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**Humility in the Talmud:**  
**A Translation and Annotated Commentary on Tractate Ta'anit**  
**with the Interpretations of the Meiri**

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## Digest

Tractate Ta'anit, the ninth tractate in the second Order of the Babylonian Talmud, illustrates the response of the rabbis to cosmic disaster. The tractate describes many forms of travesty that caused the Jewish people to respond as a nation, but drought in the Land of Israel occupied a central place in the world-view of the rabbis. The rabbis' reaction to such danger as described in the tractate was a process of self-denial, humility, and prayer. What follows is a complete translation of the entire tractate with an annotated commentary in footnotes. The translation appears in the form of an outline to emphasize the tractate's thematic unity as well as to illustrate the relationship of one passage to another. The ultimate concern of the tractate becomes manifest in its fourth and final chapter, the catastrophe of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

At the conclusion of each section of the translation, the commentary of Menachem Ben Solomon Meiri (1249-1316) appears in summarized form. The Meiri was a French scholar who lived and taught in the region of Provence. His commentary consists of a legal digest of the various materials that appear in the tractate, emphasizing not only those aspects that pertain to Jewish law but those passages which illustrate the ethics of personal conduct. The Meiri's method of outlining the tractate according to the Mishnah, his extensive use of the Palestinian Talmud, and his summary of the legal debates of his predecessors make his commentary, entitled *Beit Habechirah*, unique. His commentary follows the trajectory of the tractate from the beginning of Ta'anit, which speaks of how and when one may pray for rain, to its very end, which describes the rabbis' anticipation of celebrating as they once did in a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem.

## Table of Contents

Digest.....	i
Introduction to Tractate Ta'anit.....	iii
Introduction to the Meiri.....	vii
Chapter I.....	1
Chapter II.....	138
Chapter III.....	185
Chapter IV.....	260
Epilogue: Tractate Ta'anit and the Method of the Meiri.....	339
Bibliography of Works Consulted.....	350



## Introduction to Tractate Ta'anit

The title of the tractate, "Ta'anit," cannot be clearly translated with all of its connotations. The most common translation is "fasting," but behind this over-simplification exists a world of nuances. The Hebrew root of "Ta'anit" is *ayin-nun-yod*, and this root appears in various contexts. One of the most prominent is Leviticus 23:26-27 with regard to Yom Kippur:

*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Mark, the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be a sacred occasion for you: you shall practice self-denial.*

This command to practice "self-denial" has traditionally taken on the form of fasting, although other abstentions have also come to be included.

Fasting, however, is not an end in itself. The root also appears in the Hebrew noun, "*anava*," which means, "humility." The physical discomfort that comes from not eating or practicing some other form of self-denial is the means to an end. The goal is to be humbled. One simply does not practice self-denial; one actually humbles oneself in the face of overwhelming power.

A third nuance exists, however, that is just as important as humility. The Hebrew root appears a third time in the Hebrew verb, "*oneh*," indicating "answering" or "response." The act of humility, in the eyes of the rabbis, hopefully elicits a response. This explains the name of the prayer that is referred to as "the prayer of fasting," *Aneinu*.<sup>1</sup> Humility and self-reflection were tools that the rabbis employed to overcome disaster in times when the cosmos was brutally unfair or God's power was more than they could endure. To practice humility, for the rabbis, would

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<sup>1</sup>See Rashi on 11b and Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 46, 107.

also include prayers for God's compassion.

These aspects, self-denial, humility, and response, make up the central themes of the tractate. They become manifest in the face of disaster. The most prominent disaster in Ta'anit that would cause the rabbis to humble themselves appears to be drought. Drought served as the paradigmatic catastrophe that would cause the rabbis to fast and to take other extra measures in their routine. The tractate thus begins with questions about how one should pray for rain. Prayers for rain and their appropriate times so as to be harmonious with the universe were an important subject of study for the rabbis.

The end of the tractate focuses on a more specific yet overwhelming catastrophe, namely, the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. This catastrophe outweighed any form of drought, for it symbolized, among other things, the cutting off of God's presence in Israel. During times of drought or other crises, the people would turn toward the Temple as a special place to illicit God's compassion. Without this place, the people must have felt abandoned to the elements.

The rabbis did not invent these ideas. The cosmic catastrophe of drought and the importance of the Temple in Jerusalem have their foundations in Scripture. In Deuteronomy 11:13-17, we read of the clear theological implications that drought held for the people of Israel:

*If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the Lord your God and serving Him with all your heart and your soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil -- I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle -- and thus you shall eat your fill. Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. For the Lord's anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the Lord is assigning to you.*

While the Temple still stood, the obvious answer to coping with the universe was Temple

worship, as King Solomon declared in his dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 8:35-40):

*Should the heavens be shut up and there be no rain, because they have sinned against You, and then they pray toward this place and acknowledge Your name and repent of their sins, when You answer them, oh, hear in heaven and pardon the sins of Your servants, Your people Israel, after You have shown them the proper way in which they are to walk; and send down rain upon the land which You gave to Your people as their heritage. So, too, if there is a famine in the land, if there is pestilence, blight, mildew, locusts, or caterpillars, or if an enemy oppresses them in any of the settlements of the land.*

*In any plague and in any disease, in any prayer or supplication offered by any person among all Your people Israel -- each of whom knows his own affliction -- when he spreads his palms toward this House, oh, hear in Your heavenly abode, and pardon and take action! Render to each man according to his ways as You know his heart to be -- for You alone know the hearts of men -- so that they may revere You all the days that they live on the land that You gave to our fathers.*

The Temple, therefore, served as the focus of all prayers, especially in times of crisis. The rabbis, in composing the tractate of Ta'anit, emphasized the magnitude of the loss of the this central House of worship. At the same time, however, they also prescribed the procedure that is to take place in its absence. Prayers for rain and community fasts, according to the Talmud, were to continue even after the Temple was gone. Indeed, fasting and other rites of humility took on a new dimension with the institution of Tisha B'Ab, the ninth of the Hebrew month of Ab, which commemorates the destruction of the Temple and is observed to this day.

The contents of Tractate Ta'anit follow a trajectory from coping with drought to enduring without the Temple in Jerusalem. Ta'anit is the ninth tractate of the Talmud in the Order of Appointed Seasons, "Moed", and its pages number from 2a to 31a. (The title page counts as the first page, and the letters, "a" and "b," indicate the front and back of a page. In modern day printing, this would amount to 57 pages.) Throughout the tractate, not only are legal questions

debated as to the procedure of praying for rain and for fasting, but there are many rich tales of rabbinic lore. These legends focus primarily on the sages whose prayers before God were effective in bringing rainfall or otherwise warding off disaster. These sages serve as models of humility or self-sacrifice, for they were often willing to personally withstand the wrath of God for the sake of their community and thus, paradoxically, received God's favor. In both the legal portions and the portions of rabbinic lore, however, the themes of self-denial and reflection, humility, and response continually reappear, much like a fugue in a musical score.

In the following translation, I have attempted to emphasize the tractate's thematic unity. It has been outlined so that the relationships between the arguments can be illustrated. Often, however, this proved to be an ambiguous task. Imposing a Western sense of order onto a literature that frequently works through the logic of association is sometimes a fruitless endeavor. Nevertheless, the method of outlining highlights the over-arching themes and connections in the tractate as well of its layers and tangents. All biblical quotations come from the New Jewish Publication Society Translation, 1988. Changes have only been made to this translation if the exegesis of the rabbis demanded it. For a full citation of all sources, consult the bibliography.

I wish to thank Rabbi Mark Washofsky for guiding me through this project. His patience and enthusiasm have been outstanding.

## Introduction to the Meiri

Not much biographical information is known about Menachem Ben Solomon Meiri (1249-1316), a French scholar who lived and taught in the region of Provence. Hints of a personal tragedy appear in some of his works, including the death of his father and of his two children being taken captive.<sup>2</sup> He also was heavily engaged in the rabbinical discourse of his day, writing responsa and engaging in the debates of the times. Aside from these details, the Meiri (as he is called as a sign of respect) is mainly known from his literary works, chief among them his commentary on the Talmud, *Beit Habechirah*.

The Meiri's *Beit Habechirah* is more of a legal digest than a commentary, focusing mainly on the legal aspects of the Talmudic discourse, although he also shows a great deal of interest in ethics and passages that teach how a student of Torah should behave. As one reads his commentary, the Meiri's method of exposition becomes apparent. His first order of business is to summarize the themes of a chapter of Talmud, following the order of the Mishnah. He lists and numbers these themes which serve to unify the chapter.

Second, the Meiri explains the mishnah to each section, highlighting its legal significance as well as its context in the order of the tractate, and then he comments on the Gemara, thus dividing each section of his commentary into two parts. Often, his exposition of each mishnah is lengthier than his commentary to the Gemara which follows. If there is nothing of legal or ethical significance, he does not hesitate to say that, "This is the exposition of the mishnah, and the Gemara has nothing to add." Similarly, he frequently states that the Gemara "brings in some

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<sup>2</sup>All biographical information comes from Israel Moses Ta-Shma, "Menahem Ben Solomon Meiri," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 11, 1257-1260.

matters through association, as is its way," but he chooses which of these associations is worthy of exposition. Long and involved tales of rabbinic lore may appear in the tractate, and the Meiri may treat them as if they did not exist. A tangent that happens to mention a legal dispute, however, may merit the Meiri's attention in that the tangent is legal in nature.

Third, the Meiri distinguishes himself by constantly comparing the Babylonian Talmud (completed circa 500 C.E.) to the Palestinian Talmud (completed circa 350 C.E.).<sup>3</sup> The Palestinian Talmud is much shorter and does not share the status of the Babylonian Talmud, the latter often simply called, "the Talmud." Nevertheless, the Meiri uses the Palestinian Talmud as his chief source for understanding the context of certain statements in the Babylonian Talmud, and he often uses texts in the Palestinian Talmud to add perspectives and positions to the debates that take place in the Babylonian Talmud.

Finally, the Meiri summarizes the legal debates of the great scholars who were his predecessors and of his time. As a sign of respect, he does not refer to these scholars by name, but rather, he develops a euphemism for each one. Sometimes the positions he cites are unattributable, such as when he makes reference to "some of the early Geonic scholars," or he states that "some commentators hold." Occasionally, these anonymous positions will appear as the perspectives of scholars who lived after the Meiri's time. In any case, there are four predecessors of whom the Meiri makes constant mention. They are:

1. "The greatest of rabbis" indicates Rabbi Solomon Ben Isaac,<sup>4</sup> known from an acronym

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<sup>3</sup>H. L. Strack and G. Stemberger, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 188, 211-215.

<sup>4</sup>Avraham Yaakov Finkel, The Great Torah Commentators (Northvale: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1990), 3.

of his name as Rashi (1040-1105) who lived in Troyes, France and whose commentary to the Talmud is the most widely studied and the most extensive. For ease of reading, relevant and helpful comments by Rashi have been included in the footnotes of each section in the translation that follows. The Meiri does not refer to Rashi for legal perspectives so much as for explanations of context and definition.

2. "The greatest of composers" indicates Moses Ben Maimon,<sup>5</sup> known as Maimonides or Rambam. His chief legal work, *Mishneh Torah*, is a comprehensive and systematic codification of Jewish law. A well known controversy took place around this law code for many reasons, two being that Maimonides did not cite his sources and that any complete legal code appears presumptuous as if the study of the Talmud itself can become secondary. Maimonides also started controversy with his chief philosophical work, *Moreh Nebuchim*, "the Guide for the Perplexed." Some scholars felt that any young person who studied this work deserved excommunication.<sup>6</sup> The Meiri, however, was against this view, and treats both of Maimonides' works with respect. In the context of his commentary to this tractate, the Meiri often cites Maimonides' position, even though he rarely agrees.

