

Zusia: Jesus, History's Most Controversial Jew

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“Jesus is so thoroughly Jewish, and [for example] he talks about God as Abba: “Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.” The Judaism has been filtered out for Christians, so they don't know anymore what his origin is.”

-Reb Zalman Shachter-Shalomi, *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, 2005.

Joke: How do we know Jesus was Jewish?

His mother thought he was the messiah.

Jews and Christians have theologies that differ when it comes to the nature of Jesus. But we also have an identical moral passion for justice and equality based on the prophets. We have parallel problems and challenges that face us both. And we love and serve the same God.

-*Rabbi David Zaslow, Jesus: First Century Jew*

Previous to WW2 many prominent Jews, comfortable in the feeling of new security and the hope for a better world that the early 20th century seemed to hold forth, took a renewed interest in Jesus the Jew. Joseph Klausner wrote a book called “Jesus of Nazareth” in 1922 which was the first historical study of Jesus in Hebrew. Stefan Zweig, the great Viennese Jewish novelist, pacifist, and eventual victim of the Holocaust, called Jesus “my eternal brother.” Martin Buber, his contemporary, felt similarly, and wrote that he considered the Baal Shem Tov and Jesus his two greatest Jewish teachers. Albert Einstein said:

“Christianity and Judaism share one of the great reluctances of history. Both are reluctant to live openly and fully with the fact that Jesus was a Jew. The earliest Christians knew neither awkwardness nor reticence over the fact that Jesus was a Jew.... There is every reason for Judaism to lose its reluctance toward Jesus. His own towering spiritual presence is a projection of Judaism, not a repudiation of it.”

Perhaps more surprisingly, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise (1874-1949) Founder of the American Jewish Congress and Federation of American Zionists said:

“No ethical system, no textbook on religion, are capable of exerting such a deep impression on us as that great personality of Jesus, standing unlike any other, midway between heaven and earth, equally near to God and to man....Jesus the helper of the needy, the friend of sinners, the

brother of all sufferers, the comforter of the unfortunate, the lover of all mankind, the liberator of women, he won and conquered the human heart.”

After the Holocaust, however, it is much harder to find Jewish thinkers who will make a statement like this. Concerned with Jewish particularity and survival and wounded by the abandonment of world Jewry by the majority of our Christian brothers—despite notable and moving exceptions like the leaders Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Niemoller, Karl Barth, and thousands of other private Christians— Jews since WW2 have generally distanced themselves from Jesus and Christianity, with somewhat of an exception in our own Jewish Renewal movement, where Rabbis like Rami Shapiro, David Zaslow, Daniell Matt, and Arthur Waskow have written seriously and sympathetically about him.

Ironically this renewal of a general Jewish antipathy towards Jesus and Christians in the mainstream Jewish community has been during the same period that Christians have become drastically more philosemitic and concerned with Jews than at any time in history. Many Christian theologians and communities repented of anti-Semitism after WW2 and held out their hands to Jews, often changing their traditional theology to abandon anti-Jewish elements. Many also officially abandoned evangelism towards Jews and switched to interfaith dialogue and solidarity, especially in liberal, non-fundamentalist circles and among Catholics (due to Vatican II).

We will touch more later on the historical relationship between Jews and Christians, but what I want to explore tonight is the relationship between Jesus himself and Judaism: was Jesus an

observant Jew? If so, what kind of Judaism did he practice? What were his views of the Torah, and what were his teachings? Finally we will look at how he seems to have viewed himself and his relationship to Judaism, by which I mean God, Torah, and Israel. In order to let go of what we think we know, I'm going to refer to Jesus by his Jewish name, Yeshua, in this course. The pronunciation "Jesus" is of recent American origin and based on the older Yesus or Hesus, which was based on Iesous in Greek and Yeshua in Hebrew.

Yeshua and Judaism

Now early in the morning he [Yeshua] came again into the Temple, and all the people came to him; and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the Torah, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say?"

