

Five Rabbis

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Source: Original

Sometime around the year 130 CE, five rabbis, Rabbi **Eliezer**, Rabbi **Joshua**, Rabbi **Elazar ben Azariah**, Rabbi **Akiba**, and Rabbi **Tarfon**, gathered in the town of **B'nei Brak** and got to talking about the Exodus from Egypt all night, until the sun rose. Their students, finding them still at the table, still talking, said "It's already morning, and time to recite the morning prayers!"

Fortunately, they responded, so the students didn't have to call to each of them specifically and didn't have to pronounce all their names.

But there's a story behind the story. As the Velveteen Rabbi tells us, "Context is everything."

B'nei Brak was the headquarters of the rebellion against Roman occupation, a rebellion of which Rabbi Akiva was a leader. Because of rebel activities, the Roman authorities had forbidden gatherings of Jews. The seder described in this passage was a chance not only to discuss the liberation from Egypt—but also to plan a strategy of resistance against Roman occupation. The students were standing guard, ready to caution the rabbis to disband at daybreak, lest they be caught.

This tale may be read as an encouragement to become so joyfully immersed in the seder that we don't notice the passing of time...and it may also be read as a story of how one liberation begets another. Celebrating our freedom from servitude can be a radical act. It was Rabbi Akiva, after all, who famously answered the query, "Which is better, study or action?" with the response, "Study—if it leads to action."