3. "The greatest of interpreters" indicates Rabbi Abraham Ben David (1120-1197),<sup>7</sup> who is referred to as the Ravad. The Ravad lived in Provence and died approximately fifty years before the Meiri was born. He headed an academy in Posquieres, and he was a contemporary of Maimonides. He is most famous for his criticism of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, and he

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<sup>5</sup>Finkel, 99.

<sup>6</sup>Ta-Shma, 1257.

<sup>7</sup>Finkel, 104.

disagrees with a great many of Maimonides' positions. The Ravad is the natural protagonist of the Meiri. As a teacher from his region and a representative of his legal tradition, the Ravad's position is almost always cited as the correct rule of law.

4. Finally, "the greatest of judges" indicates Rabbi Isaac Alfasi, known as the Rif (1013-1103).<sup>8</sup> The Rif was born in Algeria and settled in Fez, Morocco. He died in Lucena, Spain, when he had to flee the country at an old age. He is most known for his legal work, Sefer Hahalchot. The Rif's procedure resembles the Meiri's in that his is a legal digest of the Talmud. Aside from this resemblance, the Meiri does not cite the Rif's position very often in this particular tractate. Rather, the Meiri mainly focuses on the discussions that take place between Maimonides and the Ravad. Nevertheless, the Rif's influence, in style and procedure, is clear.

After each section, a summary of the Meiri's commentary will appear. In the conclusion to this tractate, in the epilogue, the procedures and concerns of the Meiri discussed here will be demonstrated from the material of Ta'anit.

The Meiri, in the same way that he introduces each chapter, also has a brief introduction to the tractate as a whole. So that one might get a feel for the language of the Meiri's writing and his use of Hebrew, that introduction appears here in translation:

The Meiri's Introduction to Tractate Ta'anit

Menachem Ben Solomon of the house of Meir said: There are those who say that this tractate, that is to say Ta'anit, is of the Order of Moed [and should be studied in its place in that Order], but we are accustomed to study after the tractate of Berachot for the reason that we have recalled in the opening of this volume [namely, that like Berachot, Ta'anit deals largely with

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<sup>8</sup>Finkel, 95.



issues of prayer], and which includes four chapters, and whose order follows our usual way, are: 1.) "As from when do we mention," 2.) "How is the order of fasts," 3.) "The procedure of these fasts," and 4.) "At three times."

The subject of the tractate, which makes up the basis of its intention, is to clarify matters of repentance and prayer in a time of crisis and what needs to be done with regard to awakening oneself with an increase in prayers, crying out, and fasts. On this perspective, it [the tractate] clarifies for us three matters. The first is to clarify the content of the prayer for rain, specifically from what day [such a prayer] enters the liturgy, staying all winter long, until the days when we change over, that is say, summer, as well as the actions which we take when they [the rains] cease. The first chapter comes to clarify this matter, and the second chapter proceeds from it addressing the content of the prayers, other calamities, and over which of them we fast and the actions we take concerning them. The third chapter comes to clarify this matter further, explaining the actions that have been taken when a fast had been decreed on us over previous calamities, that is to say, the four fasts. The fourth chapter proceeds from this, and indeed interspersed into this order, some matters overlap others and many items are mixed in, such as the matter of the members of the station and other things, through association as is the way of the Talmud as we have seen before.

## Chapter I

### The Meiri

In the Meiri's introduction to this chapter, he mentions that there are two major themes of legal significance that this chapter takes up. They are:

1. As from when one makes the insertion, "who brings down the rain," (*morid hagashem*) into the second blessing of the Amidah, the Standing Prayer, which deals with the resurrection of the dead (*tichiyat hametim*). This is referred to as "mentioning rain" before God. Also, as from when one makes the insertion, "who gives dew and rain," (*v'ten tal u'matar*) into the ninth blessing of the Amidah, which deals with the abundance of the seasons. This is referred to as "requesting rain" before God.

2. To explain the procedure when rains are late in coming, who fasts and when, how many fasts and for how long, for how long must they continue if the drought persists, and with what behavior.

I. **Our Mishnah:** As from when do we mention the "power<sup>1</sup> of rain"?

Rabbi Eliezer says: From the first day of the Festival [of Sukkot]. R. Joshua says: From the last day of the Festival.

R. Joshua said to him [R. Eliezer]: Since rain can only be a sign of a curse during the Festival,<sup>2</sup> why should one mention [the "power of rain"]? R. Eliezer answered him: I, too, did not say to request [for rain to come], but only to mention [that God] "causes the wind to blow and brings down the rain" -- in its due season.<sup>3</sup> He [R. Joshua] responded to him [R. Eliezer]: If so, one should always mention!<sup>4</sup>

We do not request rain until close to the rainy season.

R. Judah says: The one who passes before the Ark [and the congregation to lead prayer] on the last day of the Festival [Shemini Atzeret], the late one [during

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<sup>1</sup>As Rashi (Rabbi Solomon Ben Isaac, 1040-1105 of Troyes, France) explains, the Gemara will clarify the association of rain with power.

<sup>2</sup>Rashi explains why rain during Sukkot is a "curse" by referring to Sukkah 28b, "As from when is it permitted to remove [the dishes from the sukkah when there is rain]? When one's porridge spoils. A parable: A servant came to mix a cup [of wine] for his master and he threw the cup in his face." Rashi clarifies that it is as if the master told the servant, "I do not want you to serve me." Likewise, it is as if God does not delight in the service of His people, for when one prays for rain during Sukkot it is as if one is asking God to throw His cup in one's face.

<sup>3</sup>The key to understanding the argument is in distinguishing between the verbs "mention" and "request." Both terms refer to different prayers or blessings in the Standing Prayer, called the Amidah. "Mention" refers to an insertion into the second blessing of the Amidah, *tichiyat hametim* (resurrection), while "request" refers to an insertion into the ninth blessing of the Amidah, *birkat shanim* (blessing of years). See Elbogen 39, 44. R. Eliezer argues that "mentioning," that is, saying the insertion in *tichiyat hametim*, does not ask God for it to rain at present, unlike "requesting" in *birkat shanim*.

<sup>4</sup>One need not "mention" in any specific season.

*musaf*] makes mention while the first [during *shacharit*] does not mention. On the first day of Passover, the first does make mention and the late does not mention.<sup>5</sup>

II. **Gemara:** Where does the Tanna<sup>6</sup> [get the assumption that we are obligated to mention at all] that he teaches “as from when”?

A. [Because] it is taught elsewhere that we mention the “power of rain” in *tichiyat hametim* [the prayer for giving life to the dead] and request [for rain] in *birkat shanim* [the blessing of years], and we say Havdalah in *chonen hada'at* [the prayer called “the giver of knowledge”].<sup>7</sup> So he teaches: When do we mention the “power of rain”?

1. Let him teach it there!<sup>8</sup> Why does he leave off teaching it until here?<sup>9</sup>

2. Rather, he proceeds from Rosh Hashanah, where it is taught in a Baraita: On the Festival [of Sukkot] we are judged for water.<sup>10</sup> He teaches: On the Festival we are judged for water, so he teaches: When do we mention “the power of rain.”<sup>11</sup>

B. And let him teach: When do we mention “rain”. What is meant by the “power of

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<sup>5</sup>The mishnah therefore mentions three authorities: R. Eliezer, R. Joshua, and R. Judah. As the Meiri will indicate, the Halacha is with R. Judah.

<sup>6</sup>The first anonymous teacher of our mishnah.

<sup>7</sup>Mishnah Berachot 5:2, a Tannaitic source. Also found in Berachot 33a, the Giver of Knowledge is the fourth blessing of the weekday Amidah.

<sup>8</sup>In Berachot in Seder Zeraim.

<sup>9</sup>In Seder Moed. In other words, why not teach when we begin mentioning the different prayers for rain in the same part of the Talmud that teaches about the wording of the prayers?

<sup>10</sup>Rosh Hashanah 16a.

<sup>11</sup>He teaches it here as a continuation of Tractate Rosh Hashanah, which, according to some editions, comes just before Ta'anit, where it mentions that on Sukkot the world is judged for rainfall. Therefore, in Seder Moed as well there is a starting point for this discussion.

rain”?

1. R. Jochanan said: Because it descends in power, as it is written (Job 9:10), *Who does great deeds which cannot be fathomed and wondrous deeds which cannot be numbered*, and it is written (Job 5:9-10), [*Who does great deeds which cannot be fathomed and wondrous deeds which cannot be numbered,*] *who gives rain to the earth and sends water over the fields*. What does this convey? Rabbah Bar Shilah taught [the meaning] comes from *fathomed* (Hebrew: *cheker*), that is, comprehension of God’s creation of the universe.<sup>12</sup> For it is written here [in Job 9:10], *Who does great deeds which cannot be fathomed* [in reference to rain] and it is written elsewhere (Isaiah 40:28), *Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is God from of old, Creator of the earth from end to end, He never grows faint or weary, His wisdom cannot be fathomed* [in reference to creation]. And it says (Psalms 65:7), *Who by His power fixed the mountains firmly, who is girded with might* [connecting creation to power].<sup>13</sup>

2. Where do we learn that this [“mentioning” rain] deals with prayer [specifically]? It is taught, concerning (Deut. 11:13), *Loving the Lord your God and serving Him with all of your heart*; what is meant by service of the heart? This means prayer. And it says afterwards, *I*

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<sup>12</sup>The technique is a *gezera shava*, or an analogy, in how the word *cheker* is used in two different contexts, and then showing how the second instance is equivalent to “power,” thereby connecting “power” back to the first.

<sup>13</sup>Rashi teaches that the verses from Job mention “cannot be fathomed” in connection with rainfall. “Cannot be fathomed” also is mentioned concerning the creation of the world in Isaiah, and the creation of the world, as Psalms teaches, is an act of power. Therefore, rain is associated with power through creation. In other words, as H. Malter writes, the logic is A=B, B=C, so A=C. See Henry Malter, *Masechet Ta’anit Min Talmud Bavli*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967), 11.

*will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late.*<sup>14</sup>

3. R. Jochanan said: Three keys in the power of the Holy One Blessed Be He were not entrusted to any intermediary, and they are: the key of rain, the key of childbirth, and the key of giving life to the dead.<sup>15</sup> Concerning the key of rain it is written (Deut. 28:12), *The Lord will open for you His bounteous store, the heavens, to provide rain for your land in season.* Concerning the key of childbirth, where do we learn of it? It is written (Gen. 30:22), *Now God remembered Rachel; God heeded [2b] her and opened her womb.* Concerning the key of giving life to the dead, where do we learn it? It is written (Ezek. 37:13), *You shall know, O My people, that I am the Lord when I have opened your graves.* In the West [the Land of Israel] they say: Also the key of sustenance, as it is written (Ps. 145:16), *You give it openhandedly, [feeding every creature to its heart's content].* What is the reason that R. Jochanan did not count this [as a fourth key]? He could answer you: rain is the same for us as sustenance.<sup>16</sup>

#### The Meiri

The Meiri adds the following reasons as to why rain is associated with power, specifically why the "power of rain" is mentioned in the second blessing of the Amidah, whose theme is the giving of life to the dead. 1)

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<sup>14</sup>Rain and prayer (or "service") are also linked, thus Scripture specifically indicates that one needs to pray concerning the power of rain.