This they said, testing him, that they might have something of which to accuse him. But Yeshua stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though he did not hear.

So when they continued asking him, he raised himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last.

And Yeshua was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Yeshua had raised himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has not one condemned you?"

She said, "No one, master."

And Yeshua said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

(John 8)

What is going on here? Why, and what, did Yeshua write in the dust?

The woman in question has been found guilty of adultery. Vayikra 20:10 commands: "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife--with the wife of his neighbor--both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death." What has happened to the male participant is not mentioned here, most likely because the society of the time saw the woman as bearing the primary guilt, as is the case in many patriarchal cultures. The text says they brought this case to Yeshua to "test" him, presumably because of his public statements in favour of nonviolence. What would the Rabbi pacifist do when confronted by the need to order a death according to Jewish law?

Yeshua's answer here, as in other cases we'll look at below, shows a mastery of the ability to turn the challenge around on his own accusers, as well to avoid the bind they try to place him in.

We'll return to the challenge "him without sin" and the writing in the dust in a moment, but first

notice what Yeshua says to the woman he chooses not to condemn to death. First he says, “Where are your accusers? Has not one chosen to condemn you?” thus elegantly pointing out to the humiliated woman that all of her accusers have self-identified as sinners just as she is. He then says that he- the charismatic healer rumoured to be the Messiah- also does not condemn her, and adds the essential, “Now go and sin no more.”

Why, though, do the Rabbinic judges turn away so easily, and what is Yeshua writing in the dust? One scholar suggests that the answer may be in Jeremiah 17:13:

O YHVH, the hope of Israel,

all who forsake you shall be put to shame;

those who turn away from you shall be written in the dust,

for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water.

This scholar suggests that Yeshua was writing the names of his accusers in the dust, and as he did so each one became terrified as they contemplated what sins of theirs the magic-working Rabbi knew about.

In this example we see an essential pattern in Yeshua’s life: coming out of Jewish tradition to criticize Jewish tradition by means of Jewish tradition.

Through much of the last two thousand years, however, Jesus' Jewishness has been badly misunderstood. In the beginning the early Christians were almost entirely Jews. According to the New Testament and other sources Jesus had a large following among the Jewish population, especially among the "am ha'aretz" or common folk.

The "New Testament" is a collection of five narratives, 19 letters, and one apocalyptic text. Four narratives tell of the life of Yeshua, called Yeshua Mashiach (Jesus Christ), and one tells of the life of the community of his disciples in the years immediately after his crucifixion. Two of the four gospels are known to have been written by Jews, with the other three written by people whose ethnicity is unknown, but may have been Jews. The 19 letters were written mostly by Sha'ul (Paul), Yochanan (John) and Shimon (Peter), Ya'akov (James), his brother, or other members of the early community—Timothy, Titas, Yehuda (Jude) and the unknown Jewish author of the "Letter to the Hebrews." All told, then, the majority of the writers were Jewish, and the bulk of the content was written by them. The subject matter is, of course, the life and teachings of a Jew. This book thus has the strange character of being a very Jewish book which has mostly been studied by non-Jews and been largely regarded as non-Jewish for the last two thousand years.

A Palestinian Jew

At the time Yeshua was born to Miriam and Yosef, the Jewish world was in crisis and turmoil. The Temple and priesthood were corrupt and in cahoots with a King (Herod) who was a

Roman-backed tyrant, a descendant of Edomites forced to convert to Judaism by the Hasmoneans. The people were poor and overtaxed by Herod and the Romans, and resented having been colonized. Religious life was increasingly led by the Pharisees, who were pious, learned Rabbis crafting an innovative new approach to Judaism. Their approach was growing in popularity among the common people. A more extreme Jewish sect called the Essenes had withdrawn to the desert to practice extreme purity laws and communal living in preparation for a final apocalyptic battle between the children of Light and those of Darkness.

