



Volume 3. Issue 17.

Not Just a Name

The thirteenth and final *perek* of *ketubot* opens with the mention of two judges in *Yerushalaim* and the number of instances in which they differed in their rulings from the *Chachamim*. The *Mishnayot* continue by listing each of those cases. The names of these *dayanei gezeirot* were *Admon* and *Chanan ben Avshalom*.

Rabeinu Tam (*Tosfot* s.v. *shnei*) asserts that the name of the second judge must read *Chanan ben Avshalom* as apposed to *Chanan ben Avshalom*. The rational presented appears to be as follows: Firstly, according to *R' Meir* (*Sanhedrin* 103b) *Avshalom* (from *sefer Shmuel*) has no place in the world to come. This would qualify him as a *rasha*. Secondly, the *Gemara Yoma* (38b), quoting the *pasuk* “The name of the wicked will rot” (*Mishlei* 10:7) explains that we do not use the names of *reshaim* when naming children.¹ Consequently, the person cited in this *Mishnah* cannot be named *Chanan ben Avshalom*.²

At first glance this line of reasoning may appear a little strange. The *Rabbeinu Tam* stated with absolute confidence as to the correct version of the *Mishnah* just because it was not appropriate to give a child the same name as *rasha*? Maybe his parents made a mistake? How could *Rabbeinu Tam* make this claim with such certainty?

A closer reading of the above *Gemara Yoma* sheds much light on the reasoning of *Rabbeinu Tam* and on names in general. There the *Gemara* continues by questioning this idea that we do not use the names of

reshaim when naming children. It follows with a story of an young child name *Doeg* the same name as the *rasha* in *sefer Shmuel*. The response of the *Gemara* is to focus on the end of the story, where the child suffered an unfortunate end.

Rabbeinu Channanel provides a tremendous explanation to the above dialogue. The *Gemara* is not telling us that it is not the “proper thing” to give the child the same name as a *rasha*. Nor is avoiding giving the child that name a round-a-bout way of trying to punish the *rasha*. *Rabbeinu Channanel* explains that this *Gemara* is teaching us that the implication of “the name of the righteous will rot” is that a person with such a name cannot succeed.

In Jewish thought names are not just agreed referential tools. A name rather reveals much about the essence and potential of the named object or person.³ For example, the *Ohr Gedalyahu* explains that *Adam's* task, when naming the animals, was to identify their very essence. Naming a child is a difficult task and heavenly assistance is provided when doing so. Giving a child a name of a *rasha*, a “rotting” name, would significantly and negatively impact that child.

This explains why *Rabbeinu Tam* was so adamant that the *dayan*, this giant in the judicial system, was named *Chanan ben Avshalom*. For such a position to be held by a person named *Chanan ben Avshalom* would have been impossible.⁴

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¹ This is *Rashi's* explanation of the phrase “לא מסקינן ב”שמייהו”. *Rashi* also explains that “the names of the wicked will rot” as they will not be used and waste away as an iron utensil slowly rusts away when left idle. The *Maharsha* explains that the idea presented in the *Gemara* is learnt since the *pasuk* after mentioning “the **memory** of the righteous is blessed” makes reference specifically to the **name** of the wicked and not just their memory.

² The *Rabbeinu Tam* does continue by bringing a source for the name *Avshalom*.

³ For example, see *Gemara Yoma* 83b where the *R' Meir* was rightly cautious in his dealings with an individual, because of his name. See also *Sichat Mussar* (60)

⁴ One could suggest an alternative reason could simply be that as we avoid mentioning the names of *reshaim* had his name be *Chanan ben Avshalom* then the *Mishnah* would have just written the name *Chanan*. (This is the case on other instances where a parent is a *rasha*.) Yet this line of reasoning would imply that *Chanan's* father would have been a *rasha* and not simply shared the name with that *rasha*.

Revision Questions

כתובות י"ב – א' – י"ג:

- Can a woman make a condition with her husband that he provide her daughter with food for five years? (י"ב:א')
- Does the condition hold if she divorces and marries another and makes the same condition? (י"ב:א')
- What happens if, within the five year period: (י"ב:ב')
 - the daughter gets married?
 - The husband dies?
- How would *pikchim* word such a condition? (י"ב:ב')
- What is the law regarding *almanah* that does not want to leave her late husband's house? (י"ב:ג')
- What is the law regarding an *almanah* that returns to her father's house? (י"ב:ג')
- Explain the debate regarding the time within which an *almanah* can collect her *ketubah* if: (י"ב:ד')
 - She is living in her late husband's house.
 - She is living in her father's house.
- What were the two *halachot* that were disputed between *Chanan ben Avishalom* and the *bnei kohanim gedolim*? With who did *Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zaki* side? (י"ג:א-ב')
- Explain the debate regarding how the sons and daughters are supported when there is a very small *yerusha*? (י"ג:ג')
- Explain the debate between *Admon* and the *Chachamim* regarding a case where:
 - One party claims he is owed jugs of oil and the other party admits he only owes him empty jugs. (י"ג:ד')
 - The father reneges on his promise for a dowry just prior to *nisuin*. (י"ג:ה')
 - One party claims that his field was stolen from him yet his own signature is on the sale contract that is in the hands of the other party. (י"ג:ו')
 - A person returns from an extended period overseas to find that the access path to his property through another's field has disappeared and he does not remember where it was. (י"ג:ז')
 - One party presents a loan contract and the other party presents a sale document (dated after the loan contract) stating that he purchased land from the first party. (י"ג:ח')
 - Two parties each produce loan documents trying to claim money from each other. (י"ג:ט')
- What are the three regions in Eretz Yisrael for *nisuin* and why are they important? (י"ג:י')

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Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
3 rd December י"ב כסלו	4 th December י"ג כסלו	5 th December י"ד כסלו	6 th December ט"ו כסלו	7 th December ט"ז כסלו	8 th December י"ז כסלו	9 th December י"ח כסלו
Ketubot 13:11 – Nedarim 1:1	Nedarim 1:2-3	Nedarim 1:4-2:1	Nedarim 2:2-3	Nedarim 2:4-5	Nedarim 3:1-2	Nedarim 3:3-4

