

PERSONALITIES

Rav Kahana – רב כהנא: There were several Sages with this name, but here the reference is to Rav Kahana, disciple-colleague of Rav. Rav Kahana was born in Babylonia during the first generation of amora'im. When Rav came to Babylonia, Rav Kahana, who was already a Torah luminary despite his young age, became Rav's disciple.

As is evident from the Gemara, Rav Kahana ran afoul of the Persian government and was forced into exile in Eretz Yisrael, where he lived for a certain period, during which he studied Torah from the Sages there. Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish praised him, saying: A lion ascended from Babylonia. The rest of the Sages of that generation agreed with that assessment, and in the Jerusalem Talmud his name is usually cited simply as Kahana. Although Rav Kahana later returned to Babylonia, he apparently returned to Eretz Yisrael toward the end of his life.

Rav Kahana's greatness was acknowledged by subsequent generations and his statements were considered authoritative, to the extent that they were used to challenge Amoraic opinions, as though they were tannaitic statements.

NOTES

He dislodged the man's neck – שטמיה לקועיה: Rav Kahana was justified in killing this individual because a Jew who serves as an informer against other Jews to the gentile authorities is deserving of death. This is due to the fact that in addition to causing monetary harm to individuals, he also endangers the safety of the entire Jewish community. Consequently, he has the halakhic status of one who pursues another with the intent to kill him. This is the halakha even when there is no longer a rabbinical court that has the authority to impose capital punishment. Historically, this extralegal capital punishment was put into practice in many Jewish communities over the course of the generations.

Accept upon yourself that you will not raise any difficulties – קביל עלך דלא תקשי: The Maharsha explains that this was meant as a form of penance for the fact that Rav Kahana took action based on his own halakhic ruling without consulting his teacher, Rav, who was present. As a result, Rav told him not to state his own opinions to Rabbi Yoḥanan even when they would not relate to practical action. Alternatively, the Iyyun Ya'akov explains that the Sages in Eretz Yisrael were more polite than the Sages in Babylonia and did not challenge the statements of the lecturer to the same degree, and Rav wanted Rav Kahana to learn the etiquette of the Sages of Eretz Yisrael.

HALAKHA

He dislodged the man's neck – שטמיה לקועיה: Although court-imposed capital punishment is no longer administered, it is nevertheless permitted to kill an informer. This applies to one who is warned not to become an informer, and who brazenly announces that he will do so. This also applies regardless of whether the informer reveals information endangering the lives of others, or merely endangering their property. Some say that if it is impossible to warn an informer in advance, he may nevertheless be killed (Maggid Mishne). The Mordekhai notes that if it is possible to restrain the informer by injuring him, it is prohibited to kill him (Rambam Sefer Nezikin, Hilkhot Hovel UMazik 8:10; Shulḥan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat 388:10).

LANGUAGE

Murder [meradin] – מרדין: Possibly from the Persian maridan, meaning die. Others suggest that it is a term referring to dueling. If so, the sense here is that Rav Kahana fled because he was challenged to a duel.

ההוא גברא דהוה בעי אַחוויי אַתיבנא דְחַבְרִיָּה, אַתָּא לְקַמְיָה דְרַב, אָמַר לֵיהּ: לֹא תַחֲוֵי וְלֹא תַחֲוֵי, אָמַר לֵיהּ: מַחֲוִינָא וּמַחֲוִינָא. יְהִיב רַב כְּהֵנָּא קַמְיָה דְרַב, שְׂמִטְיָה לְקוּעִיָּה מִיַּמִּיהָ.

קָרִי רַב עֵילוּיָהּ: "בְּנֵיךְ עָלְפוּ שְׂכָבוּ בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל חוּצוֹת כְּתוּא מִכְּמַר", מַה תּוֹא זֶה בֵּין שְׂנַפְל בְּמִכְמַר אֵין מִרְחַמִּין עָלָיו, אַף מָמוֹן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּין שְׂנַפְל בְּיַד גּוֹיִם אֵין מִרְחַמִּין עָלָיו.