The religious demands of the Pharisees, whose stronghold was in Judea, were complex and stringent, but humanistic. The Mishna and Talmud say that the Pharisees inspired many, but they followed practices much more demanding than the average Jew, and sometimes this caused tension. The Pharisees could be dismissive of the ignorant “people of the land” (*am ha'aretz*, which in later Jewish culture basically means redneck). The people of the land could also be hostile and mocking towards the Pharisees, and sometimes even taught them a lesson, as the Talmud (written by descendants of the Pharisees, to their credit) faithfully records.

The people were hoping that the longed-for Messiah predicted by the Prophets would come and throw off the yoke of Rome, returning Israel to righteousness and freedom. Several Jews claiming to be Messiah surfaced and attempted to lead rebellions which were crushed by the Romans or fizzled out before achieving their goals. Nevertheless militant Jews, called “zealots”, were arming themselves and preparing to battle Rome. Some of the Pharisees were sympathetic

to the Zealots, and some weren't. The Sadducees are thought to have largely favored cooperation with Rome, and resisted the worldview and practices of the Pharisees.

Yeshua, whose name means “salvation”, was raised in a pious, working class Jewish family. His father Yosef is described as a *tzadiq*, a “righteous/just” man (Matthew 1:19), and his mother Miriam likewise demonstrates both her piety and her personal devotion to God throughout her appearance in the gospel of Lukas (Luke). By the way, the name “gospel” comes from “gut shpiel” and has its roots in the Hebrew phrase “besorah tovah” (good news/report) which the Prophet Isaiah said would be announced when the Messiah arrives. When we sing “Eliyahu HaNavi” we pray “Elijah, come to us with besorot tovot (good news/gospel), yeshuot u' nehamot (salvations and comforts).”

A brief Christmas digression, since 'tis the season: a scholar of the gospels who lived in the Middle East for decades, Kenneth Bailey, has argued compellingly that the European version of Yeshua's birth story distorts the text. Rather than there being “no room in the Inn”—the average ancient Palestinian village did not have an Inn, and it is extremely unlikely that a Jewish family could find no one to let them spend the night in their house. The word mistranslated as Inn is used in Middle Eastern languages for the main room of a single family dwelling. What likely happened is that there was no room inside the main area of the small house where people slept, so the baby was placed in the feeding trough near the entrance where the family's animals were taken in to sleep at night time (no one had barns). So Yeshua was not born in “a stable” but in a feeding trough among the animals, in the house of a poor Jewish family his parents spent the

night with. I mention this here both because I find it interesting and because it corrects a toxic telling of the story: the great teacher was not born in a stable, rejected by everyone in a cold-hearted Jewish village. He was born nestled among animals, kept warm by the generosity of the Jewish poor.

The rest of the gospels share a fairly uniform story, although each one gives a somewhat different perspective on Yeshua's life and teachings, and some add narrative elaborations. Luke adds details about his mother Miriam's foreknowledge of his birth, and her acceptance of the spiritual task of being his mother. Some of his sayings and activities are shared across all four, some feature in 1, 2, or 3 of them, and some in only one of them. It's a strange and interesting fact that the early followers of Yeshua did not edit these accounts into one book that harmonized them, but rather kept what are essentially four different biographies that contain significant inconsistencies. It shows an almost Talmudic respect for diverse traditions.

As a child Yeshua is circumcised and his mother brings the proper offering for a birth to the Temple, both mitzvot of the Torah. Later his family observed the pilgrim festivals, at one of which Yeshua became so immersed in discussion with the Rabbis that he stayed behind while his family left. When challenged later by his parents after they found their lost son in the Temple with the Rabbis, Yeshua said, "Should I not be among the matters of my Father?" This sentence makes more sense as a Hebrew pun- in Hebrew, the word for "matter" or "thing" is "davar", which also means "word." So he is punningly also saying, "Should I not be among the words/affairs of my Father" i.e. the Torah?

