

Let's Get Ready to Rumble: A Study in Talmudic Agression

Section 1- "I'm Rubber and You're Glue"

1. פסחים קי"ג ב:ה'

תנו רבנן שלשה שונאין זה את זה אלו הן הכלבים והתרנגולין והחברין ... וי"א אף תלמידי חכמים שבבבל

1. Pesachim 113b:8

Furthermore, the Sages taught: Members of three groups hate other members of the same group: Dogs, roosters, and the Persian priests. ... And some say: Also Torah scholars in Babylonia.

2. בבא קמא פ"א ב

רבי ורבי חייא הוו שקלי ואזלי באורחא אסתלקו לצידי הדרכים הוה קא מפסיע ואזיל ר' יהודה בן קנוסא קמיהו א"ל רבי לרבי חייא מי הוא זה שמראה גדולה בפנינו א"ל ר' חייא שמא ר' יהודה בן קנוסא תלמידי הוא וכל מעשיו לשם שמים כי מטו לגביה חזייה א"ל אי לאו יהודה בן קנוסא את גזרתינהו לשקך בגיזרא דפרזלא:

2. Bava Kamma 81b

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and Rabbi Ḥiyya were once walking along the road, and they veered off to the sides of the road. Rabbi Yehuda ben Kanosa was taking broad steps on the road, to avoid the protrusions without going off to the side of the road, while walking in front of them. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said to Rabbi Ḥiyya: Who is this man who is showing off his supposed greatness in our presence? Rabbi Ḥiyya said to Rabbi Yehuda: Perhaps it is my student Rabbi Yehuda ben Kanosa. And if so, all of his actions are undertaken for the sake of Heaven. When they reached him and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi saw him, he said to him: If you were not Yehuda ben Kanosa I would have cut off your legs with iron shears

3. תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת ברכות פרק ב

תני מסתלקין לצדדין מפני יתידות דרכים ובשעה שהוא משתקע אפילו בשדה שהיא מליאה כורכמין. א"ר אבהו מעשה בר"ג ור' יהושע שהיו בדרך והיו מסתלקין לצדדין מפני יתידות דרכים וראו את ר' יהודה בן פפוס שהיה משתקע ובא כנגדן אמר ר"ג לר' יהושע מי הוא זה שמראה עצמו באצבע. אמר לו יהודה בן פפוס הוא שכל מעשיו לשום שמים. א"ל ולא כן תני כל דבר שהוא של שבח לא כל הרוצה לעשות עצמו יחיד עושה תלמיד חכם עושה אלא א"כ מינו אותו פרנס על הצבור. אמר ליה והתני כל דבר של צער כל הרוצה לעשות עצמו יחיד עושה ת"ח עושה ותבוא עליו ברכה. א"ר זעירא ובלחוד דלא יבזה חורנין

3. Talmud Yerushalmi, Berakhot 2:9

It was stated: One may step to one side because of obstacles on the road. And when one sinks, even into a field full of saffron.

Rebbi Abbahu said: It happened that Rabban Gamliel and Rebbi Joshua were on the road

and stepped on the side because of obstacles on the road when they saw Rabbi Yehudah ben Pappos, who was sinking, coming towards them.

Rabban Gamliel said to Rabbi Joshua: Who is this one who makes an exhibition of himself?

He answered: This is Yehudah ben Pappos, all whose deeds are done for Heaven's sake

He said to him: Did we not formulate "In anything that gives praise, not everyone who wants to distinguish himself may do so. A scholar does except if he has been appointed to a position of public authority."

He answered him: Did we not also formulate, "In anything that gives pain, everyone who wants to distinguish himself may do so. A scholar does and may blessing come to him."

Rabbi Zeira said, but only if he does not shame others.

4. בבא בתרא פ"ט א:ט'

ת"ר (לא) יהיה לך מלמד שמעמידין אגרדמין למדות ואין מעמידין אגרדמין לשערים דבי נשיאה אוקימו אגרדמין בין למדות בין לשערים א"ל שמואל לקרנא פוק תני להו מעמידין אגרדמין למדות ואין מעמידין אגרדמין לשערים נפק דרש להו מעמידין אגרדמין בין למדות בין לשערים א"ל מה שמך קרנא תיפוק ליה קרנא בעיניה נפקא ליה קרנא בעיניה

4. Bava Batra 89a:9

[Backstory] The Sages taught that the court appoints market inspectors to supervise the accuracy of measures. But the court *does not* appoint market inspectors for supervising market prices.