<sup>15</sup>The root of the Hebrew word for "key" (*maphteah*) is the same as the verb "to open." All of the cited verses employ the verb "to open."

<sup>16</sup>There are three parts to the answer as to why rain is associated with power. The first is that rain is part of the creative power of the universe. The second part is that part of this creative power deals with prayer and service (*avodah* = Temple service), that one serves God with the heart and sustains the universe through prayer the way that the Israelites once served God and sustained the universe through Temple worship. The third part reflects on how God is the sole keeper of the powers of life and death in the world.

Dispensing rainfall is as weighty as giving life to the dead (Berachot 33a).

2) Hosea associates resurrecting power with rain (6:2-3), *After two days God will revive us, in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His presence...and God shall come to us like rain, the late rain that waters the earth* (Palestinian Talmud Ta'anit 1:1). 3) Rain comes down in might.

Finally, 4) rain is part of the power of God's providence, for not only does the lightning only strike where God directs it, but also (as it is taught in Bereshit Rabbah 4:5), human beings cannot sift wheat without the grains immediately mixing with one another, yet the rain falls from the heaven in separate drops, not combining into a torrent that would obliterate the earth.

The Meiri also clarifies the debate between R. Eliezer and R. Joshua and anticipates the issues of the next section. R. Eliezer's reasoning is that one should make the insertion into the second blessing of the Amidah at the same time that one begins to take up the lulav and etrog and offers the water libation, each of which remind God of the rain (see the next section). The reasoning is that one seeks to appease God with such devices before one makes an official request with the start of the rainy season. R. Joshua, on the other hand, feels that mentioning the "power of rain" is equivalent to asking for rain, and one does not want it to rain during Sukkot when there is the commandment to dwell in booths for such would be like a curse. "Dwelling" consists of eating at least one full meal and sleeping in the sukkah. Even though one has fulfilled one's duty of eating a full meal in the sukkah after the first night, one has not fulfilled the ideal sleeping in the sukkah all seven. It is also not in the festive spirit to only eat snacks in the sukkah during the holiday. The Geonim support R. Joshua, saying that even if rain during the days of Sukkot is not necessarily a curse, it certainly is not a blessing, and one should try to eat fourteen meals in the sukkah. R. Joshua further challenges R. Eliezer, saying that if mentioning the "power of rain" is not a prayer for rain, one can say the prayer all year round, and there

need be no provision to start saying the prayer near Sukkot. In fact, explains the Meiri, R. Eliezer claims that one may indeed mention the "power of rain" all year round, but one is obligated to say it with the onset of Sukkot.

The Halacha, however, is with neither R. Joshua or R. Eliezer, but with the third opinion, R. Judah, who begins mentioning the "power of rain" during *musaf* of Shemini Atzeret and ceases with the morning prayers of the first day of Passover. The Meiri then explains why the *shacharit* and *musaf* prayers are indicated, and not the evening prayers. The Palestinian Talmud clarifies that not everyone is present during the evening, and so it is less confusing to make the change in prayers between the morning and the afternoon. Further, during the *musaf* prayers, one's mind is more settled, as explained by a midrash on a verse in Psalms 17:1, *Hear, O Lord, what is just* -- this indicates the Recitation of the Shema. *Heed my cry* -- this indicates the Prayer of Creation. *Give ear to my prayer, uttered without guile* -- this indicates the *musaf* (with the added phrase, *without guile*, indicating a more settled mind). There is, however, still some confusion as to whether "the last day" indicates Hoshana Rabba or Shemini Atzeret, and the Meiri recommends that a general announcement from the prayer leader will clear up any confusion between him and the congregation.



Ta'anit Section 2 (2b-4a)

I. [Mishnah:] Rabbi Eliezer says: From the first day of the Festival [of Sukkot], etc.<sup>17</sup>

A. [Gemara:] The question was asked: From where did R. Eliezer derive [this teaching]? Did he derive it from the lulav,<sup>18</sup> or did he derive it from the water libation?<sup>19</sup>

1. If he derived it from the lulav, just as lulav [can only be taken up] during the day, so also mentioning [the "powers of rain" can only be fulfilled] during the day.<sup>20</sup>

2. Or perhaps if he derived it from the water libation, just as the water libation [can be poured] during the evening, for a Master taught:<sup>21</sup> (Num. 29:18) *the meal offerings and libations*, even during the night, so also mentioning [the "powers of rain" can be fulfilled] during the evening.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>See the mishnah in section 1.

<sup>18</sup>The mitzvah of waving the four species, which takes place only in the day-time of Sukkot. Rashi explains, as will be said explicitly by R. Eliezer further on, the these species cannot live without water, so too the world cannot exist without water. Therefore, the lulav and etrog are used in prayers for rain.

<sup>19</sup>Sukkah 42b and Rosh Hashanah 16a teach that water was poured on the altar in Jerusalem during the seven days of Sukkot to elicit God's compassion for favorable rainfall. The water libation could occur during the night if one forgot it during the day.

<sup>20</sup>Therefore one would not start on the eve of the festival but only during the day of the holiday.

<sup>21</sup>Temurah 14a. The inclusion of their libations with the sacrifices indicates that may both be offered at night.

<sup>22</sup>Rashi explains, referring Sukkah 51b, that they would fill the water vessels at night or they could bring the animals for sacrifice at night along with their offerings (as derived from the Scriptural verse in Numbers) and therefore they could offer the water libation at night as well.

3. Come and hear [an answer]: R. Abbahu said: R. Eliezer derived it only from the lulav.

B. There are those who say R. Abbahu had a tradition from his teachers, and there are those who say he heard a Baraita.<sup>23</sup> What is this Baraita? [It runs as follows:] As from when do we mention the “power of rain”? R. Eliezer says: From the time of the taking up of the lulav [that is, the first day of Sukkot]. R. Joshua says: From the time we lay it down [that is, the end of Sukkot<sup>24</sup>]. R. Eliezer said: These four species only come to gain favor for rainfall, and just as these four species cannot exist without water, so the world cannot exist without water.<sup>25</sup> R. Joshua said to him [R. Eliezer]: Since rain can only be a sign of a curse during the Festival, why should one mention [the “power of rain”]? R. Eliezer answered him: I, too, did not say to request [for rain to come], but only to mention [that God] “causes the wind to blow and brings down the rain.” Just as one mentions “the resurrection of the dead” all year long, although it will only be in its due time, so also may we mention the “power of rain” all year long and it will only come in its due season.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, if one comes to mention [the “power of rain”] all year long, he may mention. Rabbi said: I say, at the time one stops requesting [rain, at Passover], so does

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<sup>23</sup>A teaching from the Tannaim, the sages of the Mishnah, that was not included in the Mishnah itself. The following text is a lengthier, alternative version than our mishnah.

<sup>24</sup>Rashi comments that this indicates the seventh day of Sukkot, but Tosafot clarifies that R. Joshua means the eighth day, Shemini Atzeret. Thus, one lays down the lulav at the end of the seventh day, during Maariv.

<sup>25</sup>Sukkah 37b.

<sup>26</sup>Thus these prayers are said together.

one stop mentioning [the "power of rain"].<sup>27</sup> R. Judah Ben Bathyra says: On the second day of the Festival [of Sukkot] one mentions [the "power of rain"]. R. Akiba says: On the sixth day of the Festival one mentions. R. Judah says in the name of R. Joshua:<sup>28</sup> The one who passes before the Ark [and the congregation to lead prayer] on the last day of the Festival [Shemini Atzeret], the late one [during *musaf*] makes mention while the first [during *shacharit*] does not mention. One the first day of Passover, the first does make mention and the late does not mention.<sup>29</sup>

1. R. Eliezer responded to R. Joshua perfectly! R. Joshua could respond to you: It is okay to mention the "resurrection of the dead," for every day is its due season, but can the rains come on any day that would be in its due season? [Obviously no,] for it is taught in a mishnah.<sup>30</sup> If the month of Nisan departs and rain descends, it is a sign of a curse, as it is said, (I Sam. 12:17) *It is the season of the wheat harvest today. [I will pray to the Lord and He will send thunder and rain; then you take thought and realize what a wicked thing you did in the sight of*

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<sup>27</sup>Rashi comments that this view is opposed to R. Eliezer. Rabbi, that is, R. Judah Ha-Nasi, claims that one should not "mention" during the summer months and during Sukkot because, even one only mentions for it to come during its proper season, such prayers are certainly ill-timed and not of blessing. The Meiri picks up on this as well.

<sup>28</sup>In the mishnah, "in the name of R. Joshua" was missing. One might think that this is the R. Joshua of the first opinion, either in our mishnah or the Baraita. Further on, however, the Gemara will clarify that this is a new figure, R. Joshua Ben Bathyra.

<sup>29</sup>There are thus five different opinions in this Baraita. The first is R. Eliezer's who derives the day one mentions from the lulav and says one should mention all seven days and in fact may do so all year. The second is R. Joshua's, who says one should begin mentioning when one stops taking up the lulav, that is, the eighth day, and one stops with Passover. R. Judah Ben Bathyra claims one begins on the second, as will be explained. R. Akiba claims one begins on the sixth, as will be explained. Finally, another R. Judah cites another R. Joshua by stating the exact times.

<sup>30</sup>Ta'anit 12b.

*the Lord when you asked for a king.*<sup>31</sup>

2. R. Judah Ben Bathyra says: On the second day of the Festival [of Sukkot] one mentions [the “power of rain”].

a. What is R. Judah Ben Bathyra’s reasoning? R. Judah Ben Bathyra says: It is said in connection with the second day (Num.29:18) *And libations* [with an extraneous plural ending, the Hebrew letter “mem”], and it is said in connection to the sixth day, *And its libations* [again with an extraneous plural ending, this time the Hebrew letter “yod”], and it is said in connection with the seventh day, *According to their law* [with an extraneous plural possessive, this time another “mem”]. Behold! “Mem,” “yod,” “mem” here spells “water” [the Hebrew word “mayim”]. Here is a hint of the water libation in the Torah.<sup>32</sup>

b. And what is the reason the second day is set to take up [the matter]? When Scripture hints at it [the water libation], it [begins] hinting with the second day.<sup>33</sup>

3. R. Akiba says: On the sixth day of the Festival one mentions, for it is said in connection with the sixth day, *And its libations*. Scripture is speaking of two libations, one a libation of water and one a libation of wine.

a. So let it mean both of them are of wine.

b. [R. Akiba] reasoned like R. Judah Ben Bathyra, who said it refers to

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<sup>31</sup>Rashi explains resurrection may only come in its due time but can start at any time. Rain, however, is not welcome at any time.

<sup>32</sup>The water libation is a prominent feature in the Mishnah (Sukkah 4:9) but is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah. In this piece of exegesis, the origins of the water libation are tied back into Scripture through oral tradition.

<sup>33</sup>Therefore, one “mentions” rain on the second day.

water.

[3a] c. If he [R. Akiba] reasons like him [R. Judah Ben Bathyra], then let him speak like him!

d. R. Akiba reasoned thus: When Scripture mentions an extra libation, it is written in connection to the sixth day.