When Yeshua next appears on the scene it is to be immersed in the Jordan, a natural *mikvah* (place for purifying immersion) by Yochanan HaMetuval (John the Baptist/Immerser), a prophet like character who is calling the people to repent and be purified. Yochanan was an immensely popular preacher of Teshuvah who lived in the wilderness like the ancient Jewish sect of Rechavim. Although after Yochanan's jailing and execution by Herod Yeshua apparently succeeded him, there is to this day a small community of followers of Yochanan in the Near East (perhaps 70,000 people) called Mandaeans.

Yeshua, after Yochanan's imprisonment, began taking his own students and announcing that "the Kingdom of God (malchut adonai, malchut shamayim) is near", i.e. God is showing up to put things right. The acceptance of the life of Torah and mitzvot is, of course, called by the Rabbis the acceptance of "ol malchut shamayim", the "yoke of the Kingdom of God." Yeshua teaches in parables and wisdom sayings and heals people and casts out demons. He calls disciples to himself, usually from among the common folk- fishermen and farmers- but also from among the despised in Jewish society- prostitutes, promiscuous women, and tax collectors (collaborators with the Romans). He lives as a poor, homeless wanderer and travels from town to town teaching. Unlike the ascetic Yochanan, Yeshua dines and drinks in fellowship with everyone, including those polite society rejected.

Before beginning his teaching, however, Yeshua withdraws to the desert wilderness as Yochanan had, to do battle with HaSatan (The Accuser, the Adversary) before announcing himself publicly.

Yeshua, like Eliyahu/Elijah before him, is sustained by God in the desert. He then appears and begins taking disciples. According to Yochanan the gospel-writer, a long-lived Jewish mystic who may have been a direct disciple of Yeshua's, his first public appearance as more than a carpenter's son was his famous turning of water into wine at a wedding in Cana that had run out of libations.

Though Yeshua spends a lot of his time in northern Israel, he also visits Jerusalem and engages a lot with the Jewish scribes and priests there. As well as addressing large crowds of Jews, healing the sick, and raising the dead (two miracles also reportedly performed by Prophets and Talmudic Rabbis), Yeshua answers challenges and questions from Sadducees, Pharisees, and Scribes (Torah scholars) and on one occasion aggressively challenges Temple practices by overturning the tables of those doing business in its precincts. Despite his indictment of some of the Pharisees for hypocrisy, excessive legalism, and wrong priorities, when Yeshua discusses the Torah he seems to share the same conception of it that they have- that there are written texts plus the "oral law" (Torah sh'b'al peh). His teachings are not only rooted in the Jewish tradition, they seem to share the same basic worldview and legal preoccupations of the Pharisees.

As evidence of the Jewishness of Yeshua's positions, consider two examples:

1) Rabbi Akiva argued that the fundamental principle of the Torah was "You shall love your neighbour as yourself", by which he meant the love of one's fellow Jew. Ben Azzai disagreed, stating that it was "These are the generations of Adam: In the image of God, God made

humankind”, by which he meant the fundamental principle was the oneness of humanity and the ethical responsibilities which transcended the Jewish-Gentile distinction (Sifra Kedoshim, parasha 4). The latter also seems to have been Yeshua’s position, as we shall see.

2) Hillel argued that a man could divorce his wife for any reason; Shammai argued, like Yeshua, that only adultery was legitimate grounds (Talmud Bavli, Gittin 9:10). In Yeshua’s time, only men could issue a divorce, and there was a debate about whether this could be for any reason (Beit Hillel) or just for the woman committing adultery (Bet Shammai and also the literal reading of Deut 24). Yeshua sides with the literal reading of the Torah and Shammai. Note that what he is saying is that a man who sends away his wife makes himself guilty, her next husband guilty, and her a victim. Divorced women were vulnerable and disadvantaged, and Torah law and Yeshua seem to be protecting them, whereas Bet Hillel, which we might view as liberal, actually seems to be instantiating male privilege. Hillel in fact argues that a man may divorce his wife for any reason, even burning dinner!