The Gemara relates: The house of the Nasi appointed market inspectors for supervising both measures and prices.

Shmuel said to his student, the Sage *Karna*: Go out and teach them that one appoints market inspectors for supervising measures but one does not appoint market inspectors for prices.

Karna went out and taught them that one appoints market inspectors for supervising both measures AND prices.

Shmuel, hearing what he had done, said to him: What is your name? He replied: Karna.

Shmuel said: Let a horn emerge in his eye. A horn, emerged in his eye.

5. תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת בבא בתרא פרק ה

רב מנייה ריש גלותא אנגרמוס והוה מחי על מכילתא ולא על שיעוריא חבשיה ריש גלותא. עאל רב קרנא גביה א"ל אנגרמוס שאמרו למידות ולא לשיעורין א"ל והא תנית אנגרמוס למידות ולשיעורין א"ל פוק אמר לון אנגרמוס שאמרו למידות ולא לשיעורין נפק ואמר לון בר נש דתנה כבשה דאהינו חבשין ליה:

5. Talmud Yerushalmi, Bava Batra 5:5

Rav was appointed market overseer by the Head of the Diaspora; he intervened about measuring vessels but not prices. The Head of the Diaspora jailed him. Rav Karna went to see him and said, the market overseer about whom they spoke was for measures but not prices. He answered, but you had stated: the market overseer is for both measures and prices. He said to him, go out and tell them, the market overseer is for measures but not prices. He went out and said to them, a person who teaches hidden things they send to jail!

6. תענית ז' א:ז'

אלא משום דכתיב (דברים כ, יט) כי ממנו תאכל ואותו לא תכרת וכתיב אותו תשחית וכרת הא כיצד אם ת"ח הגון הוא ממנו תאכל ואותו לא תכרת ואם לאו אותו תשחית וכרת

6. Taanit 7a:7

Rather, it is because it is written earlier in the same verse: “You may eat of them but you may not cut them down,” and it is written in the *next* verse: “Them you may destroy and cut down” (Deuteronomy 20:20).

This indicates that there are certain trees which may be cut down, while others may not be destroyed.

How so?

If a Torah scholar is worthy: “You may eat of them but you may not cut them down,” but if he is not worthy: “He you may destroy and cut down.”

7. סנהדרין כ"ד א:י"ב

א"ר אושעיא מאי דכתיב (זכריה יא, ז) ואקח לי (את) שני מקלות לאחד קראתי נועם ולאחד קראתי חובלים נועם אלו ת"ח שבארץ ישראל שמנעימין זה לזה בהלכה חובלים אלו ת"ח שבבבל שמחבלים זה לזה בהלכה ...

אמר רבי יצחק אלו ת"ח שבא"י שנוחין זה לזה בהלכה כשמן זית ושנים זיתים עליה אלו ת"ח שבבבל שמרורין זה לזה בהלכה כזית.

7. Sanhedrin 24a:12

This demonstrates what Rabbi Oshaya says: What is the meaning of that which is written: “And I took for myself two staves; the one I called Graciousness, and the other I called Binders” (Zechariah 11:7)?

“Graciousness”; these are the Torah scholars in Eretz Yisrael, who are gracious to one another in discussions of halakha. They treat each other with honor and love, as demonstrated in the statements of Reish Lakish and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi.

“Binders [*hovelim*]”; these are the Torah scholars in Babylonia, who injure [*shemeḥabbelim*] each other in discussions of halakha

Rabbi Yitzhak says: These are the Torah scholars in Eretz Yisrael, who are pleasant to each other in discussions of halakha like olive oil, which is not bitter. The verse “and two

olive trees by it” should be interpreted as follows: These are the Torah scholars in Babylonia, who are bitter to each other in discussions of *halakha* like an olive.

8. בבא מציעא פ"ד א:י"ג

אקרייה ואתנייה ושויה גברא רבא יומא חד הוו מפלגי בי מדרשא הסייף והסכין והפגיון והרומח ומגל יד ומגל קציר מאימתי מקבלין טומאה משעת גמר מלאכתן ומאימתי גמר מלאכתן רבי יוחנן אמר משיצרפם בכבשן ריש לקיש אמר משיצחצחון במים א"ל לסטאה בלסטיותיה ידע אמר ליה ומאי אהנת לי התם רבי קרו לי הכא רבי קרו לי אמר ליה אהנאי לך דאקרבינך תחת כנפי השכינה חלש דעתיה דרבי יוחנן חלש ריש לקיש

8. Bava Metzia 84a:13

Rabbi Yoḥanan taught Reish Lakish Bible, and taught him Mishna, and turned him into a great man.