4. It was taught in a Baraita<sup>34</sup> that R. Nathan says: (Num. 28:7) *To be poured* [*"hasekh nesekh"*] *in the sacred precinct as an offering of fermented drink to the Lord.*

Scripture speaks of two libations, one a libation of water and one a libation of wine.<sup>35</sup>

a. Perhaps both of them are wine? If so Scripture would have said, *hassekh hassekh* or *nasokh nesekh*.<sup>36</sup>

b. What is the reason for [two forms of the verb,] *hasekh nesekh*? Learn from it: One is of water and one is of wine.

5. However, who is it who taught: The water libation is offered all seven [days of Sukkot]? If it is R. Joshua, he would have said one day. If it is R. Akiba, he would have said two days. If it is R. Judah Ben Bathyra, he would have said six days.<sup>37</sup>

a. It was actually R. Judah Ben Bathyra, who reasoned like R. Judah in our

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<sup>34</sup> This is a parenthetical remark to the objections to R. Akiba's argument.

<sup>35</sup> The word-play here is on the phrase "to be poured," in Hebrew, "*hasech nesech*." The two different forms of the verb indicate two different libations.

<sup>36</sup> Using one form of the verb.

<sup>37</sup> R. Joshua would have it start on the last day of the eight days of Sukkot, leaving only this last day to make the offering. R. Akiba would have it start on the sixth day, leaving only two days left. R. Judah Ben Bathyra would have it start on the second day, leaving only six days left.

mishnah,<sup>38</sup> which says that R. Judah teaches: A vessel of a *log*-amount was used for the libation all eight days, but he [R. Judah Ben Bathyra] excludes the first day [and begins on the second day] and includes the eighth day.<sup>39</sup>

b. What is the reason he [R. Judah Ben Bathyra] teaches that it is not on the first day? Is it because Scripture hints [to the water libation] on the second day? Then the eighth day, too, [would be excluded], for Scripture hints also on the seventh day.<sup>40</sup>

c. Rather, it is R. Joshua. "The water libation is offered all seven days," for it is a law that has been received,<sup>41</sup> for R. Ami said in the name of R. Jochanan in the name of R. Nehuniah, a man of the valley of Beit Horatan: [the laws of] the ten young trees,<sup>42</sup> the willow of the brook,<sup>43</sup> and the water libation came to Moses at Sinai.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Sukkah 4:9.

<sup>39</sup>Rashi clarifies that R. Judah Ben Bathyra reasons like R. Judah not in including all eight days but by including the eighth day. That is, he includes the second through the eighth day, totally seven.

<sup>40</sup>As Rashi explains, the midrash of R. Judah Ben Bathyra which finds the word "*mayim*" woven into Num. 29:18 may begin on the second day (which would serve as the reason for beginning counting on the second day), but the final *mem* is on the seventh day, excluding the eighth. Using that midrash, one could only count from the second until the seventh day, coming up a day short.

<sup>41</sup>Rashi points out that, for R. Joshua, the issue of "mentioning" and the time of the water libation are two separate issues. "Mentioning" is linked to when one puts down the lulav, while the water libation is a *Halacha l'Moshe m'Sinai*.

<sup>42</sup>Orchards need to be let lay fallow one month before the Sabbatical year, but an area with ten young trees in fifty cubits could be worked until the very start of the Sabbatical year.

<sup>43</sup>The willow was used in circuits during Sukkot.

<sup>44</sup>The phrase "laws which came to Moses from Sinai" indicates a tradition whose origin is lost but is not in dispute. R. Joshua therefore agrees that the water libation lasts for seven days of Sukkot, independent of mentioning the "power of rain," although the reason why is unclear.

6. R. Judah says in the name of R. Joshua: The one who passes before the Ark [and the congregation to lead prayer] on the last day of the Festival [Shemini Atzeret], the late one [during *musaf*] makes mention while the first [during *shacharit*] does not mention. One the first day of Passover, the first does make mention and the late does not mention.<sup>45</sup>

a. Which R. Joshua? If you say the R. Joshua of our mishnah, he said he mentions on the last day of the Festival [of Sukkot, meaning the morning prayers or perhaps the eve before, while here the afternoon prayers are indicated. If you say,] rather, R. Joshua of the Baraita, it says from the time one lays down the lulav.

b. Further, here it is taught, R. Judah says in the name of Ben Bathyra: The one who passes before the Ark [and the congregation to lead prayer] on the last day of the Festival [Shemini Atzeret], the late one [during *musaf*] makes mention.<sup>46</sup> Which Ben Bathyra? If you say R. Judah Ben Bathyra, it says on the second day of the Festival one mentions.

c. R. Nachman Bar Isaac answered: It is R. Joshua Ben Bathyra.<sup>47</sup> Sometimes he is referred to by his name and sometimes by his father's name, the early before he was ordained and the late after he was ordained.

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<sup>45</sup> This is quoted from the Baraita which appeared above. There are a number of sages with the same name yet conflicting views. There is R. Joshua of the mishnah, R. Judah of the mishnah, R. Joshua of the Baraita, and here R. Judah Ben Bathyra speaking in the name of R. Joshua. Rather than say that contradictory traditions are held by the same authority, the Gemara seeks to find an individual personality to be consistent with each view.

<sup>46</sup> Rashi claims that "here" is in the Mechilta, thus presenting another Tannaitic version.

<sup>47</sup> Unable to hold this last view to be consistent with any of the previous, it is decided that a new figure, R. Joshua Ben Bathyra, has entered the debate, and not R. Joshua Ben Hanania who is normally just called "R. Joshua."

II. It is taught [in a Baraita]: Concerning dew and winds, the sages do not obligate one to mention, but if one wishes [lit. comes] to mention [them], one may mention.<sup>48</sup> What is the reason? Rabbi Chanina said: Because they are not withheld.<sup>49</sup>

A. From where do we learn that dew is not withheld? It is written, (I Kings 17:1) *Elijah the Tishbite, an inhabitant of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain except at my bidding."* And [further on] it is written, (I Kings 18:1) *"Go, appear before Ahab; then I will send rain upon the earth,"* while he [Elijah] did not speak of dew to him [Ahab]. What is the reason? Because [3b] it is never withheld.

1. But if it is never withheld, why did he [Elijah] swear to him [Ahab, that dew would be withheld]?

2. This is what he actually said: Even dew of blessing would not come.

3. Then let him [say] he will restore dew of blessing!

4. Because it would not be a discernable thing.<sup>50</sup>

B. Where do we learn that winds are never withheld? R. Joshua Ben Levi said: Scripture says, (Zechariah 2:10) *"Though I swept you [there] like the four winds of heaven -- declares the Lord."* What did God say to Israel? [Did He say] I will scatter you to the four corners of the

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<sup>48</sup>As Rashi indicates, the words to be included are: "who causes the wind to blow," as well as, "who causes dew to descend," even in the winter.

<sup>49</sup>Rashi points out that it is the theological assumption that God will not withhold what is absolutely necessary for the survival of humankind. Regular forces, such as dew, normal winds, etc. are therefore not interrupted by divine providence.

<sup>50</sup>Rashi explains that the Gemara expands what Elijah says, maintaining that regular dew was not withheld but special dew of blessing was. He did not mention it in the second verse because the change could not be seen with the naked eye and could give Ahab an excuse to claim that nothing really happened.



earth or like the four? To the four He would have said, but God wanted to say, "Just as the world cannot exist without the winds, so the world cannot exist without Israel."

C. Rabbi Chanina continued: Therefore, during the days of summer, if [the prayer leader] says, "who causes the wind to blow," they do not make him start over; if he says, "causes the rain to fall," they make him start over. In the rainy season, if he does not "who causes the wind to blow," they do not make him start over, but if he does not say, "causes the rain to fall," they do make him start over. Not only that, but even if he says, "who removes the rain and makes the dew flee," they do not make him start over.<sup>51</sup>

II. It is taught [in a Baraita]: Concerning clouds and winds, the sages do not obligate one to mention, but if one wishes to mention [them], one may mention. What is the reason? Because they are not withheld.

A. Are they not withheld? Did not R. Joseph report [a Baraita], (Deut. 11:17) *He will shut up the skies* -- from clouds and from winds.

1. You say from clouds and from rains, or maybe it is only from rain?
2. It says [in the same verse] *there will be no rain*, see, rain is already mentioned.

So what do I establish with the phrase *shut up the skies*? From clouds and from winds.

3. There is a contradiction [between the Baraita of R. Joseph and the preceding Baraita] with the winds mentioned in both and the clouds mentioned in both.

a. There is no contradiction with regard to clouds. In the early, [the clouds appear] before [the rain, and these clouds are never withheld], and in the late, after [which

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<sup>51</sup>Rashi explains that they do not make him start over because wind and dew are never withheld in any case.

may be withheld].

b. There is no contradiction with regard to winds. In the early, normal winds [are meant, which are never withheld], and in the late, extraordinary winds [are indicated, which are sometimes withheld].

c. Extraordinary winds are suitable [for use] in a barn [for winnowing].

d. It is possible [to separate the kernel from the chaff] with sieves.<sup>52</sup>

B. Clouds and winds are second [in benefit only] to rain. Which [clouds] are they? 'Ulla said, or some say, R. Judah, the clouds after [the rain].

1. [Are we] to say that such are beneficial? It is written, (Deut. 28:24) *The Lord will make the rain of your land dust and sand*. Of this was 'Ulla, or some say, R. Judah, speaking, a wind after the rain?<sup>53</sup>

2. This is not a contradiction. The first [meant by 'Ulla or R. Judah] refers to those that come gently, the late to those that come violently. (If you want, I can further say,<sup>54</sup>) the late raises up dust, while the early does not raise up dust.

3. R. Judah said: Wind after a rain is as [beneficial as] rain itself; clouds after a rain is as [beneficial as] rain itself. Sunshine after a rain is as [beneficial as] two rainfalls!

a. So what does he exclude [if they are all so beneficial? Why are clouds and winds second to rain?]

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<sup>52</sup>Rashi: Strong winds, therefore, are not absolutely necessary for humankind's survival and may be withheld.

<sup>53</sup>Apparently a wind after a rainfall would coat damp produce with dust.

<sup>54</sup>Usually this phrase introduces something new. The original text puts this in parentheses because the phrase does not appear to belong, and Rashi believes it should be skipped.

b. He excludes flashes during the night and sun between the clouds [which are of no benefit].

4. Raba said: Snow is beneficial to mountains the way that five rainfalls are beneficial to the land, as it is said, (Job 37:6) *He commands the snow, "Fall to the ground!" And the downpour of rain, His mighty downpour of rains [is a sign on every man's hand, that all men may know His doings]*.<sup>55</sup>

5. Raba further said: Snow [is good] for mountains, heavy rain [is good] for trees, gentle rains [are good] for produce, [4a] and a drizzling rain [Aramaic: *urpilla*] is even [good] for a seed under a clod of earth. What is "*urpilla*"? "*Uru*" [wake up] -- "*pillei*" [cracks].<sup>56</sup>

6. Raba further said: A young [intelligent] rabbinical student is like a seed under a clod of earth, for when he sprouts, he sprouts.<sup>57</sup>

7. Raba further said: A young rabbinical student that gets enraged [lit. heated], it is the Torah that inflames him, as it is said, (Jeremiah 23:29) *Behold my word is like fire -- declares the Lord*. And R. Ashi continued: Every sage who is not as hard as iron is not a sage, for it is said, (ibid.) *And like a hammer that shatters rock!*

a. R. Abba said to R. Ashi: You learn this from there [in Scripture, in Jeremiah], but we learn this from here, (Deut. 8:9) *A land whose rocks are iron*. Do not read *whose rocks* ["*abaneiha*"] but rather read "whose builders" ["*boneiha*"].

