

# Tale of a plaster – Different versions of a story and possible meaning of the phrase *Lo shmi'a li* (Bavli Eruvin 102b)

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This article deals with different versions of a story in Tractate Eruvin of the Babylonian Talmud (102b). This story has different versions in various sources, including in one page from the Genizah fragment Cambridge U-L T-S F2 (2) 23, numbered C98948 in the Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society. Each version changes our understanding of the story's content, and in this article we will display these variations and examine the feasibility that they reflect about the original version. The story ends with the phrase *Lo shmi'a li*, for which we shall offer a new alternative meaning.

**Contribution:** The main contribution of this article is in revealing the importance of comparing the different versions to the same story which implies a change in the content of the story. This has future implications when considering a story that has different versions. In addition, exploring and examining a particular phrase can offer a different interpretation or meaning than it was commonly thought. These insights are based on story and phrase found in the theological text, so that the article fits to the focus and scope of this journal.

**Keywords:** tale; plaster; *Lo shmi'a li*; Bavli; Eruvin.

## Introduction

This article deals with a story in Tractate Eruvin (102b) that describes a plaster that slipped off the wound on the Sabbath and discusses whether it could be replaced. The content of the article is divided into two parts. The first part engages in clarifying the different versions regarding the name of the person relating the story. Each version portrayed in the article suggests a different narrator, and as a result the dialogue between the speakers in the story changes as well. The purpose of the article is to present the different versions and try to decide between the different options regarding the name of the narrator. The second part of the article discusses the phrase *Lo shmi'a li*, where the simple meaning of the phrase is mentioned: I did not hear (this or the halakha under discussion). The purpose of the article is to propose another possible meaning that could be relevant regarding the story of the plaster.

The text of the printed version (b Eruvin 102b):

Mishnah. It is permissible to replace a plaster on a wound in the temple but not in the country. For the first time, however, this is forbidden everywhere.

Gemara. Our Rabbis taught: A plaster that was detached from a wound may be replaced on the Sabbath. R. Judah ruled: Only if it slipped downwards may it be pushed back upwards or if it slipped upwards it may be pushed back downwards. One may also uncover a part of the plaster and wipe the opening of the wound and then another part of the plaster may be uncovered and the opening of the wound be wiped, but the plaster itself may not be wiped off because such wiping is tantamount to spreading the salve; and if one did spread the salve, the obligation of a sin-offering is incurred.

Rab Judah citing Samuel ruled: The halachah is in agreement with R. Judah. This, R. Hisda observed, was learnt only where it slipped off on to an object, but if it slipped off on to the ground, all agree that it is forbidden to replace it on the wound. Mar, son of R. Ashi, stated: I was once standing in the presence of my father when his plaster slipped off on to his pillow and he replaced it. 'Does not the Master accept?', I asked him, 'the statement of R. Hisda that they differed only where it slipped off on to an object but that if it slipped off on to the ground all agree that replacement is forbidden; in connection with which Samuel stated: The halachah is in agreement with R. Judah?' 'T', he replied, 'did not hear of this, by which I mean: I do not accept it' (Epstein edition).

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## The tale of a plaster that slipped off R. Ashi's wound

The tale of plaster (Lieberman 1962:73; Safrai & Safrai 2009:347–349) that slipped off<sup>1</sup> has at least five versions. The first version is that of the Genizah fragment U-L T-S F2 (2) 23 (FGP no. C98948) which describes R. Ashi himself who speaks of [the plaster] that slipped off his father's wound. The second version is that of R. Hananel, Rif, and the printed version; it mentions R. Ashi's son who relates the tale about his father – R. Ashi.<sup>2</sup> The third version is that of MS Oxford 366 and the Tosafot, which mentions R. Ashi's son who relates the tale about Rava.<sup>3</sup> The fourth version is that of MS Munich 95 and it mentions the son of a man named Ashi (not R. Ashi) who tells the tale about Rava. There is also a fifth version, which mentions that R. Ashi's son told the tale to R. Aba.<sup>4</sup>

The first version, consisting of the fragment's version, is possible from a chronological perspective. The second version is viable too (Cohen 2001:73–74, n.42).<sup>5</sup> The third version is rejected because R. Ashi's son could not have been able to make up in the presence of Rava when this happened, because Rava died on the day his father R. Ashi was born<sup>6</sup> (although other opinions also exist).<sup>7</sup> So R. Ashi's son could certainly not have been standing before Rava when it had happened.

