

From the Rabbi's Desk  
Rabbi Manes Kogan

Hillcrest Jewish Center  
183-02 Union Turnpike, Flushing, NY 11366  
[rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org](mailto:rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org)

## Stories with a Twist [210]

### I will not do what the son of Hakhinai did!

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 62b



### Background to Our Story

#### Rabbi Hama bar Bisa

Rabbi Hama was of the last generation of *tanna'im*. He was apparently a member of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's rabbinical court, who praised him as a great man. It seems that he lived in the southern part of Eretz Yisrael, perhaps in Lod, and served as a city judge. In most of the places in both the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmuds where Rabbi Hama's name is mentioned and his statements are quoted, he is referred to by the name of his son: Rabbi Hama father of Rabbi Oshaya. This is because Rabbi Oshaya was one of the leaders of the generation who compiled a collection of important *baraitot*. Very little is known about Rabbi Hama's father, Rabbi Bisa, and only one *halakha* is quoted in his name, in a case where he ruled in accordance with the opinion of his grandson Rabbi Oshaya, and contrary to the opinion of his son Rabbi Hama.

#### Hoshaiah Rabbah



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoshaiah\\_Rabbah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoshaiah_Rabbah)

Hoshaiah Rabbah or Hoshayya Rabbah was Palestinian amora of the first amoraic generation (about 200 AD), compiler of *baraitot* explaining the Mishnah-Tosefta. He was closely associated with the successors of Rebbi, as was his father with Rebbi himself. Hoshaiah's father, Hama, lived in Sepphoris, the residence of Rebbi and the seat of the patriarchs.

Hoshaiah's yeshibah, also, was for many years located at Sepphoris, where pupils crowded to hear his lectures. R. Johanan, one of his greatest disciples, declared that Hoshaiah in his generation was like R. Meir in his: even his colleagues could not always grasp the profundity of his arguments (Er. 53a). And the esteem in which Hoshaiah was held by his pupils may be gaged by the statement that, even after Johanan had himself become a great scholar and a famous teacher and no longer needed Hoshaiah's instruction, he continued visiting

the master, who in the meantime had grown old and had removed his school to Cæsarea (Yer. Sanh. xi. 30b).

Hoshaiah was called the "father of the Mishnah," not so much because of his collection and edition of the mishnayot, as because of the ability with which he explained and interpreted them (see Yer. Kid. i. 60a; Yer. B. Q. iv. 4c). Hoshaiah's most important halakic decision is directed against the standard weights and measures, held by R. Johanan to be traditional from the Sinaitic period. Hoshaiah's radical point of view can be traced to his theory of the development of the Mishnah. He even goes so far as to overrule both Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel with reference to offerings brought on visiting the Temple in Jerusalem three times every year (Ḥag. i. 2). The custom of greeting mourners on the Sabbath was permitted in southern Galilee, including Cæsarea, and prohibited in other places. Hoshaiah happened to be in a certain town on the Sabbath, and, meeting mourners, greeted them, saying, "I do not know your custom, but I greet you according to our custom" (Yer. M. Q. iii. 82d).

Hoshaiah's consideration for others is exemplified in his gracious apology to the blind teacher whom he had engaged for his son, and whom he did not suffer to meet visitors at dinner for fear that he might be embarrassed (Yer. Peah viii. 21b).

Hoshaiah's authority must have been very powerful in his later years, when he successfully resisted the efforts of R. Gamaliel ha-Nasi, the son of Rebbi, to introduce "demai" (the "suspicion," on buying wheat from an *am ha-arez* (common folk), that he had not separated the tithes) into Syria (Yer. Ḥal. iv. 60a) It is also indicated by his remarkable interposition in regard to the mishnah which declares that "a Gentile's testimony in the case of an agunah is allowed only if stated as a matter of fact and without any intention to testify" (Yer. Yeb. xvi. 5; Yeb. 121b).

The haggadic utterances of Hoshaiah are numerous, scattered principally in Midrash Rabbah, which some have erroneously attributed to him because of the opening words "R. Hoshaiah Rabbah." In Genesis Rabbah, Hoshaiah's text with reference to the Creation is the verse "Then I was by him, as one brought up [= וְיָמָא] with him" (Prov. viii.30). He transposes the letters to read וְיָמָא ("an architect"), and explains that "wisdom" (the Torah) was used as an instrument by God to create the universe. He illustrates this by the example of an earthly king who, in building a palace, needs an architect with plans and specifications.