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<sup>55</sup> Rashi: Whereas snow is mentioned once in the verse, "downpour," "rain," "downpour," and "rains" (the last counted twice because it is plural) adds up to five. The ratio is thus 1:5.

<sup>56</sup> Drizzling rain sinks into the cracked earth and awakens the seeds to sprout.

<sup>57</sup> Rashi: Once he begins to learn or once his name is recognized, his career keeps going.

b. Rabina said: Despite this, a man needs to learn to calm his soul [that is, to be gentle], as it is said, (Ecclesiastes 11:10) *Banish anger from your heart [and pluck sorrow out from your flesh].*

III. R. Samuel Bar Nachmani said in the name of R. Jochanan:<sup>58</sup> Three made improper requests<sup>59</sup> [of God], two of which were answered as if the request were proper and one not. They are: Eliezer, servant of Abraham, Saul Ben Kish, and Jephtha the Gileadite.

A. Eliezer, servant of Abraham [said], (Genesis 24:14) *Let the maiden to whom I say, "Please, lower your jar [that I may drink, and who replies, "Drink, and I will also water your camels" -- let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac].* Could this be, even if she was lame or blind? God responded to him as if it was proper [however], and he happened upon Rebecca.

B. Saul Ben Kish [said with regard to Goliath], (I Samuel 17:25) *The man who kills him will be rewarded by the king with great riches; he will also give him his daughter in marriage.* Could this be, even if he was a slave or a *mamzer*?<sup>60</sup> God responded to him as if it was proper

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<sup>58</sup> The following aggadic piece initially changes topic but ends with the theme of rain and dew. One can see a certain thematic unity here: the previous aggada tells of promising young scholars who might in their righteousness become angry and do something improper. This leads to biblical figures who made improper requests of God. This in turn continues with a stronger censure against those who make not just improper but requests contrary to the will of God. Finally, with respect to rain and Messianic redemption, the passage ends with requests to control over the universe. In each, one can see both aspects of judgement and compassion on the part of God.

<sup>59</sup>That is, these requests were poorly thought out, for if one took them literally they would have an undesirable result.

<sup>60</sup> A child of an illegitimate union under Jewish law. Such are prohibited from marrying anyone else except for other *mamzerim* [pl.]. See Adin Steinsaltz, *The Talmud. The Steinsaltz Edition. A Reference Guide.* (New York: Random House, 1989), 218.

[however], and he happened upon David.

C. Jephtha the Gileadite [said], (Judges 11:31) *Then whatever comes out of the door of my house [to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's and shall be offered by me a burnt offering].*<sup>61</sup> Could this be, even if [what came out of his house] was improper for slaughter?<sup>62</sup> God responded in an unusual way, and he happened upon his daughter.<sup>63</sup> This is of what the prophet [Jeremiah] spoke to Israel, (Jeremiah 8:22), *Is there no balm in Gilead? Can no physician be found?*<sup>64</sup> For it is written [concerning God's view of child sacrifice], (Jeremiah 19:5) *[They have built shrines to Baal, to put their children to the fire as burnt offerings to Baal --] which I never commanded, never decreed, and which never came to My mind.* [The phrase] "*which I never commanded*" refers to the son of Meisha, king of Moab, as it is said, (II Kings 3:27) *So he took his first-born son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him up on the wall as a burnt offering.* "*Never decreed*" refers to Jephtha. "*And which never came to My mind*" refers to Isaac son of Abraham.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Jephtha was going to war against the Ammonites and made this improper oath.

<sup>62</sup>For instance, as Rashi explains, a dog or other animal that cannot be offered as sacrifice.

<sup>63</sup>His daughter came out to greet him and welcome him home from battle. Jephtha immediately despaired over his vow, and his daughter went into the hills for two months. Upon her return, Scripture says, (Jud. 11:39) *He did to her as he had vowed.* Rabbinic sources, as Rashi explains, however, (Genesis Rabbah 6) claim that his vow was automatically null and void because it referred to a human being. Jephtha and his daughter, however, thought the vow was binding, heightening the tragedy.

<sup>64</sup>Rashi points out that the Midrash understands this to mean that the "balm" or "physician" is Pinhas the prophet who would have declared Jephtha's vow null and void. Jephtha, however, did not seek out his advice, nor did Pinhas come to him.

<sup>65</sup>Rashi has an extensive series of comments illustrating that God never desires human sacrifice. He cites a number of aggadic sources to support the contention that usually the

D. R. Berekiah said: Also the congregation of Israel made an improper request, and the Holy One Blessed Be He responded as if it was proper, as it is said, (Hosea 6:3) *Let us pursue obedience to the Lord, and we shall become obedient. His appearance is as sure as daybreak, so let Him come to us like rain, [like the late rain that refreshes the earth].*<sup>66</sup> The Holy One Blessed Be He said, "My daughter, you ask something that sometimes is desirable and sometimes is not desirable, but I will be to you like something which is always desirable." As it is said, (Hosea 14:6) *I will be to Israel like dew.* She made another request that was improper, (Song of Songs 8:6) *Let me be a seal upon your heart, like a seal upon your arm.* The Holy One Blessed Be He said to her, "My daughter, you ask for something that sometimes is seen and sometimes cannot be seen,"<sup>67</sup> but I will make you something that can always be seen." As it is said, (Isaiah 49:16) *See, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands.*

#### The Meiri

The Meiri raises two issues at the beginning of his commentary to this section. Both issues concern the libation of water offered on Sukkot. First, the Meiri teaches that the Water Libation, as is explained in Tractate Sukkot,<sup>68</sup> took place all seven days of the Festival. In this section, however, two different reasons are given as to why. The first is that the Water Libation is alluded to in the Torah, as seen in the midrash of R. Judah

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commandment to sacrifice a child comes from either Satan ("the prosecutor") or human misunderstanding. In the case of Isaac, for instance, the commandment was to "offer him" but never to "slay him."

<sup>66</sup>God's deliverance is likened to rain.

<sup>67</sup>Rashi explains that these parts of the body are covered with clothes.

<sup>68</sup>See Mishnah Sukkot 4:9. The offering of the Water Libation was an elaborate ritual that consisted of a procession, shofar blasts, and a dramatized pouring from vessel to vessel.

Ben Bathyra and R. Akiba. The second reason is that the Water Libation is a tradition given to Moses at Mount Sinai that, although the origin and reason behind it are lost, its existence is not in dispute. The Meiri clarifies that both of these reasons are given because one might mistakenly think from the midrash that the Water Libation only occurs during part of the Festival and not on all seven days, that is, on those days which are "hinted" at by the rabbis. The status given to the Water Libation as a tradition given to Moses from Sinai eliminates the possibility of this error.

The second issue concerns the Water Libation in relation to the lulav. R. Eliezer, it is taught, derives his teaching from the mitzvah of taking up the lulav, which can only be done during the day. Another possibility is that he derived his teaching from the Water Libation, which may be done in the evening. The Meiri claims that this is confusing because normally the Water Libation may only be given during the day as well, which he demonstrates at great length. This would render the following discussing completely mistaken. There are commentators, however, who claim that if one has forgotten the Water Libation during the day, one may offer it during the night. This, then, gives a basis for this section's discussion. Only R. Eliezer bases his ruling on the lulav, but the remaining three sages base their opinions as to when one begins "mentioning" on the water libation.

The Meiri continues by focusing almost exclusively on the Halacha of prayer, that is, what one is obligated to say and what one is not. Concerning dew, wind, and clouds, one is not obligated to mention them in prayer because, in their regular state, they are never withheld. God does not deprive the universe and humankind of what it needs to exist. This may be seen especially in the need for strong winds. The Gemara presumes that God knows human beings have appropriate tools for winnowing and therefore can feel free to make strong winds irregular. The purpose of the prayers, it appears, is to align the prayers of the community with the regular cycles of nature and human

need.

The Meiri then raises a legal question posed by some authorities that, if one mentions "dew" in the second blessing of the Amidah during the rainy season but does not mention "rain," has one fulfilled one's duty? The answer comes from the Palestinian Talmud, Berachot 5:2, which reads, "One who stands [to be the prayer leader] in the rainy season and mentions dew, they do not make him start over. One who stands in a time of dew [the dry season] and mentions rain, they make him start over." But then it reads that mentioning dew or wind in the dry season is optional, that one need not say "dew" in the dry season. This second clause appears problematic because one might think from the first case that if one omits "dew" during the dry season one needs to start over but if one omits "dew" in the second case one need not start over. The answer is that the mentioning of dew is entirely secondary; the issue is if one mentions rain or not. One can omit or mention dew all year round, but one may only mention rain in its season. Asking for rain out of season is like asking for a curse, but mentioning or not mentioning "dew" is of no consequence. (Some understand a different problem here that the Meiri mentions but rejects. How can something that is optional, i.e. the mentioning of dew, take the place of something that is obligatory, i.e. the mentioning of rain in its season? The answer is that dew is a light form of rain and may in this instance be an adequate substitute.)

The case is different regarding a later blessing in the Amidah, the Blessing of Years. One prays in this blessing for a fertile season, asking for "blessing" during the dry season and "dew and rain" in the rainy season. The dew asked for in the rainy season is not regular dew that appears year round but "dew of blessing," that is, dew that supports extra growth. Both this "dew of blessing" and rain are the essential part of the Blessing of Years and may not be omitted. If one accidentally skipped them, one has the opportunity to mention them later in the blessing, "One Who Hears Prayer." If



one forgets to petition here as well and walks away from the place where one was praying, one must go back to the Blessing of Years to correct the mistake. If one is still standing in one's place and is reminded of one's error, one need only go back to the One Who Hears Prayer. The Meiri acknowledges that the Tosafot disagrees with this last statement, claiming that if one has left one's place, one needs to return all the way to the beginning of one's prayers, and if one has not left one's place, one needs to return to the One Who Hears Prayer. The difference, then, is whether, if one has left the place where one was standing, there is a need to go back to the very beginning or only to the Blessing of Years. The Meiri claims that his is the more consistent approach.

With respect to clouds, also mentioned in this section, the Meiri explains that although clouds benefit crops and human beings enormously, such as providing shade to keep crops moist after a rain, they have the same status as dew which is never withheld. There are other interpretations as to the benefits of clouds. Rashi believes that only clouds that come before a rain are of such benefit that they are never withheld, but clouds after a rain may be withheld. The Ravad's (Rabbi Abraham Ben David of Posquieres, 1120-1197) interpretation is that there is never a sufficient need to withhold clouds, for clouds that come before a rain are part of the rain process, and clouds after a rain have very little benefit. Therefore, it would be superfluous to mention clouds in prayer.

The Meiri concludes this section by emphasizing the comment that a young Torah scholar should remove anger from his heart, for although he sees negligence or improper performance of commandments, he should teach patiently and calmly rather than cause any harm whatsoever.