The fourth version is also possible because it speaks of the son of a man named Ashi who lived in the time of Rava and could have stood before Rava and related the tale.<sup>8</sup> The fifth version is indeed possible as there was an Eretz Israel amora called R. Aba (Albeck 1969a:424) in the time of R. Ashi, but it is hard to assume that R. Ashi's son told him the tale. The fragment's version is one of the four possible versions and here too there is no way to decide between the fragment's version and the two other possible versions.

### Interpretation of the phrase *Lo shmi'a li* ('לא שמיע לי כלומר לא' 'סבירא לי')

The tale ends with R. Ashi's words (according to the fragment's version), with the phrase *Lo shmi'a li* [I did not hear of this, by which I mean: I do not accept it]. From an interpretive perspective, it is not clear what R. Ashi did 'not hear of and does not accept'. The first option is that R. Ashi does not accept that the halakha follows R. Judah in the controversy between him and the Rabbis in the Baraita preceding the sugya

1.Y. Eruvin 10:11, 26c: 'שפחה'.

2.Eruvin 102b; see Hullin 76b; R. Hananel, Eruvin 102b; Rif, Eruvin 102b; Dikdukei Sofrim, Eruvin 102b, n. 4.

3.Tosafot, Eruvin 102b, s.v. *amar*.

4.Tosafot R. Peretz, Eruvin 102b, s.v. *amar mar*; Dikdukei Sofrim, Eruvin 102b, n. 4.

5.Tosafot, Eruvin 102b, s.v. *amar*: 'וכן נראה'.

6.Kiddushin 72b; Tosafot, Eruvin 102b, s.v. *amar*; Hagahot Reneshburg, Kiddushin 72b, n.1.

7.Kelalei Shmuel, 43, p. 24.

8.Dikdukei Sofrim, Eruvin 102b, n. 4.

(which is not included in the fragment's version) and does not disagree with the words of R. Hisda<sup>9</sup> or does not refer to R. Hisda's words at all. According to this option, R. Ashi does not accept that the halakha follows R. Judah who says that the plaster that slipped off the wound on the Sabbath cannot be replaced on the wound, rather R. Ashi accepts the Rabbis' opinion whereby it is permissible to replace the plaster that slipped off the wound on the Sabbath (even in the city).<sup>10</sup>

A second possibility is that R. Ashi does not accept R. Hisda's explanation of the controversy between the Rabbis and R. Judah in the Baraita preceding the sugya (which is not contained in the fragment's version).

According to R. Hisda's explanation, the controversy between the Rabbis and R. Judah is about where the plaster slipped off on to. R. Hisda explains that the Rabbis permitted replacement of the plaster that slipped off the wound only if it fell on an object but R. Judah disagrees and contends that even if the plaster fell on an object it cannot be replaced on the wound.<sup>11</sup> R. Hisda contends that there is no controversy between the Rabbis and R. Judah if the plaster fell on the ground – according to both the Rabbis and R. Judah, it is forbidden to replace a plaster that slipped onto the ground.<sup>12</sup>

According to the second possibility, R. Ashi does not think and does not accept R. Hisda's explanation, rather he contends that the controversy between the Rabbis and R. Judah is only on the topic of the plaster that slipped off onto the ground. According to the Rabbis – it is permissible to replace the plaster, according to R. Judah – it is forbidden to replace the plaster. According to R. Ashi, there is no controversy between the Rabbis and R. Judah on the topic of a plaster that slipped off on to an object, and they both agree that it is permissible to replace a plaster that slipped off on to an object.<sup>13</sup>

### Possible meaning of the phrase *Lo shmi'a li* ('לא שמיע לי כלומר לא' 'סבירא לי')

The phrase 'לא שמיע לי כלומר לא סבירא לי' [I did not hear of this, by which I mean: I do not accept it] demands explanation (Cohen 1984). We shall relate to the first part of the phrase, 'I did not hear of this'. This part has several possible explanations suggested by the researchers. According to the tale, R. Ashi insists on his opinion and does not agree with the opinion to which he objects (whether the first or the second possibility – as stated in the preceding section 'Interpretation of the phrase *Lo shmi'a li*'). But he is not interested in explaining and justifying his objection so he uses an apologetic

9.Tosafot, Eruvin 102b, s.v. *retiya*.