The differences between Yeshua and the Pharisees are in most cases no more divergent than we find in arguments between different Pharisees, eg. the Pharisees that said that you could not heal on Shabbat versus Yeshua who said you could (Mark 3:1-6, Luke 13:10-17, etc.) or between those who said that contact with certain types of pots and pans could convey impurity to one’s hands and therefore to the food you were eating, and Yeshua who said it couldn’t (the Mishna and Talmud both debate these very issues, with Rabbis on both sides).

Yeshua also adheres to ancient Torah law. One example, Mark 1:44: Yeshua instructs a leper he has healed to show himself to a priest, and when pronounced clean, to perform the sacrificial rites prescribed by Moses in Leviticus 14:1-7. Another example: Yeshua wore a shirt fitted with tzitzit (Num. 15:38-40; Matt. 9:20; Luke 8:44; and Mark 6:56; Matt. 14:36). The Pharisees were known to wear larger tefillin than others. Although we don't know for sure, we can also guess from his criticism of the Pharisees for making a public show of their large tefillin that he probably wore tefillin as well, if smaller ones.

Further, Yeshua himself is depicted making the following statements about Judaism in the book of Matthew (5:17-20):

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For I tell you truly, until heaven and earth pass away, **not a single jot, not a stroke of a pen**, will disappear from the Torah, until everything is accomplished.*

So then, whoever breaks one of the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do likewise will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your uprightness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

This seems pretty clear. Yeshua does not abolish the Torah, and his Jewish followers are to “practice and teach” the mitzvot. In fact, in order to enter the Kingdom of heaven (the expression

of God's will on earth) your practice must exceed the Pharisees in uprightness according to the Torah. In other words, his sometimes subversive teachings don't abandon the Torah but rather provide a higher righteousness than he feels the Pharisees of his time have- but it is a righteousness *of* the Torah, not against it.

If that isn't enough, there's this (Matthew 23:1-4):

Then Yeshua spoke to the crowds and to His disciples: "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So practice and observe everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, burdensome loads and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."

Despite his criticism of their excessive stringencies, Yeshua here tells his followers explicitly to listen to the Pharisees and states that they "sit in Moses' seat", i.e. their legal decisions are binding (the same point made in Deuteronomy 1:9-18, 16:18, and 17:8-13, the basis for Rabbinic authority).

Yeshua's criticism here is that the Rabbis are making life too difficult for people by making Jewish law too complex and burdensome, yet he affirms their basic authority at the same time. His concern was apparently not just with stringency, however, but wrong priorities. As the Book of Matthew has him say: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others (Matthew 23:23)."

Yeshua's criticism of the Pharisees can be intense, but it should be noted that the Rabbinic tradition itself is not without such criticism. Shalom Ben-Chorin, in his book *Brother Jesus*, brings the following examples:

“There are seven kinds of Pharisees (perushim)...the shoulder Pharisee carries his good deeds on his shoulder [i.e. openly, before the whole world]; the gleaning Pharisee says, “Wait for me, I must fulfill the commandments [and have no time for you]; the balancing Pharisee pays off each debt [i.e. sin] by performing a commandment; the frugal Pharisee says, “From the little I have, what can I set aside for performing commandments?; the debtor Pharisee says, “Tell me what sin I have committed, and I will perform a commandment to offset it’ the fearing Pharisee is like Job; the loving Pharisee is like Abraham (Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 9.5). The Babylonian Talmud warns in Sotah 22b of the “painted Pharisee” who is immoral inwardly but outwardly pious; the Mishna (Sota 3.4) warns that “the foolishly pious, the cunningly wicked, the Pharisaical woman (?), and the fleshly mortifications of the Pharisees are ruining the world!”