Freudenthal points out the analogy between Philo's ideas and those of Hoshaiah, and W. Bacher expresses his opinion that if Hoshaiah had not himself read the philosopher's works, he at least had heard of them from Origen, the most important champion of Philo (*J. Q. R.* iii. 357). In a dialogue with Hoshaiah regarding circumcision, a "philosopher" (identified as Origen by Bacher) asked: "If the rite possesses such virtue, why did not God create the first man circumcised?" Hoshaiah replied that man, with all things created on the first six days, needs improving and perfecting, and that circumcision conduces to perfection (Gen. R. xi. 6). Bacher quotes a passage in which Hoshaiah refuted the incarnation dogma: "When God created Adam the angels mistook him for a deity and wished to sing the hymn 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' But when God put Adam to sleep they knew him to be mortal, as the prophet said: 'Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?'" (Isa. ii. 22; Gen. R. viii. 10).

There are more examples in the Talmud to justify the assertion that Hoshaiah as the representative of Judaism was in constant touch with the early Christians at Cæsarea, and particularly with Origen, who was ordained presbyter at Cæsarea in 228, and who in 231 opened a philosophical and theological school which was attended by persons from all parts, anxious to hear his interpretation of the Christian Scriptures. Origen died in 254 at Tyre, so that his last twenty-five years were spent in the region in which most of the Amoraim lived. The "philosopher" whom the latter mention as controverting Hoshaiah's Biblical

interpretations was doubtless Origen himself or one of his students. The influence brought to bear by Hoshaiah and others probably induced Origen to formulate the doctrine of the different degrees of dignity in the Trinity, for which Origen was accused as a heretic.

Hoshaiah was very strict in requiring from a proselyte both circumcision and immersion (mikvah) in the presence of three rabbis (Yeb. 46b); this was very likely directed against the free conversion of the Gentiles by the Christian Jews. In a case of partition by heirs or partners the Mishnah says: "They can not divide the Scriptures between them, even when all parties are satisfied." Hoshaiah adds: "even if they wish to divide by volumes, one to take the Psalms and another the Chronicles" (Yer. B. B. i. 13a). It is explained that such an exchange would be considered as unequal and as giving the impression that one Biblical book is holier than another. This is more easily understood in view of the exaltation by the Judæo-Christians of the Psalms in comparison with the other books of the Old Testament, especially with the Chronicles, as against the contrary view of Judaism, which recognizes no preference between the various books.

## **Frequency of Conjugal Duty**

### **Mishnah Ketubot 5:6**

**MISHNA** With regard to **one who vows that his wife<sup>n</sup> may not derive benefit from marital relations<sup>h</sup> with him, Beit Shammai say: He may maintain this situation for up to two weeks, but beyond that he must divorce her and give her the payment for her marriage contract. Beit Hillel say: He must divorce her if it continues beyond one week.**

Apropos the husband's obligation to his wife regarding marital relations, the Gemara mentions other aspects of this issue: **Students may leave their homes and travel in order to learn Torah without their wives' permission for up to thirty days, and laborers may leave their homes without their wives' permission for up to one week. The set interval defining the frequency of a husband's conjugal obligation to his wife stated in the Torah (see Exodus 21:10),<sup>h</sup> unless the couple stipulated otherwise, varies according to the man's occupation and proximity to his home: Men of leisure, who do not work, must engage in marital relations every day, laborers must do so twice a week, donkey drivers once a week, camel drivers once every thirty days, and sailors once every six months. This is the statement of Rabbi Eliezer.**

### **Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 62b**

§ The mishna stated: For **sailors, the set interval for conjugal relations is once every six months. This is the statement of Rabbi Eliezer. Rav Berona said that Rav said: The halakha is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer. Rav Adda bar Ahava said that Rav said: This is the statement of Rabbi Eliezer, but the Rabbis say: Students may leave<sup>h</sup> their homes to study Torah for as long as two or three years without permission from their wives. Rava said: The Sages relied on Rabbi Adda bar Ahava's opinion and performed an action like this themselves,<sup>n</sup> but the results were sometimes fatal.**

## Rabbi Hananya's Tragic Story (Ketubot 62b)

Rabbi Hananya ben Hakhinai<sup>p</sup> went to the study hall at the end of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai's wedding feast. Rabbi Shimon said to him: Wait for me until I can come with you, after my days of celebration are over. However, since he wanted to learn Torah, he did not wait and went and sat for twelve years in the study hall. By the time he came back, all the paths of his city had changed and he did not know how to go to his home.

He went and sat on the bank of the river and heard people calling to a certain girl: Daughter of Hakhinai, daughter of Hakhinai, fill your pitcher and come up. He said: I can conclude from this that this is our daughter, meaning his own daughter, whom he had not recognized after so many years. He followed her to his house. His wife was sitting and sifting flour. She lifted her eyes up, saw him and recognized him, and her heart fluttered with agitation and she passed away from the emotional stress. Rabbi Hananya said before God: Master of the universe, is this the reward of this poor woman? He pleaded for mercy for her and she lived.