Eventually, Reish Lakish became one of the outstanding Torah scholars of his generation. One day the Sages of the study hall were engaging in a dispute concerning the following baraita: With regard to the sword, the knife, the dagger, the spear, a hand sickle, and a harvest sickle, from when are they susceptible to ritual impurity?

The baraita answers: It is from the time of the completion of their manufacture, which is the *halakha* with regard to metal vessels in general.

These Sages inquired: And when is the completion of their manufacture?

Rabbi Yoḥanan says: It is from when one fires these items in the furnace.

Reish Lakish said: It is from when one scours them in water, after they have been fired in the furnace.

Rabbi Yoḥanan said to Reish Lakish: A bandit knows about his banditry.

Reish Lakish said to Rabbi Yoḥanan: What benefit did you provide me by bringing me close to Torah? There, among the bandits, they called me: Leader of the bandits, and here, too, they call me: Leader of the bandits.

Rabbi Yoḥanan said to him: I provided benefit to you, as I brought you close to God, under the wings of the Divine Presence.

As a result of the quarrel, Rabbi Yoḥanan was offended, which in turn affected Reish Lakish, who fell ill.

Section 2- Orality and Violence: Holy War

9. Jeffrey Rubenstein, “The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud,” John Hopkins University Press: 2003, 58-59

The sages conceived of their struggles to learn Torah, perform the commandments, and help their fellow Jews lead pious lives as a holy war. Where their biblical ancestors

fought battles against the inhabitants of Canaan to carry out God's plan, so they struggled against Roman and Persian oppressors, heretics, nonrabbinic Jews, the evil impulse, sin, laziness, and suchlike. However much the sages perceived themselves as a scholastic class of philosophers, they simultaneously saw themselves as soldiers waging war. This self-conception helps explain the violent tenor of rabbinic interactions.

10. סנהדרין פ"ב א:ט"ו

ויקם מתוך העדה ויקח רומח בידו מיכן שאין נכנסין בכלי זיין לבית המדרש שלף שנגה והניחה באונקלו והיה

10. Sanhedrin 82a:15

It is written with regard to Pinehas: "He arose from amidst the assembly and he took a spear in his hand" (Numbers 25:7). From here, where it is written that he took the spear only after he arose from the assembly, it is derived that one does not enter the study hall with a weapon.

11. Quintilian X .v.20; trans. H. E. Butler, Harvard University Press: 1936, 125.

He advises that a young lawyer prepare for court by writing out practice speeches, "training himself with the real weapons of his warfare, just as gladiators do"

12. תוספתא יבמות א' ב'

שאלו את רבי יהושע - אתם מכניסין ראשי בין שני הרים גדולים [בין] ב"ש [ובין ב"ה] שירוצו את ראשי

12. Tosefta Yevamot 1:2

They asked R. Yehoshua [a halakhic opinion]. He said to them: "Why do you interpose my head between two great mountains, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai, lest they crush my skull."

13. תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת שבת פרק א

א"ר זעירא אילולי דלא מעלה רישי ביני ארייותא הוינא אמר טעמא.

13. Talmud Yerushalmi, Shabbat 1:5

R. Zeira said, were it not the fact that i would be putting my head between two lions, I would say the reason.

14. עירובין י"ג ב

א"ר אבא אמר שמואל שלש שנים נחלקו ב"ש וב"ה הללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו והללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו יצאה בת קול ואמרה אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים הן והלכה כב"ה וכי מאחר שאלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים מפני מה זכו ב"ה לקבוע הלכה כמותן מפני שנוחזין ועלובין היו ושונין דבריהן ודברי ב"ש

14. Eruvin 13b

Rabbi Abba said that Shmuel said: For three years Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagreed. These said: The halakha is in accordance with our opinion, and these said: The halakha is in accordance with our opinion.

Ultimately, a Divine Voice emerged and proclaimed: Both these and those are the words of the living God. However, the halakha is in accordance with the opinion of Beit Hillel. The Gemara asks: Since both these and those are the words of the living God, why were Beit Hillel privileged to have the halakha established in accordance with their opinion? The reason is that they were agreeable and forbearing, showing restraint when affronted, and when they taught the halakha they would teach both their own statements and the statements of Beit Shammai.

Moreover, when they formulated their teachings and cited a dispute, they prioritized the statements of Beit Shammai to their own statements, in deference to Beit Shammai.