Rabbi Yohanan – לְמַעַן רְבֵּי אַבְּאֵי. Rabbi Yohanan bar Nappaha was one of the greatest amoraim, whose statements are fundamental components of both the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. He resided in Tiberias and lived to an advanced age. Rabbi Yohanan was orphaned at a young age, and although his family apparently owned considerable property, he spent virtually all of his resources in Torah study, first as a student of Rabbi Yoĥanan, then as a student of Rabbi Yoĥanan. The connection between Rabbi Yoĥanan and Rabbi Yohanan was a long time. Rabbi Yoĥanan was the leading rabbinic scholar of his generation. His objective was not to disagree with Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, the redactor of the Mishna, but rather to bring about Tora'h study, i.e., he is clever and will be able to serve as a substitute for Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. One of the outstanding Tora'h scholars of his generation. One day, Rabbi Yohanan was bathing in the Jordan River. Reish Lakish saw him and jumped into the Jordan, pursuing him. At that time, Reish Lakish was the leader of a band of marauders. Rabbi Yohanan said to Reish Lakish, Your strength is fit for Torah study. Reish Lakish said to him: Your beauty is fit for women. Rabbi Yohanan said to him: If you return to the pursuit of Torah, I will give you my sister in marriage, who is more beautiful than I am. Reish Lakish accepted upon himself to study Torah. Subsequently, Reish Lakish wanted to jump back out of the river to bring back his clothes, but he was unable to return, as he had lost his physical strength as soon as he accepted the responsibility to study Torah upon himself.

Rabbi Yohanan taught Reish Lakish the Tora'h 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 (vehapigyon); 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. The Gemara relates: One day, Rabbi Yoĥanan was bathing in the Jordan River. Reish Lakish saw him and jumped into the Jordan, pursuing him. At that time, Reish Lakish was the leader of a band of marauders. Rabbi Yohanan said to Reish Lakish, Your strength is fit for Torah study. Reish Lakish said to him: Your beauty is fit for women. Rabbi Yohanan said to him: If you return to the pursuit of Torah, I will give you my sister in marriage, who is more beautiful than I am. Reish Lakish accepted upon himself to study Torah. Subsequently, Reish Lakish wanted to jump back out of the river to bring back his clothes, but he was unable to return, as he had lost his physical strength as soon as he accepted the responsibility to study Torah upon himself.

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As a result of the quarrel, Rabbi Yohanan was offended, which in turn affected Reish Lakish, who fell ill. Rabbi Yohanan’s sister, who was Reish Lakish’s wife, came crying to Rabbi Yohanan, begging him to pray for Reish Lakish’s recovery. She said to him: Do this for the sake of my children, so that they should have a father. Rabbi Yohanan said to him: The verse: Leave your fatherless children, I will rear them (Jeremiah 49:11), i.e., I will take care of them. She said to him: Do so for the sake of my widowhood. He said to her the rest of the verse: And let your widows trust in Me.

Ultimately, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, Reish Lakish, died. Rabbi Yohanan was sorely pained over his loss. The Rabbis said: Who will go to calm his pain? They said: Let Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat go, as his statements are sharp, i.e., he is clever and will be able to serve as a substitute for Reish Lakish.

The sword…from when are they susceptible to ritual impurity. A sword is susceptible to ritual impurity only when its manufacture is completed. What is considered complete in this regard? A sword is susceptible to ritual impurity only when it is scoured in water, and a knife once it is sharpened. This halakha is in accordance with the mishna in Kelim (14a), and not the Gemara here (Rambam Sefer Tora'h, Hilkhot Kelim 8:2).

A bandit knows about his banditry, i.e., he is sharp, i.e., he is clever and will be able to serve as a substitute for Reish Lakish. Many commentators ask how Rabbi Yohanan could say this to Reish Lakish, as the Torah explicitly prohibits verbal mistreatment of others (see Leviticus 25:10). Some explain that a principal teacher is allowed to berate his pupil for a constructive purpose (Ein Yehosef, Mahashal). According to this interpretation, Reish Lakish replied that he had studied Torah prior to encountering Rabbi Yohanan. Consequently, Rabbi Yohanan could not be considered his principal teacher and therefore he had no right to berate him. Others suggest that Rabbi Yohanan’s words could be a jocular fashion as a way of piquing the attention of the other Sages. He wanted them to listen to the opinion of Reish Lakish, who was an expert in the matter at hand. Reish Lakish misconstrued Rabbi Yohanan’s intent and was upset by his remark (Ein Yehosef).
Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat went and sat before Rabbi Yoĥanan. With regard to every matter that Rabbi Yoĥanan would say, Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat would say to him: 'There is a ruling which is taught in a baraita that supports your opinion. Rabbi Yoĥanan said to him: Are you comparable to the son of Lakish? In my discussions with the son of Lakish, when I would state a matter, he would raise twenty-four difficulties against me in an attempt to disprove my claim, and I would answer him with twenty-four answers, and the halakha by itself would become broadened and clarified. And yet you say to me: There is a ruling which is taught in a baraita that supports your opinion. Do I not know that what I say is good? Being rebutted by Reish Lakish served a purpose; your bringing proof to my statements does not.


Rabbi Yoĥanan and Reish Lakish were a unique pair in the realm of Torah study.

Reish Lakish was usually the one to raise objections and challenges and probe the issues at hand. He would pile up questions, textual or theoretical, on almost everything Rabbi Yoĥanan said. In fact, a significant portion of the sugyot in both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds is based on the controversies of Rabbi Yoĥanan and Reish Lakish.

Reish Lakish did not intend to dispute the very basis of Rabbi Yoĥanan's statements, but to more thoroughly investigate and clarify matters, and that was how Rabbi Yoĥanan himself perceived it, too.

Indeed, after Reish Lakish's death, Rabbi Yoĥanan was deeply grieved by his absence. To comfort him, the sages sent one of their most astute colleagues, Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat, to fill Reish Lakish’s place.

Rabbi Elazar would sit before Rabbi Yoĥanan, and as Rabbi Yoĥanan spoke, he would say "There is a baraita which supports you."

Said Rabbi Yoĥanan, "Are you like the son of Lakish? When I stated a law, the song of Lakish would raise twenty-four objections and I would give twenty-four answers, which would then lead to a fuller understanding of the law. But you say, 'A baraita has been taught which supports you.' Don’t I already know that my dicta are right?"