אָמַר לֵיהּ רַב: כְּהֵנָּא, עַד הֵאֱדִינָא הוּוּ פְּרָסָאֵי דְלֹא קִפְדֵי אֲשִׁפִּיכוֹת דְּמִים, וְהִשְׁתָּא אִיכָּא יוּנָאֵי דְקִפְדוּ אֲשִׁפִּיכוֹת דְּמִים וְאִמְרוּ "מִרְדִּין מִרְדִּין", קוּם סַק לְאַרְעָא דְיִשְׂרָאֵל, וְקַבֵּיל עָלֶיךָ דְלֹא תִקְשֵׁי לְרַבֵּי יוֹחָנָן שְׁבַע שָׁנִין.

אָזִיל אֲשִׁפְחִיָּה לְרִישׁ לְקִישׁ דִּיתִיב וְקָא מְסִיִּים מְתִיבְתָּא דִּיּוּמָא לְרַבְנָן, אָמַר לְהוּ: רִישׁ לְקִישׁ הֵיכָּא? אָמְרוּ לֵיהּ: אָמַיָּא? אָמַר לְהוּ: הָאֵי קוּשִׁיָּא וְהָאֵי קוּשִׁיָּא, וְהָאֵי פִירוּקָא וְהָאֵי פִירוּקָא. אָמְרוּ לֵיהּ לְרִישׁ לְקִישׁ: אָזִיל רִישׁ לְקִישׁ אָמַר לֵיהּ לְרַבֵּי יוֹחָנָן: אַרְי עָלָה מִבְּבַל, לְעֵינֵי מַר בְּמִתִּיבְתָּא דְלְמַחֲוֹר.

לְמַחֲוֹר אוֹתְבוּהּ בְּדָרָא קַמָּא קַמְיָה דְרַבֵּי יוֹחָנָן, אָמַר שְׂמַעְתַּתָּא וְלֹא אֶקְשֵׁי, שְׂמַעְתַּתָּא וְלֹא אֶקְשֵׁי, אֲנַחְתִּיָּה אַחוּרֵי שְׁבַע דְרֵי עַד דְאוֹתְבִיָּה בְּדָרָא בְּתַרְא. אָמַר לֵיהּ רַבֵּי יוֹחָנָן לְרַבֵּי שְׂמַעוֹן בֶּן לְקִישׁ: אַרְי שְׂאִמְרַתָּ נַעֲשֶׂה שׁוּעָל!

The Gemara relates another incident: There was a certain man who desired to show another individual's straw to the gentile authorities, who would seize it. He came before Rav, who said to him: Do not show it and do not show it, i.e., you are absolutely prohibited from showing it. The man said to him: I will show it and I will show it, i.e., I will certainly show it. Rav Kahana⁶ was sitting before Rav, and, hearing the man's disrespectful response, he dislodged the man's neck^{7H} from him, i.e., he broke his neck and killed him.

Seeing Rav Kahana's action, Rav read the following verse about him: "Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as an antelope in a net" (Isaiah 51:20). Just as with regard to this antelope, once it falls into the net, the hunter does not have mercy upon it, so too with regard to the money of a Jew, once it falls into the hand of gentiles, they do not have mercy upon him, i.e., the Jew. Since gentiles who seek a Jew's money will kill him in order to seize the property, Rav Kahana acted appropriately when he broke the miscreant's neck, as he protected the Jew's property and, by extension, the Jew himself.

Rav then said to Rav Kahana: Kahana, until now there were Persian rulers who were not particular about bloodshed. But now there are Greeks⁸ who are particular about bloodshed, and they will say: Murder [meradin],^L murder, and they will press charges against you. Therefore, get up and ascend to Eretz Yisrael to study there under Rabbi Yoḥanan, and accept upon yourself that you will not raise any difficulties^N to the statements of Rabbi Yoḥanan for seven years.

Rav Kahana went to Eretz Yisrael and found Reish Lakish, who was sitting and reviewing Rabbi Yoḥanan's daily lecture in the academy for the Rabbis, i.e., the students in the academy. When he finished, Rav Kahana said to the students: Where is Reish Lakish? They said to him: Why do you wish to see him? Rav Kahana said to them: I have this difficulty and that difficulty with his review of Rabbi Yoḥanan's lecture, and this resolution and that resolution to the questions he raised. They told this to Reish Lakish. Reish Lakish then went and said to Rabbi Yoḥanan: A lion has ascended from Babylonia, and the Master ought to examine the discourse he will deliver in the academy tomorrow, as Rav Kahana may raise difficult questions about the material.