### The Text: Babylonia Talmud Ketubot 62b

רְבִי חָנָנְיָא בְּרַי בִּיסָא אָזִיל יְתִיב תְּרִי  
סְרִי שְׁנֵי בְּבֵי מְדֻרְשָׁא. כִּי אַתָּא, אָמַר:  
לֹא אֵיעָבִיד כְּדַעְבִּיד בֶּן חֲכִינְאִי. עֵייל  
יְתִיב בְּמְדֻרְשָׁא, שְׁלַח לְבֵיתָהּ. אַתָּא  
רְבִי אוֹשְׁעִיא בְּרִיה, יְתִיב קַמִּיה. הָוָה  
קָא מְשָׁאִיל לִיה שְׁמַעְתָּא, חֲזָא דְקָא  
מִתְחַדְדִי שְׁמַעְתָּהּ, חָלַשׁ דַּעְתָּהּ, אָמַר:  
אִי הָוֵאִי הַכָּא – הָוָה לִי זְרַע כִּי הָאִי.

עַל לְבֵיתָהּ. עַל בְּרִיה, קָם קַמִּיה. הָוֵא  
סְבֵר – לְמִשְׁאָלֶיהָ שְׁמַעְתָּתָא קָא בְּעִי.  
אָמְרָה לִיה דְּבֵיתָהּ: מִי אִיבָא אָבָא  
דְּקָאִים מִקָּמִי בְּרָא? קְרִי עֲלֶיהָ רְמִי בְּרַי

Rabbi Hama Bar Bisa went and sat for twelve years in the study hall. When he came back to his house, he said: I will not do what the son of Hakhinai did. He [Rabbi Hama Bar Bisa] went and sat in the study hall in his hometown, and sent a message to his house that he had arrived.

While he was sitting there his son Rabbi Oshaya, whom he did not recognize, came and sat before him. [Rabbi Oshaya] asked him questions about *halakha*, and [Rabbi Hama] saw that the *halakhot* were very sharp.

[Rabbi Hama] was distressed and said: If I had been here I would have had a child like this.

[Rabbi Hama] went in to his house and his son went in with him.

Rabbi Hama then stood up before him [before Rabbi Oshaya]. He [Rabbi Hama] thought that he [Rabbi Oshaya] wanted to ask him a matter of halakha.

His wife [Rabbi Hama's wife] said to him [to Rabbi Hama]: Is there a father who stands up before his son?




### **Explaining the Story**

What is the sequence of events in the story?

### **Comprehension and Analysis Questions**

**Extra Bonus**  How did Hama bar Bisa know what had happened to the son of Hakhinai?

**Extra Bonus**  What do you think is Hama bar Bisa thinking, both regarding his own imminent return and regarding the son of Hakhinai as he is about to return to his home?



Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 4 \_\_\_\_\_

**?** What does Hama bar Bisa do to prevent what happened to the the son of Hakhinai?

**?** Why does Hama bar Bisa choose the study hall as his "waiting place"?

**?** Why did Rabbi Oshaya ask Hama bar Bisa halakhic questions?

**Extra Bonus ?** Why was Hama bar Bisa distressed? Please elaborate.

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**?** Why did Hama bar Bisa go to his home?

**?** Why did Rabbi Oshaya go in after Hama bar Bisa?

**?** Why did Hama bar Bisa stand before Rabbi Oshaya?

**?** How did Hama bar Bisa find out Rabbi Oshaya was his son?

**Extra Bonus ?** What do you think were the thoughts and feelings of Hama bar Bisa when he found out that Rabbi Oshaya was his son?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 4 \_\_\_\_\_

**!** - I will not do!

- Wait and you will see.

# EPILOGUE

Hama bar Bisa, like many of his colleagues, went to study Torah away from his home. Hama bar Bisa knows of the tragic story of Rabbi Hananya ben Hakhinai and he is determined not to repeat the same mistake ("I will not do what the son of Hakhinai did!"), and indeed, in our story, Hama bar Bisa doesn't surprise his wife.

However, despite Hama bar Bisa's desire to be in control, he is the one surprised. After twelve years of being away, Hama bar Bisa doesn't recognize his own son, Rabbi Oshaya, who despite his father's absence, or maybe because of it, became a great Torah scholar, much greater than his own father.

Hama bar Bisa doesn't repeat Rabbi Hananya ben Hakhinai's mistake, but the end of the story -his own story- leaves him with a bittersweet taste. His son became a great Torah scholar but not because of him and Hama bar Bisa is forced to face the fact that in his own place he could have achieved greatness, without abandoning his family for so many years.