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**Zealotry and Satire: Revisiting the Talmudic Discussion
of Human Dignity**

The talmudic *sugya* concerning the juxtaposition between the value of human dignity and the obligation to strictly adhere to divine commands (b.Berakhot 19b-20a) has garnered considerable scholarly attention. This article provides a fresh examination of the *sugya*, specifically delving into the interplay between legal precepts and narrative elements. In contrast to previous analyses, I argue that the concluding narrative of the *sugya* stands in profound tension with the legal framework established earlier. The legal discussion develops around the principle that “wherever there is profanation of God’s name, no respect is accorded the master,” which in turn is based on the verse, “There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord” (Proverbs 21:30). The combination of the verse and the dictum emphasize the supremacy of religious edicts over considerations of human dignity and intuitive ethical behavior. The legal discussion grapples with this perspective, yet it is conclusively subverted by the satirical story at the conclusion of the discussion. Demonstrating various connections between the legal discourse and the narrative, I propose a comprehensive interpretation of the entire passage as a Menippean satire offering a provocative critique of foundational religious principles.