10.Rif, Eruvin 102b (para. 685); HaMa'or HaKatan, Eruvin 102b; Tosafot, Eruvin 102b, s.v. *retiya*; Cf. HaRosh, Eruvin 102b; see Korban Netanel, Eruvin 102b, n. 400; Geon Ya'akov, Eruvin 102b, s.v. *tanu Rabbanan*.

11.Rashi, Eruvin 102b, s.v. *lo savar lah*.

12.R. Hananel, Eruvin 102b; Rashi, Eruvin 102b, s.v. *lo savar lah*, s.v. *lo shami'a li*.

13.Rashi, Eruvin 102b, s.v. *lo shami'a li*; Geon Ya'akov, Eruvin 102b, s.v. *tanu Rabbanan*.

tone by saying 'I did not hear of this', namely, so to speak, 'I did not hear' the contrary opinion and therefore he sees no need to explain or justify his objection (Cohen 1984).

The second part of the phrase, 'by which I mean I do not accept', is a later addition from the period of the savoraim to the first part of the phrase 'I did not hear of this', and it was intended to explain (Kaplan 1933:99–100) the first part of the phrase as though R. Ashi says 'I do not accept this' – referring to the opinion to which he objects. But in fact, this was not said by R. Ashi (Cohen 1984).

This linguistic emendation, 'by which I mean I do not accept', was intended to explain why R. Ashi did not reconsider and change his opinion in light of his son's words, who stated that the halakha in this matter had already been determined (Samuel stated: The halakha is in agreement with R. Judah). Assumedly, R. Ashi should have reconsidered his words in light of the accepted halakha on this topic as per his son's words, because fundamentally this is the customary practice.<sup>14</sup>

However, there is another possible explanation for the phrase 'I did not hear of this, by which I mean: I do not accept it'. Firstly, it is notable that the first part of the phrase, 'I did not hear of this', is usually explained as 'I have not heard' about it (Albeck 1969b:2–3; De-Vries 1966:71).<sup>15</sup> However, it is also possible to explain this phrase, at least in the current sugya, as leaning on interpretation of the word *shmu'a*, which means a halakhic tradition (Sokoloff 2002:1156, 2017:641–642)<sup>16</sup> (learned from a sage<sup>17</sup>). Namely, 'I did not hear of this' means: I do not maintain this halakhic tradition (in this sugya meaning the first or second opinion that R. Ashi is objecting to, as stated in the section 'Interpretation of the phrase *Lo shmi'a li*') although I have learnt about the *shmu'a*<sup>18</sup> and I am familiar with it and nonetheless I do not accept it (Jastrow 1967:1599).<sup>19</sup>

The second part of the phrase is *klomar lo svira li* [by which I mean 'I do not accept it'], meaning: I do not think so,<sup>20</sup> or I do not understand (Sokoloff 2017:408)<sup>21</sup> it that way, or that is not the way it seems to me (the second part appears to indicate the opposite of the first part, showing that R. Ashi indeed heard the said *shmu'a*). However, this phrase could be explained by the word *sevara* which means something

14. Shabbat 61a; Tosafot, Eruvin 19b, s.v. *R. Papa*; Halikhot 'Olam, Kelalei ha-Gemara le-R. Karo, p. 129, s.v. *be-perek bet de-eruvim*.

15. Shabbat 19b; Shabbat 61a; Eruvin 19b; Pesachim 101b; Gittin 45a; 'Arachin 30a; *Darkhei ha-talmud le-R. Itzhak Kanfanton*, p. 56, Lange edition; *Sefer Krittut*, 95, p. 327, n. 213.

16. Aruch HaShalem 1955, vol. 8, p. 103, entry: *shama'*; Sokoloff 2002:1156, entry: *shemu'ata*; Sokoloff 2017:641–642, entry: *shmu'a*.

17. Shabbat 39a, 40a.

18. Aruch ha-Shalem 1955, vol. 8, pp. 103–104, entry: *shama'*.

19. Jastrow 1967, vol. 2, p. 1599, entry: *shama' l*.

20. Rashi, Shabbat 95a, s.v. *lav ad'atai*.

21. Sokoloff 2017:408, entry: *savar*.

that is learned by review and inquiry,<sup>22</sup> in some method of study (Jastrow 1967:952–953; Sokoloff 2002:784–785).<sup>23</sup> In other words, 'I do not accept it' means: I do not learn it that way or I would not think of learning it that way (the contradictory view), and as Rashi says: 'To give an explanation of it as I see it',<sup>24</sup> neither by means of review nor by some logical study method (Sokoloff 2017:641–642),<sup>25</sup> and for this reason, I do not accept it because it cannot be understood in that way.

