?' She said [back], 'They went to the study hall.' He said to her, 'I scanned the study hall and I did not see them.' They gave him the cup of Havdalah and he separated [the days of the week with the closure of Shabbat]. He repeated and said, 'Where are my two sons?' She said, 'They went elsewhere and they are coming now.' She placed food in front of him and he ate and blessed. After he blessed, she said to him, 'I have a question to ask you.' He said to her, 'Say your question.' She said to him, 'Rabbi, before today, a man came and deposited something with me, and now he is coming to take it. Should we return it to him or not?' He said, 'My daughter, one who has a deposit with him must return it to its owner.' She said to him, 'Were it not for your consent, I would not have given it to him.' What did she do? She grabbed his hand, brought him up to that room, had him approach the bed and took off the sheet from upon them. When he saw both of them dead and laying upon the bed, he began to cry and

say, 'My sons, my sons, my teachers, my teachers - my sons in the way of the world, my teachers in that they would enlighten my eyes with their Torah.' At that time, she said to Rabbi Meir, 'Rabbi, is this not what I told you - do I not need to return the deposit to its Owner?' He said, "'The Lord has given and the Lord has taken; may the name of the Lord be blessed'" (Job 1:21)." Rabbi Chanina said, "With this thing, she consoled him and his mind became composed - that is why it states, 'A valiant woman, who can find.'" Rabbi Chama bar Chanina said, "On account of what did the sons of Rabbi Meir become liable and die at one time? Because they were accustomed to leaving the study hall to sit with food and drink."

What do we learn about Bruriah's actions with the death of her sons? Why does she wait until after Shabbat before she tells her husband? How does she couch their death in a sympathetic way? When does she get to mourn?