I. [Mishnah:] We only request rain [until close to the rainy season].

A. [Gemara:] It was thought [by the Amoraim] that "requesting" and "mentioning" were the same thing.<sup>69</sup> [But] then who is the author of the [above] statement? Rabba said: It is R. Joshua who said, "From the time that we put away [the lulav]."<sup>70</sup> Abaye said to him [Rabba]: You can say even R. Eliezer [is the Tanna, if he thought that] "requesting" is one thing and "mentioning" is another.<sup>71</sup>

B. There are some who have this version [of the above text]: Shall we say [4b] it is R. Joshua, who said, "From the time that we put away [the lulav]? Abaye said to him [Rabba]: You can say even R. Eliezer [is the Tanna, if he thought that] "requesting" is one thing and "mentioning" is another.<sup>72</sup>

II. [Until when do we "request" rain?] R. Judah says: Until Passover concludes. [R. Meir says: Until the month of Nisan goes by, as it is said, (Joel 2:23) *For He has given you the early rain in [His] kindness, now He makes the rain fall [as] formerly.*]

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<sup>69</sup>As Rashi explains, that the use of the word "requests" in our mishnah is an unusual usage in that it does not indicate the prayer *Birkat Shanim* but is equivalent to "mentioning."

<sup>70</sup>Who said we begin to "mention" when we put away the lulav at the end of Sukkot, which, as Rashi points out, is the beginning of the rainy season.

<sup>71</sup>R. Eliezer, who might have differentiated between "requesting" and "mentioning," does dispute when one begins to "mention" but may agree over "requesting" and thus be the speaker of this statement.

<sup>72</sup>There is only a slight variation in the texts cited in the Vilna edition. H. Malter, however, has revealed a text where the second version has a completely different beginning. It begins: "It was thought [by the Amoraim] that "requesting" and "mentioning" are two different things."

A. A contradiction was pointed out [in R. Judah's statements by citing,] "Until when do we "request" rain? R. Judah says: Until Passover concludes. R. Meir says: Until the month of Nisan goes by."<sup>73</sup>

1. R. Chisda replied: This is not a contradiction. Here [in the late statement] one "requests" while here [in the early statement] one "mentions"<sup>74</sup> One continues to "request" [until Passover concludes] but one ceases to "mention" on the first day of the holiday.

2. 'Ulla said: This [resolution] by R. Chisda is as difficult (Proverbs 10:26) *like vinegar to the teeth, like smoke to the eyes*. Just as one "mentions" at a time [from Shemini Atzeret until the time of the first rainfall] where one does not "request," is it not logical that in a place where one does "request" one should [also] "mention"? Rather, said 'Ulla, there are two Tannaim [with two different versions] as to the opinion of R. Judah.

3. R. Joseph said: What is [meant by] "Until Passover concludes"? Until the first Passover prayer leader concludes, who descends [from before the congregation] on the first of the Festival of Passover.<sup>75</sup>

a. Abaye said to him [R. Joseph]: Is there place for "requesting" during the Festival [liturgy]?

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<sup>73</sup>The contradiction is between the first statement by R. Judah, that, on the first day of Passover, the first [prayer leader, during Shacharit] makes "mention" but the late [during *musaf*] does not make mention, and this statement, that one "requests" until Passover concludes.

<sup>74</sup>Which are two different prayers, "mentioning" indicating *morid hagashem* in *tichiyat hametim* while requests indicates *ten tal u'matar* in *birkat shanim*.

<sup>75</sup>This would harmonize R. Judah's statements, that one would cease both "mentioning" and "requesting" on Shacharit of the first day of Passover. However, there is a problem with "requesting" at all on Yom Tov.

b. He [R. Joseph] said to him [Abaye]: Yes. The Meturgemon may "request."<sup>76</sup>

c. [Abaye responded]: May the Meturgemon "request" something not incumbent upon the community? [Obviously no.<sup>77</sup>]

4. Rather, [Abaye concluded] 'Ulla's [explanation] is the clearest.

5. Rabbah said: What is [meant by] "Until Passover concludes"? Until the time of slaughtering the Passover sacrifice concludes.<sup>78</sup> Just as its beginning, so its end. Just as in the beginning [of the rainy season] one "mentions" without "requesting," so in the end [of the rainy season] when one does not "request," one still "mentions."<sup>79</sup>

6. Abaye replied: It is okay that in the beginning [of the rainy season] one "mentions" [without "requesting"]. "Mentioning" finds favor [with God] in preparation for "requesting." But in the end [of the rainy season], what need is there to find favor [with God] in preparation for "requesting?" Rather, 'Ulla's [explanation] is the clearest.

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<sup>76</sup>As Rashi indicates, the Meturgemon is the person who translates and gives the sermon. During the sermon or explanation, this "expounder" may pray for rain.

<sup>77</sup>Rashi explains: It is not the right custom (*derech erez*) for the Meturgemon to ever pray for something not incumbent upon the community since Yom Tov is not the right time to ask for rain.

<sup>78</sup>Rashi: This means noon on the fourteenth of Nisan, before the first day of Passover. Therefore, one would stop making the insertion into *birkat shanim* a day before one would stop making "mention," that is, making the insertion into *tichiyat hametim*.

<sup>79</sup>Just as at the start of the rainy season one begins "mentioning" before one begins "requesting" (see next section), so too at the end of the rainy season. One would stop "requesting" by noon on the eve of Passover and cease to "mention" on the next day.

B. R. Assi said in the name of R. Jochanan: The Halacha is according to R. Judah.<sup>80</sup> R. Zera said to R. Assi: Did R. Jochanan really say so? For it is taught [in a Baraita]: On the third of Marcheshvan they "request" rain. Rabban Gamaliel says: On the seventh. And R. Eleazar<sup>81</sup> said: The Halacha is according to Rabban Gamaliel.

1. He [R. Assi] said to him [R. Zera]: You put one authority against another [R. Jochanan against R. Eleazar].<sup>82</sup> [Or] if you want, I can say that there is no contradiction. Here [in R. Eleazar's statement] they speak of "requesting," and here [in R. Jochanan's statement] they speak of "mentioning."<sup>83</sup>

2. [R. Zera said to R. Assi:] But did not R. Jochanan say: At a time when one "requests," one "mentions?"<sup>84</sup>

3. [R. Assi answered R. Zera:] That [statement] refers to ceasing [to pray].<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Rashi: R. Judah, who said, "The one who passes before the Ark, etc." We begin to "mention" in the *musaf* service on Shemini Atzeret. The Gemara leaves the decision as to when we cease "requesting" until later.

<sup>81</sup>This is R. Eleazar the Amora, for he comes after Rabban Gamaliel.

<sup>82</sup>A dispute has formed between R. Jochanan citing the Halacha in the name of R. Judah, that one begins "mentioning" on Shemini Atzeret, and R. Eleazar citing the Halacha in the name of R. Gamaliel, that one begins "requesting" on the seventh of Marcheshvan.

<sup>83</sup>R. Judah's statement from our mishnah, which is cited as the law in the name of R. Jochanan, is about "mentioning," while the law of the seventh of Marcheshvan pertains to "requesting." Therefore, the statements are about two different prayers, and the authorities agree with one another.

<sup>84</sup>Rashi: And at a time that one does not "mention," one does not "request." Therefore, R. Jochanan cannot agree with R. Eleazar if both "mentioning" and "requesting" begin at the same time because R. Jochanan holds with R. Judah that one begins to "mention" Shemini Atzeret.

<sup>85</sup>Rashi explains that one ceases them together with Passover, for one never "requests" without also "mentioning," but this has nothing to do with when they might begin.

4. [R. Zera said to R. Assi:] But did not R. Jochanan [explicitly] say: At a time when one begins to "mention," one begins to "request?" When one ceases to "request," one ceases to "mention."<sup>86</sup>

5. [R. Assi answered R. Zera:] Rather, there is not a contradiction. This [R. Eleazar in the name of R. Gamaliel] refers to us [Babylonian Jews], and that [R. Jochanan in the name of R. Judah] refers to them [Palestinian Jews].<sup>87</sup>

6. [R. Zera still objects:] Why are we different? Is it because we have produce in the fields?<sup>88</sup> [Postponing until the seventh of Marcheshvan applies to them,] also, for they have pilgrims [who have come to Jerusalem for Sukkot and need to return home].<sup>89</sup>

7. R. Jochanan speaks when the Temple is no longer standing [and there are no pilgrimages and no delay in the rainy season as in Babylonia, therefore one can begin "requesting" immediately after Sukkot].

8. Now that you have come to this [conclusion], both [teachings, that one begins "mentioning" after Sukkot and that one begins "mentioning" and "requesting" together] apply to

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<sup>86</sup>Therefore, R. Jochanan would have us begin and end both "mentioning" and "requesting" simultaneously. Therefore, R. Jochanan holding with R. Judah that one "mentions" on Shemini Atzeret is in conflict with R. Gamaliel's ruling that one begins "requesting" on the seventh of Marcheshvan.

<sup>87</sup>Rashi clarifies that the harvest began later in Babylonia, so the "request" for rain also began later. Therefore, in Babylonia, one begins "mentioning" (*morid hagashem* in *tichiyat hametim*) at the end of Sukkot and begins "requesting" (*ten tal u'matar* in *birkat shanim*) on the seventh of Marcheshvan, whereas in Palestine, one began both at the end of Sukkot.

<sup>88</sup>Lit. "desert," but Rashi defines it as "fields."

<sup>89</sup>Rashi: Rain would be a hardship for pilgrims upon their return, so why should one "mention?" R. Zera is assuming that R. Jochanan is speaking of a time when the Temple was still standing or perhaps a Messianic time.

them [the Palestinian Jews], and there is no contradiction. The late applies to when the Temple was standing. The early applies to when the Temple was no longer standing. But as for us, who observe two days [of Shemini Atzeret, the last day of Sukkot], how should we act?<sup>90</sup>

C. Rabba said: One begins [to "mention"] during *musaf* [of the eighth day], ceases during *mincha*, *aravit*, and *shacharit* [following], and begin again on *musaf* [of the ninth day].<sup>91</sup>

1. Samuel said to them [the sages]: Go and say to Abba:<sup>92</sup> After you have declared the day holy are you to make it mundane?<sup>93</sup> Rather, says Samuel, One begins [to "mention"] during *musaf* and *mincha* [of the eighth day], ceases during *aravit* and *shacharit* [on the next day], and begins again on *musaf* [of the ninth day]. [5a]

2. Rabba [however] said: When one has begun [to "mention"] already, one should not cease. And so did R. Shesheth say: When one has begun [to "mention"] already, one should not cease. Rab even withdrew his statement, that R. Hananel said in the name of Rab: One counts twenty-one days [from Rosh Hashanah to establish Shemini Atzeret], like the way that one counts ten days from Rosh Hashanah until Yom HaKippurim and begins, and when one has begun [to

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<sup>90</sup>According to the law of Yom Tov Sheni (see Beitzah 4b), in the times of the Amoraim of Babylonia, the calendar was established by the report by witnesses of the new moon. A disparity could arise between when the holidays were declared in the Land of Israel and when the Diaspora would be informed. To cover all possibilities, holidays were celebrated for two days, either one of which could be the real holiday as declared in Palestine. Therefore, as Rashi points out, the eighth day could be the real seventh day and the ninth could be the real eighth day.

<sup>91</sup>Therefore one follows the literal wording of R. Judah, that one "mentions" on *musaf* on either possible day that is the end of Sukkot.

<sup>92</sup>Abba is the proper name of Rabba.

<sup>93</sup>Rashi: After you have made the eighth day, which is possibly the seventh day, holy by "mentioning" the powers of rain as R. Judah decreed, are you to make the same day mundane during the afternoon *mincha* service?

"mention"] already, one should not cease. Thus is the law: when one has begun [to "mention"] already, one should not cease.