In light of the above, according to this possibility the meaning of the phrase 'I did not hear of this, by which I mean: I do not accept it' is: I do not maintain this halakhic tradition or I do not accept this *shmu'a*, although I have heard and I am familiar with this *shmu'a* nonetheless I do not accept it, and I also do not learn it or do not see any need to learn it (the opinion is one's own contradiction) in some study method or to give an explanation of it as I see it (*sevara*). Moreover, the give and take tradition [=sevara] on the basis of which this *shmu'a* was decided does not seem to me correct.

The possibility of explaining the phrase 'I did not hear of this, by which I mean: I do not accept it' according to this interpretation may be evident from another place as well: 'Perhaps R. Johanan did not hear this baraita ... or perhaps he heard it and held that the halakha is not as that mishna'.<sup>26</sup> It appears from this that R. Johanan had not heard the Baraita and even if he had heard it, he would not have accepted it and would not necessarily have changed his mind because he did not learn it or did not see a need to learn it (the Baraita) in some study method or give an explanation of it as he sees it (by some *sevara*) or the tradition of the give and take [=sevara] on the basis of which this *shmu'a* was decided does not seem to him correct. And the other incidents where this phrase appears, usually with regard to the words of R. Ashi<sup>27</sup> or in a dialogue between another amora (Amemar) and R. Ashi,<sup>28</sup> could be explained similarly.

In fact, the phrasing of the question that R. Ashi's son asked his father ('Does not the Master accept the statement of R. Hisda ... which Samuel stated: The halakha is in agreement with R. Judah') also indicates that not all the Rabbis, including R. Ashi, were of the opinion that the halakha follows R. Judah – that this is the ruling and it is accepted by all the Rabbis. If this was an accepted halakha, the phrasing of the question to R. Ashi should have been different, something like: 'But as Samuel in fact stated, 'The halakha is in agreement with R. Judah',<sup>29</sup> and not as R. Ashi's son asked

22. Aruch HaShalem 1955, vol. 6, pp. 13–14, entry: *savar*.

23. Jastrow 1967, vol. 2, pp. 952–953, entry: *sevara, savar*; Sokoloff 2002:784–785, entry: *savar*.

24. Rashi, Yoma 33a, s.v. *sevara lo yada'ana*.

25. Sokoloff 2017:641–642, entry: *shmu'a*.

26. Shabbat 61a.

27. Mo'ed Katan 12b; Ketubot 83b, 97a; Bava Batra 13b.

28. Bava Batra 165a; Hullin 53b, 62a.

29. Pri To'ar, Hilkhot Shechita, 15:2; see Yad Malakhi, 403, p. 91.

above. Because the question was not phrased in this way, it is clear why R. Ashi did not agree that the halakha should be in contradiction of his opinion – because this halakha was not necessarily accepted by R. Ashi (or apparently by other Rabbis) and therefore he saw no need to learn it in some study method or to explain it as he saw it (by means of a *sevara*). Moreover, the give and take tradition [=sevara] on the basis of which this *shmu'a* was decided did not seem to him correct. Hence, R. Ashi said, 'I did not hear of this, by which I mean: I do not accept it'.

These words of R. Ashi, according to this option, are in answer to his son's question that needs no halakhic justifications (Cohen 2001:73–74) on R. Ashi's objection to an opinion that he does not accept. Therefore, there is also no discussion between them on this topic further to the sugya, rather the sugya in fact ends with R. Ashi's words.

## Conclusion

In the first part of this article, we presented five possible versions of the name of the narrator in the story of the plaster. After discussing all these versions, one of them was rejected and the four others remained possible but no decision was reached regarding the correct version. The second part of the article presented the customary interpretation and meaning of the phrase *Lo shami'a li*. In addition, we proposed another possible meaning for the phrase *Lo shami'a li* that could also be relevant for the story of the plaster. This phrase is located at the end of the sugya, and our proposal explains why the discussion of the sugya does not continue, rather the phrase constitutes its conclusion.

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The author has declared that no competing interest exists.

### Author's contributions

I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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