The Invention of Chutzpah

Chutzpah (חוצפאה), n. barefacedness, boldness; from chatzaf (חצה), v. to bare.

M. Sota 9.15
In the messianic period chutzpah will prevail - בתקבוקת משיחא חוצפאה ימעה

B. Sanhedrin 105a
Chutzpah carries its point, even against Heaven - חוצפאה אפיקי מאני מתניה

B. Sanhedrin 105a
Chutzpah is royalty without a crown - חוצפאה מלכהת בלא תأمنה היא

Devarim (Deutoronomy) 13.1
Everything I command you that you shall be careful to do it. You shall neither add to it, nor subtract from it.

B. Gittin 56b
[Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai] said: Give me Yavne and her Sages and the family chain of Rabban Gamliel.

M. Avot 2.11
Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus is like a plastered cistern which does not lose a drop.

B. Taanit 7a
The daughter of the Roman emperor addressed Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah: “O glorious Wisdom in an ugly vessel!” He replied: “Does not your father keep wine in an earthenware vessel?” She asked: “Wherein else shall he keep it?” He said to her: “You who are nobles should keep it in vessels of gold and silver.” She had the wine put in vessels of gold and silver and it turned sour.
It happened one day that Rabbi Eliezer brought forward every imaginable argument, but the rabbis did not accept any of them. He said to them: “If the halacha is according to me, let this carob tree prove it!” Thereupon the carob tree was torn up a hundred amot, others say, four hundred amot. “Proof cannot be brought from a carob tree,” they retorted. Again he said to them: “If the halacha is according to me, let the stream of water prove it!” Whereupon the stream of water flowed backwards. “Proof cannot be brought from a stream of water,” they rejoined. Again he urged: “If the halacha agrees with me, let the walls of the academy prove it,” whereupon the walls inclined to fall. But Rabbi Yehoshua rebuked them, saying: “When scholars are engaged in a halachic dispute, what business is it of yours?” Hence they did not fall, in honour of Rabbi Yehoshua, nor did they straighten, in honour of Rabbi Eliezer, and they are still thus inclined.

Again he said to them: “If the halacha is according to me, then let the Heavens prove it.” And a bat kol called out: “Why do you dispute with Rabbi Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the halacha agrees with him!” Then Rabbi Yehoshuah rose to his feet and exclaimed: Lo bashamayim hi - It is not in Heaven! What did he mean by this? Said Rabbi Yirmiah: “The Torah has already been given at Mount Sinai; and therefore we pay no attention to Heavenly voices, because You have long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, Acharei rabim lehatot - Side with the majority.”

Rabbi Natan met Eliyahu Hanavi and asked him: “What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do in that hour?” “God laughed and said, ’My children have defeated Me, My children have defeated Me.’”

On that day all objects which Rabbi Eliezer had declared clean were brought and burnt in fire. Then they took a vote and excommunicated him. Said they, “Who shall go and inform him?” “I will go,” answered Rabbi Akiva, “lest an unsuitable person go and inform him, and thus destroy the whole world.” What did Rabbi Akiva do? He clothed himself in black garments and wrapped himself in black, and sat at a distance of four amot from him. “Akiva,” said Rabbi Eliezer to him, “why is this day different from all other days?” “Master,” he replied, “it appears to me that your companions have separated themselves from you.”

Thereupon he too rent his garments, took off his shoes, removed his seat and sat on the earth, whilst tears streamed from his eyes. The world was then smitten: a third of the olive crop, a third of the wheat, and a third of the barley crop. Some say, the dough in women's hands swelled up.
B. Baba Metzia 59b (cont’d)

Great was the calamity that befell that day, for everything at which Rabban Gamliel cast his eyes was burned up. Rabban Gamliel too was travelling in a ship, when a huge wave arose to drown him. “It appears to me,” he reflected, “that this is on account of none other than Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus.” Thereupon he arose and exclaimed, “Master of the universe! You know full well that my prayer led to his death?” he asked her. “I came to the house of Rabban Gamliel that he had died. ‘How do you know that my prayer led to his death?’ he asked her. “I heard him. On her return she found him fallen on his face. “Get up!” she cried out to him, “you have killed my brother!” In the meanwhile an announcement was made from the house of Rabban Gamliel that he had died. ‘How do you know that my prayer led to his death?’ he asked her. “I have this tradition from my father's house: All gates are locked, excepting the gates of wounded feelings.”

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 30.11-14

For this commandment which I command you this day, is not concealed from you, nor is it far away. It is not in Heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us and fetch it for us, to tell it to us, so that we can fulfill it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us and fetch it for us, to tell it to us, so that we can fulfill it?' Rather, this thing is very close to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can fulfill it.

Shemot (Exodus) 23.2

You shall not follow the majority for evil; when you testify in court, don't side with the majority to pervert justice.
Rambam, Hilchot Mamrim 2.9

A court has the authority to issue a decree and forbid something which is permitted and make its decree binding. Similarly, it has the authority, as a temporary measure, to release the Torah's prohibitions. What then is the meaning of the scriptural prohibition: “Do not add to it and do not detract from it”? The intent is that they do not have the authority to add to the words of the Torah or to detract from them, establishing the matter forever as part of either the Written or the Oral Torah.

Midrash Tehillim (Psalms) 12.4

Rabbi Yannai taught: The words of the Torah were not given as clear-cut decisions. For with every word which the Holy One, blessed be He, spoke to Moses, He offered him forty-nine arguments by which a thing may be proven clean and forty-nine other arguments by which it may be proved unclean. When Moses asked: “Master of the universe, in what way shall we know the true sense of the law?” God replied: “The majority is to be followed: when a majority says it is unclean, it is unclean; when a majority says it is clean, it is clean.”

Rabbi Abbahu said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: Rabbi Akiva had a faithful disciple named Rabbi Meir, who with forty-nine arguments from Scripture could prove even a reptile clean, and with forty-nine other arguments could prove it unclean.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Even children living in the days of Shaul and David and in the days of Shmuel knew those subtle distinctions of the law which elaborate forty-nine days of Shaul and David and in the days of Shmuel knew those subtle distinctions of the law which elaborate forty-nine arguments by which a thing may be proven clean, and forty-nine other arguments by which it may be proven unclean.

Eicha (Lamentations) Rabba 1.19

When [Rabbi Yehoshua] entered the city, he met a little girl standing and filled her pitcher from the well. He said to her: “Give me some water to drink.” She replied: “Both for you and your ass.” When he had drunk and was turning to go away, he said to her: “My daughter, you have acted just like Rivka!” She retorted: “I have acted like Rivka but you have not acted like Eliezer!”

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