### The Meiri

The Meiri indicates that the line of our mishnah, that we only request rain close to the rainy season, is secondary to the topic that seeks to establish a time for mentioning, but nevertheless, the relationship between the two prayers is explored. The Halacha as to when one begins "mentioning," that is, the insertion into of *morid hagashem* into *tichiyat hametim*, follows the opinion of Judah Ben Bathyra, that one begins on *musaf* of the last day of Sukkot, namely, Shemini Atzeret. Mixed into this theme is the clause that one only "requests," that is, inserts *ten tal u'matar* into *birkat shanim*, until after Sukkot is over and close to the rainy season, that is, shortly after one begins to "mention."

The Meiri points out that the Gemara digresses to explain a difference between the liturgy as to when the Temple was still standing versus now that the Temple is not. During the Temple period, there were pilgrims to Jerusalem, and they delayed the "request" for rain until the seventh of Marcheshvan. When the Temple is no longer standing, it was proper to keep postponing the prayer for rain because of a later harvest in Babylonia.

(The Meiri also returns to the subject of the law of ten trees which appears to be a complete digression from the topic.)

The Meiri also explains the next mishnah which is brought up incidental to the time when ceases to "mention." The mishnah brings up the topic as to the length of time one "requests," that is, when one inserts the prayer for rain into the ninth blessing of the Amidah. The mishnah attributes the opinion that one ceases with the end of Nisan to R. Meir, but the Meiri attributes it to R. Jose. In any case, the contention that one makes the insertion until the month of Nisan has passed supports the Meiri's claim that the month of



Nisan is the time of the rainy season. The Meiri also states that the Halakha is not like either R. Judah or R. Jose (R. Meir), but rather, one ceases to "request" at the same time one ceases to "mention." Therefore, just as one ceases to "mention" during *mincha* on the fourteenth of Nisan, so does one stop "requesting." This hearkens back to Rabbah's statement concerning the definition as to "when Passover concludes," that is, when the slaughtering of the Passover sacrifice concludes. It also is in agreement with R. Zera's and R. Assi's citation of R. Jochanan's statement that when one ceases to "request," one ceases to "mention". The general rule is that one may "mention" without "requesting," as in the beginning of the rainy season, but one may not "request" without also "mentioning."

I. **Our Mishnah:** Until when do we request rain? R. Judah says: Until Passover has concluded. R. Meir says: Until the month of Nisan has concluded, as it is said, (Joel 2:23) *For He has given you the early rain in [His] kindness, now He makes the rain fall [as] formerly-- the early rain and the late.*

A. **Gemara:** R. Nachman said to R. Isaac:<sup>94</sup> Does the early rain [come] in Nisan?<sup>95</sup> The early rain [falls] in the month of Marcheshvan, as it is taught in a Baraita: The early rain in Marcheshvan and the late rain in Nisan. He [R. Isaac] said to him [R. Nachman]: Thus said R. Jochanan: In the days of Joel Ben Pethuel, this verse was fulfilled, (Joel 1:4) *What the cutter has left the locust has devoured.*<sup>96</sup> That year, the month of Adar passed and rain had not fallen. Then rain<sup>97</sup> [finally] fell for them [the people] for the first time on the first of Nisan. A prophet [Joel] said to Israel, "Go out and plant!" They answered him, "Someone who might have a measure of wheat or two measures of barley, should he eat them and live or sow them and die?" He said to them, "Nevertheless, go out and plant." A miracle was performed on their behalf, and [grain] was

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<sup>94</sup>The following section begins with a narrative relevant to the theme of the mishnah, namely, prayers and actions taken in a time of drought or another crisis. Following it, however, comes a series of narratives, eight in all, that begin the same way, that is, with a conversation between R. Nachman and his teacher, R. Isaac.

<sup>95</sup>"As formerly" is taken to mean, "as formerly in Nisan." See below.

<sup>96</sup>As Rashi points out, the prophet Joel predicted seven years of famine due to drought and locust plagues. The following narrative tells of the end of this blight.

<sup>97</sup>An usual word for "rain" is used, *riviya*, related to "fertile." Rashi explains that it this was because it made the ground especially fecund.

revealed to them in the walls<sup>98</sup> and in the ant holes. They went out and sowed on the second, third, and fourth [days of the month of Nisan].<sup>99</sup> A second rainfall came down for them on the fifth of Nisan. They offered the Omer on the sixteenth of Nisan.<sup>100</sup> Thus produce that [normally] would have been raised in sixth months was raised in sixteen days. Thus the Omer [which] was [normally] offered from produce of six months was offered from produce of sixteen days. And concerning that [faithful] generation, Scripture says, (Psalms 126:5-6) *They who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy. Though he goes along weeping, carrying his seed-bag, [he shall come back with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves].* What is [the meaning of] *Though he goes along weeping, carrying his seed-bag?*<sup>101</sup> R. Judah said: The ox while he is plowing [on his forward circuit] goes and weeps, but upon his return eats the young greens from the furrow. That is [the meaning of], *He shall come back with joy.* What is [the meaning of], *Carrying his sheaves?* R. Chisda said, and some say it was taught in a Baraita: The stalk was one span and the ear was two spans.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Rashi: that the mice had stored away.

<sup>99</sup>Rashi: While living on what they had found in the walls and in the ant holes.

<sup>100</sup>The Omer was a measure of barley from a new crop that had to be offered in the Temple before the new crop could be eaten. It was offered on the sixteenth of Nisan, the harvest being ready after six months' growth. The miracle here was that the crops grew so quickly, what normally took six months, from Tishrei to Nisan, took only sixteen days.

<sup>101</sup>The preceding verse, as Rashi explains, already refers to human beings and would thus render this verse superfluous. Rather, the poetic repetition indicates that even the ox who drew the plow was weeping from the lack of food, but the crops grew so quickly, the animal was able to feed on the new greenery on its return trip.

<sup>102</sup>Rashi comments that a normal plan has a stalk three or four times the length of its ears, but these plants were so abundant with food, there was twice as many ears as there was length of stalk.

B. R. Nachman said to R. Isaac: What is [the meaning of], (II Kings 8:1) *For the Lord has decreed a seven-year famine upon the land, and it has already begun.*<sup>103</sup> During the seven years, what did they eat? He [R. Isaac] said to him [R. Nachman]: Thus said R. Jochanan: The first year they ate what they had in their houses. The second they ate what was in the fields. The third [they ate] the meat of clean animals. The fourth [they ate] the meat of unclean animals. The fifth [they ate] the meat of reptiles and creeping creatures. The sixth [they ate] the flesh of their own sons and daughters.<sup>104</sup> The seventh [they ate] the flesh of their own limbs, fulfilling what was said, (Isaiah 9:19) *Each devoured the flesh of his own arm.*

C. R. Nachman said to R. Isaac: What is [the meaning of] the verse, (Hosea 11:9) *In your midst is holiness, and I will enter the city?*<sup>105</sup> He [R. Isaac] said to him [R. Nachman]: Thus said R. Jochanan: The Holy One Blessed Be He said, "I will not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until I enter the earthly Jerusalem." And is there a heavenly Jerusalem? Yes, for it is written, (Psalms 122:3) *Jerusalem built up, a city knit together.*<sup>106</sup>

D. R. Nachman said to R. Isaac: What is [the meaning of] the verse, (Jeremiah 10:8) *But they are both* (literally, "at one") *dull and foolish; [their] doctrine is but delusion; it is a piece of*

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<sup>103</sup>This was said by Elisha in the days of King Jehoram son of Ahab.

<sup>104</sup>Rashi: [Only] some of them. The faithful waited until they discovered the grain in the walls and in the ant holes, as in the previous narrative.

<sup>105</sup>Rashi explains that the plain meaning of the verse is that the goodness of the people's deeds filled the city with holiness, and God would not enter the city in retribution. Leaving out the element of God entering in wrath and read hyper-literally, one might ask, why, if the city is holy would God not enter?

<sup>106</sup>Rashi explains that the word "knit" (Hebrew: *chubra*) implies a "counterpart" (*chaver*) to the city on earth. God would thus prefer to dwell in Jerusalem on earth rather than dwell in the heavenly city.

wood?<sup>107</sup> He [R. Isaac] said to him [R. Nachman]: Thus said R. Jochanan: There is "one" thing that causes the burning of the wicked in Gehinom. What is it? Idolatry, for it is written here, (Jeremiah 10:8) *[Their] doctrine is but delusion; it is a piece of wood*, and it is written elsewhere, (Jeremiah 10:15) *They [idols] are delusion, a work of mockery*.<sup>108</sup>

E. R. Nachman said to R. Isaac: What is [the meaning of] the verse, (Jeremiah 2:13) *For my people have done a twofold wrong?* Two? Did [Jeremiah] ignore [that there was a total of] twenty-four?<sup>109</sup> He [R. Isaac] said to him [R. Nachman]: Thus said R. Jochanan: There is one [5b] that is equal to two. What is it? Idolatry, that it is written, (Jeremiah 2:13) *For my people have done a twofold wrong: They have forsaken Me, the Fount of living waters and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns*. Further it is written, (Jeremiah 2:10-11) *Just cross over to the isles of the Kittim and look, send to Kedar and observe carefully, etc. Has any nation changed its gods, even though they are no-gods? But my people has changed its glory for what can do no good*. It was taught in a Baraita that the Kittites worship fire, and the Kedarites worship water. Even though they [the Kittites] know that water extinguishes fire, they do not change their gods, *but my people has changed its glory for what can do no good*.<sup>110</sup>

F. R. Nachman said to R. Isaac: What is [the meaning of] the verse, (1 Samuel 8:1) *When*

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<sup>107</sup>Rashi explains that they are like wood in that it is in vain that one rebuke them.

<sup>108</sup>A *gezera shava*, an analogy, on the use of the word "delusion" in two different verses. Rashi also points out that "both," read literally as "one," indicates one great sin.

<sup>109</sup>Rashi indicates that in Ezekiel 22, twenty-four sins are enumerated that caused the destruction of the first Temple or that the people transgressed against all 24 books of the Bible.

<sup>110</sup>Rashi explains that idolatry is doubly offensive in Israel because even idolatrous nations are more loyal to their idol than Israel is to the one true God.

*Samuel grew old.* How is it that Samuel was old? He died at age 52, for a Master said: If one dies at age 52, this is the age at which Samuel the Ramathite died.<sup>111</sup> He [R. Isaac] said to him [R. Nachman]: Thus said R. Jochanan: Old age came upon him suddenly, as it is written, (I Samuel 15:11) *I regret that I made Saul king.* Thus he said before God, "Master of the Universe, You have made me as an equal to Moses and Aaron, as it is written, (Psalms 99:6) *Moses and Aaron among His priests, Samuel among those who call on His name.* Just as Moses and Aaron did not see their handiwork come to null in their lifetimes, also I do not want to have my handiwork come to null in my lifetime."<sup>112</sup> The Holy One Blessed Be He said [to Himself], "What should I do? Let Saul die? Samuel will not leave it be. Let Samuel die young? People will malign him."<sup>113</sup> Let neither Saul nor Samuel die? The time has already come for the sovereignty of David, and no reign may encroach on another by even a hair's breadth." The Holy One Blessed Be He [therefore] said, "I will make old age come upon him suddenly, and it is written, (I Samuel 22:6) *Saul was then in Gibeah, sitting under the tamarisk on the height* [lit., *in Ramah*]." How is it that Givah [in the territory of Benjamin from which Saul comes] is in Ramah [in Ephraim from which Samuel comes]?" This is to teach you who it was that caused Saul to dwell [as king] for

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<sup>111</sup>Rashi explains how R. Nachman calculated Samuel's age. His mother, Hannah, dedicates Samuel for service in the Temple. After Samuel is born, in I Samuel 1:22, Hannah says, *Hannah did not go up. She said to her husband, "When the child is weaned, I will bring him. For when he has appeared before the Lord, he must remain there for good.* Rashi indicates that she weaned him until the age of two, and "for good" indicates the service of a Levite in the Temple, which is fifty years. Thus it says in Moed Katan 28a that Samuel reached 52 years of age.