The next day, they seated Rav Kahana in the first row, in front of Rabbi Yoḥanan. Rabbi Yoḥanan stated a halakha and Rav Kahana did not raise a difficulty, in accordance with Rav's instruction. Rabbi Yoḥanan stated another halakha and again, Rav Kahana did not raise a difficulty. As a result, they placed Rav Kahana further back by one row. This occurred until he had been moved back seven rows, until he was seated in the last row. Rabbi Yoḥanan said to Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish: The lion you mentioned has become a fox, i.e., he is not knowledgeable.

BACKGROUND

Persians and Greeks – פְּרָסָאֵי וְיוּנָאֵי: Some versions reverse the chronology, with Rav stating that the earlier rulers were Greeks and the contemporary rulers were Persians. Such versions are more accurate than the one printed in the Vilna Talmud (see Tosafot).

During Rav's lifetime, after many generations of the empire being ruled by the Parthians, the Persian Empire underwent a fundamental change, and the new Sassanid emperors from central Persia came to power. Although the Parthians were also Persian, they had been culturally more influenced by the Greeks, who had preceded them in the region of their empire, than the Sassanids were. Therefore, the Parthians are referred to here as Greeks. The Parthian style of rule was a form of feudalism in

which the central government exerted loose control, allowing a high degree of autonomy both for provincial leaders, often called kings, and for different ethnic and religious groups. Aside from the collection of taxes, the central government intervened only minimally in the internal lives of the inhabitants, leaving each group free to govern itself.

This style of rule came to an abrupt end with the rise of the Sassanid Persians, whose central government, especially in the first years of its rule, was much stronger and tried to impose a unified system of law, and at times even religion, over the entire empire. Under Parthian rule, murder was a matter left for a particular ethnic or religious group, whereas under the Sassanids it was adjudicated by the state courts.

Cushions [bistarkei] – בִּסְתָרְקֵי: This word apparently derives from the Middle Iranian bistarak, meaning bedding or cover.

BACKGROUND

His lips were split – פְּרִיָּיה שְׁפוּתִיָּה: Some people are born with this defect, and others develop it as the result of an injury. This defect is characterized by the corners of the mouth being split, causing the mouth to appear to be much wider than the mouth of an average person. Consequently, the individual always appears to be smiling.

אמר: יהא רעוא דהני שבע דרי להו חילוף שבע שני דאמר לי רב. קם אפרעיה, אמר ליה: נהדר מר ברישא, אמר שמעתתא ואקשי, אוקמיה בדרא קמא. אמר שמעתתא ואקשי.

Rav Kahana said to himself: **May it be God's will that these seven rows I have been moved should replace the seven years that Rav told me to wait before raising difficulties to the statements of Rabbi Yoḥanan. He stood up on his feet and said to Rabbi Yoḥanan: Let the Master go back to the beginning of the discourse and repeat what he said. Rabbi Yoḥanan stated a halakha and Rav Kahana raised a difficulty. Therefore, they placed him in the first row, and again, Rav Yoḥanan stated a halakha, and he raised a difficulty.**

רבי יוחנן הוה יתיב אשבע בסתרקי, שלמי ליה חדא בסתרקא מתותיה, אמר שמעתתא ואקשי ליה, עד דשלמי ליה כולהו בסתרקי מתותיה עד דיתיב על ארעא. רבי יוחנן גברא סבא הוה ומסרחי גביניה, אמר להו: דלו לי עיני ואחזייה, דלו ליה במכחלתא דכספא,

Rabbi Yoḥanan was sitting upon seven cushions [bistarkei]¹ so that he could be seen by all the students, and since he could not answer Rav Kahana's questions, **he removed one cushion from under himself** to demonstrate that he was lowering himself out of respect for Rav Kahana. He then **stated another halakha and Rav Kahana raised another difficulty.** This happened repeatedly **until Rabbi Yoḥanan removed all the cushions from underneath himself until he was sitting on the ground. Rabbi Yoḥanan was an old man and his eyebrows drooped over his eyes. He said to his students: Uncover my eyes for me and I will see Rav Kahana, so they uncovered his eyes for him with a silver eye brush.**