Here some Pharisees are said to be vainglorious, more concerned with the details of mitzvot than loving their neighbour, and to take a calculating, self-serving view of divine service; to be hypocrites, and to be overly ascetic. These are contrasted with authentically conscientious and loving ones (like Job and Abraham respectively). Yeshua's criticisms of the Pharisees of his time are almost identical.

So Yeshua observed the Torah, affirmed the practice of mitzvot, and taught the Jewish crowds to listen to the Rabbinic authorities. That said, his teaching has its own unique emphasis and he was markedly subversive of some of the mainstream assumptions and practices of the Jewish community of the time. We'll look at more of the key emphasises of Yeshua's teachings next class, but for now let's look at his subversive practices of inclusion.

Yeshua was criticized for who he sat at table with. In the culture of the time who one welcomed to one's table was an important issue which defined your values and your class and tribal identities. Yeshua "came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'" (Luke 7:34) The two categories here represent the most hated wrongdoers of the time on the two opposite poles of society: tax collectors were wealthy collaborators with Rome; sinners were those who did not properly observe Jewish law as well as prostitutes and criminals. Luke tells of Yeshua inviting himself to eat at the house of Zaccheus, a tax collector, who subsequently gives his ill-gotten gain to charity. He also tells of a dinner invitation Yeshua accepts to the house of a Rabbi Shimon; while there a prostitute approaches Yeshua and anoints him with perfume and her own hair, a shockingly excessive and intimate gesture in that cultural setting. Yeshua accepts it and rebukes Rabbi Shimon, telling him that her teshuvah is worth more than Rabbi Shimon's piety (a statement which echoes the later Talmudic saying that "where a ba'al teshuva stands, even a tzaddiq cannot stand.")

A full discussion of Yeshua's relationship with women is beyond our scope here, but we should briefly note that he was outside of the box. He had many female disciples, including wealthier Jewish women who funded him and his disciples. He was friends with prostitutes and promiscuous women, and broke custom to speak with women alone (even a Samaritan woman in the book of Yohanan/John) as well as allowing women to touch him in public. These would have been shocking behaviours for the time period, but not nearly as shocking as allowing a woman to leave her responsibilities in the kitchen and sit at his feet among his male disciples:

As Yeshua and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Marta opened her home to him. She had a sister called Miriam, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Marta was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Marta, Marta," the Master answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Miriam has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

(Lukas 10)

Many of the Jews of the time hated Samaritans, and considered them treacherous, half-breed Jews and religious competitors, a background essential to understanding the following story:

The Good Samaritan

Then an expert in the Torah law stood up to test him, saying, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Torah?" he asked him. "How do you read it?"

He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind," and "your neighbor as yourself."

"You've answered correctly," he told him. "Do this and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Yeshua, "And who is my neighbor?"

Yeshua took up the question and said:

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead. A Kohen happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, and when he saw the man, he had compassion. He went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him. When I come back I'll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.'

"Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

"The one who showed mercy to him," he said.

Then Yeshua told him, "Go and do the same."

What Yeshua does here warrants close attention. Imagine a white southerner asking if black folks were also his neighbors, and being told a story of a black man helping out an injured white man, and then being asked, “Who was a neighbor to the white man? Now go and do likewise.” Not only does Yeshua expand the idea of neighbor to include Samaritans, not only does he hold up a hated Samaritan as an example to Jews, he also flips the question around from “who is my neighbour” to “how do I act like a neighbor?”

This Rabbinic jiu-jitsu move reminds me of a quote from the Talmud:

Once a man was removing stones from his field and putting them into the public domain. A certain Holy Man came upon him and said, “Scoundrel! Why do you remove stones from a place that does not belong to you and put them into one that does?” The man laughed at him. After some time that man was in need, and he sold his field. He was walking in that very place in the public domain, and he stumbled on those very stones he had put there. He said, “That Holy Man spoke well to me when he said, ‘Why do you remove stones from a place that does not belong to you and put them into your place.’” (Babylonian Talmud, Bava Kama 50b)