חזא דפרטיה שפוותיה, סבר אחוך קמחייך ביה, חלש דעתיה ונח נפשיה. למחר אמר להו רבי יוחנן לרבנן: חזיתו לבבלאה היכי עביד? אמרו ליה: דרביה הכי. על לגבי מערתא, חזא דההו

Once his eyes were uncovered, Rabbi Yoḥanan saw that Rav Kahana's lips were split⁸ and thought that Rav Kahana was smirking at him. As a result, Rabbi Yoḥanan was offended, and Rav Kahana died as punishment for the fact that he offended Rabbi Yoḥanan. **The next day, Rabbi Yoḥanan said to the Rabbis, his students: Did you see how that Babylonian, Rav Kahana, behaved in such a disrespectful manner? They said to him: His usual manner of appearance is such, and he was not mocking you. Hearing this, Rabbi Yoḥanan went up to Rav Kahana's burial cave and saw that it was**

Perek X

Daf 117 Amud b

הדרא ליה עכנא. אמר ליה: עכנא עכנא, פתח פומיך ויכנס הרב אצל תלמיד, ולא פתח. "יכנס חבר אצל חבר", ולא פתח. "יכנס תלמיד אצל הרב", פתח ליה, בעא רחמי ואוקמיה.

encircled by a serpent [akhna],¹ which had placed its tail in its mouth, completely encircling the cave and blocking the entrance. Rabbi Yoḥanan said to it: **Serpent, serpent, open your mouth and allow the teacher to enter and be near the disciple, but the serpent did not open its mouth to allow him entry.** He then said: **Allow a colleague to enter and be near his colleague, but still the serpent did not open its mouth.** Rabbi Yoḥanan said: **Allow the disciple to enter and be near the teacher,** referring to Rav Kahana as his own teacher. The snake then **opened its mouth for him to allow him entry. Rabbi Yoḥanan requested divine mercy from God and raised Rav Kahana from the dead.**

אמר ליה: אי הוה ידענא דדרביה דמר הכי לא חלשא דעתיה, השתא ליתי מר בהדון, אמר ליה: אי מצית למיבעי רחמי דתו לא שכיבנא – אולנא, ואי לא – לא אולנא, הואיל וחליף שעתא חליף.

Rabbi Yoḥanan said to Rav Kahana: **Had I known that this was the Master's manner of appearance, I would not have been offended. Now let the Master come with me to the study hall. Rav Kahana said to him: If you are able to request divine mercy so that I will not die again,^N I will go with you, and if not, I will not go with you. The Gemara comments: Since the time decreed for his death had passed, it had passed.^N**

תיריה, אוקמיה, שויליה כל ספיקא דההו ליה ופשטינהו ניהליה. היינו דאמר רבי יוחנן: דילכון אמרי, דילהון היא.

Rabbi Yoḥanan then completely awakened him and stood him up. Thereafter, he asked him about every uncertainty that he had, and Rav Kahana resolved each of them for him. **And this is the background to that which Rabbi Yoḥanan says to his students on several occasions: What I said was yours is in fact theirs, i.e., I thought that the Torah scholars in Eretz Yisrael were the most advanced, but in fact the scholars of Babylonia are the most advanced, as evidenced by Rav Kahana's knowledge.**

LANGUAGE

Serpent [akhna] – עֲכָנָא: This is an Aramaic form of the Greek ἔχιδνα, ekhis, meaning viper or snake.

NOTES

That I will not die again – דתו לא שכיבנא: The simple meaning of this statement is that Rav Kahana said he would agree to be revived only if Rabbi Yoḥanan could guarantee him eternal life. Rashi disputes this interpretation and explains that Rav Kahana asked Rabbi Yoḥanan to guarantee that he would not become angry with him again; otherwise he would not return to Rabbi Yoḥanan's study hall.

Since the time decreed for his death had passed, it had passed – הואיל וחליף שעתא חליף: This means that since the time for his death as a result of having insulted Rabbi Yoḥanan had passed, Rav Kahana would live a long life. Alternatively, Rashi explains this as a continuation of Rav Kahana's statement, meaning that if Rabbi Yoḥanan could not guarantee that he would not take offense from Rav Kahana again, Rav Kahana would not attend his study hall, as, since the time of his death would pass once, i.e., it would be miraculously reversed, he would not endanger himself again.