<sup>112</sup>Rashi explains that just as Joshua, their student, outlived them, so would Samuel not want to outlive Saul.

<sup>113</sup>Rashi interprets that people will think he died young on account of some sin.

two and a half years. It was the prayer of Samuel the Ramathite. May one man be pushed aside for another?<sup>114</sup> Yes, for R. Samuel Bar Nachmani said in the name of R. Jochanan: What is [the meaning] of what is written, (Hosea 6:5) *That is why I have hewn down the prophets, have slain them with the words of my mouth?* It is not written, "by their deeds," but *with the words of my mouth*.<sup>115</sup> Thus may one man be pushed aside for another.

G. R. Nachman and R. Isaac were sitting at a meal. R. Nachman said to R. Isaac: Let the Master [share] a word [of Torah]. He [R. Isaac] replied to him [R. Nachman]: Thus said R. Jochanan: Do not engage in any discussion while at a meal lest one's windpipe precede one's esophagus and prone to the danger [of choking]. After the meal, he [R. Isaac] said to him [R. Nachman]: Thus said R. Jochanan: Jacob our father is not dead.<sup>116</sup> He [R. Nachman] said to him [R. Isaac]: Was it for naught that the eulogizers eulogized, the embalmers embalmed, and the buriers buried [him]?<sup>117</sup> He [R. Isaac] answered him [R. Nachman]: I am expounding Scripture, as it is said, (Jeremiah 30:10) *But you, have no fear, My servant Jacob -- declares the Lord -- Be not dismayed, O Israel! I will deliver you from far away, Your folk from their land in captivity.* The verse compares him [Jacob] to his descendants. Just as his descendants are living, so is he living.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Saul for David.

<sup>115</sup>As Rashi clarifies, not on account of a sin but by divine decree.

<sup>116</sup>Rashi comments that Jacob lives forever.

<sup>117</sup>See Genesis 50:2, 10, 13.

<sup>118</sup>Rashi adds that Jacob's descendants are certainly living because they are to be rescued from captivity. Jacob only appeared dead but has gone into captivity with his children to see them redeemed with his own eyes.

H. R. Isaac said: Everyone one who says, "Rahab, Rahab," will immediately have a seminal discharge.<sup>119</sup> R. Nachman said to him: As for me, I can say it, and it makes no difference to me. He [R. Isaac] replied: I speak of one who knows her well and recognizes her.<sup>120</sup>

I. One they [R. Isaac and R. Nachman] were about to part from one another, he [R. Nachman] said to him [R. Isaac]: Let the Master bless me. He [R. Isaac] answered him [R. Nachman]: I will tell you a parable. To what may this be compared? To a man walking in a wilderness who is hungry, tired, and thirsty, and he finds a tree whose fruits are sweet and whose shade is pleasant, and which as a channel of water passing under it. He ate from it fruit, drank from its water, and sat in its shade. When he was about to take leave, he said, "Tree! O Tree! By what shall I bless you? If I should say, 'Let your fruit be sweet,' your fruit is [already] sweet. That your shade should be pleasant? Your shade is pleasant! That a channel of water should pass under you? A channel of water passes under you! Rather, may it be God's will that all of the shoots that are planted from you [6a] will be like you. So to is it with you. By what shall I bless you? By Torah? [You already have great knowledge in] Torah. By wealth? [You already have enough] wealth. By children? [You already have] children. Rather, may it be God's will that all of your offspring be like you."

II. Our rabbis taught: The early rain<sup>121</sup> [is called in Hebrew: *yoreh*].

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<sup>119</sup>This is the woman who helped Joshua spy on the city of Jericho. Megillah 15a claims that she was one of the most beautiful women in the world.

<sup>120</sup>While another translation might be, "mentions her name," Tosafot explains that the meaning here is to recognize her.

<sup>121</sup>Rashi explains that the Gemara is referring to Deuteronomy 11:14, *I will grant the rain for you in season, the early rain [yoreh] and the late [malkosh]*. The following passages discuss



A. [*Yoreh* is named so because] it instructs [Hebrew: *moreh*] people to plaster their roofs, to bring in their crops,<sup>122</sup> and to take care of all of their needs [before winter].

1. Another explanation: That it saturates [Hebrew: *miraveh*] the earth and waters it deeply, as it is said, (Palms 65:11) *Saturating* [Hebrew: *ravei*] *its furrows, leveling its ridges, You soften it with showers, You bless its growth.*

2. Another explanation [concerning the etymology of "*yoreh*,"] of the early rain: That it descends [Hebrew: *yored*] gently and does not come down violently.<sup>123</sup>

B. Alternatively, [perhaps one might mistakenly understand the early rain negatively, that] the early rain [is called so] only because it causes the fruit to fall [from the trees], washes away the seeds, and washes away the trees.<sup>124</sup> The text [Deut. 11:14, therefore] says, *The late rain* [Hebrew: *malkosh*, in connection with the early rain]. Just as the late rain can only be a blessing, so also the early rain can only be a blessing.

1. Or [perhaps] the late rain [is called so] only because it collapses houses, breaks trees, and raises locusts.<sup>125</sup> The text [Deut. 11:14, therefore] says: *The early rain* [in connection

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the etymology of the names of these rains.

<sup>122</sup>Rashi: crops that were left drying in the sun.

<sup>123</sup>Rashi offers a further explanation here. The first rain of the season comes down gently because it occurs before the winter winds that drive the rain sideways. This is like a teacher [Hebrew: *moreh*] who should instruct his students gently, as it is said, (Ecclesiastes 9:17) *Words spoken softly by wise men are heeded.*

<sup>124</sup>Rashi points out that perhaps the early rain is not necessarily a good thing and is named after its potentially destructive nature. Rashi derives this from the phrase, *yaroh yirae*, in Exodus 19:13, meaning, *he shall be shot*, in reference to executing those who approached Mt. Sinai irreverently.

<sup>125</sup>Rashi claims that *malkosh* is connected to the word, "locust" in Amos 7:11.

with the late rain]. Just as the early rain is a blessing, also the late rain is a blessing.

2. And how do we know that the early rain is itself [a blessing]? It is written, (Joel 2:23) *O children of Zion, be glad, rejoice in the Lord your God. For He has given you the early rain in [His] kindness, Now He makes the rain fall [as] formerly -- the early rain and the late -- [and threshing floors shall be piled with grain, and vats shall overflow with new wine and oil].*

III. Our rabbis taught: The early rain [comes] in Marcheshvan and the late rain [comes] in Nisan.<sup>126</sup>

A. You say, the early rain in Marcheshvan and the late rain in Nisan, but perhaps it is otherwise, with the early rain [coming] in Tishrei [the month before Marcheshvan] and the late rain in Iyar [the month after Nisan, extending the rainy season two months]? Thus the text [Deut. 11:14] says, *In season*.<sup>127</sup>

B. [Our rabbis taught:] The late rain [is called in Hebrew, "*malkosh*"].<sup>128</sup>

1. R. Nehilai Bar Idi said in the name of Samuel: [It is called, "*malkosh*" because

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<sup>126</sup>The lunar months go as follows: Tishrei (the first month, beginning sometime in September or October), Cheshvan (also called, "Marcheshvan"), Kisleb, Tebeth, Shebath, Adar, Nisan (approximately April), Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Ab, and Elul. The Tannaitic source here claims the first rain comes in Marcheshvan, and the rainy season ends in Nisan.

<sup>127</sup>Rashi explains that there are still ears and stalks in the fields at this time, but the assumption of Gemara is that rain before Marcheshvan or after Nisan is not necessarily a good thing.

<sup>128</sup>The etymology of *malkosh* is explored. In each of the three following explanations, the syllable "*mal*" is linked with the syllable "*kosh*."

it is] something which cuts [Hebrew: *mal*] the hardness [Hebrew: *kashiyoteichen*] from Israel.<sup>129</sup>

2. In the school of R. Ishmael it was taught: Something that fills [Hebrew: *mimalei*] the stalks [Hebrew: *bikasheicha*] with produce.

3. It was taught in a Baraita: Something that comes down on the ears [Hebrew: *hamileilot*] and stalks [Hebrew: *hakashin*].

C. Our rabbis taught: The early rain is in Marcheshvan, and the late rain is in Nisan. You say, the early rain is in Marcheshvan, but perhaps it [may come] in the month of Kisleb [the month after Marcheshvan]. Thus the text [Deut. 11:14] says, *In season, the early rain [yoreh] and the late [malkosh]*. Just as the late rain is in its proper time, so too is the early rain in its proper time. (When Nisan is concluded and rains come, it is not a sign of blessing.)

D. It is taught in another [Baraita]: The early rain is in Marcheshvan, and the late rain is in Nisan. These are the words of R. Meir, but the sages say, the early rain is in Kisleb.

1. Who is [indicated by the term,] "the sages"? R. Chisda said: It is R. Jose, for it is taught in a Baraita: What is [the time] of the early rainfall?<sup>130</sup> The first [rain] on the third of Marcheshvan, the intermediate on the seventh, and the last on the seventeenth. These are the words of R. Meir. R. Judah says: On the seventh, seventeenth, and the twenty-third. R. Jose says: On the seventeenth, twenty third, and the first of the month of Kisleb.<sup>131</sup> And further R.

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<sup>129</sup>Rashi explains that when the rain does not fall it elicits repentance, fasting, and acts of righteousness.

<sup>130</sup>As is evident from the following passage, the early rain consists of three rainfalls, first, intermediate, and last.

<sup>131</sup>Thus, the last stage of the early rain, according to R. Jose, comes in Kislev which corresponds to the opinion of "the sages" in the Baraita.

Jose used to say: Individuals do not fast until the first of the month of Kisleb arrives.<sup>132</sup>

2. R. Chisda said: The Halacha follows R. Jose.

E. Amemar taught this [Baraita] of R. Chisda's in this version: On the third of Marcheshvan they request rain. R. Gamaliel says: On the seventh. R. Chisda said: The Halacha follows R. Gamaliel.

F. In accordance with whom is this Baraita: R. Shimon Ben Gamaliel says: Rain that falls for seven days consecutively, you may count it as the first and the second [or the second] and the third? It is in accordance with R. Jose.<sup>133</sup> R. Chisda said: The Halacha follows R. Jose.

G. It is reasonable [that we learn that we learn the date of] the first rainfall, for requesting, [as well as] the third rainfall, for fasting. Why [the date] of the second rainfall?

1. R. Zera said: For vows, for it is taught in a mishnah,<sup>134</sup> [6b] One who vows, "[I will not derive benefit from something] until the rains" or "from when the rains fall," [is liable] until the second rainfall.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>Rashi explains that this is anticipation of a later statement where, in times of drought, pious individuals may fast when the crisis has progressed for a certain length of time.

<sup>133</sup>As Rashi clarifies, R. Jose explicitly states that there are exactly seven days from one rainfall to the other, whereas the others vary.

<sup>134</sup>Nedarim 62b.

<sup>135</sup>Rashi explains that the Gemara is quoting the words of the potential vow, that a vow involves a form of ascetism. One swears not to derive any benefit from something, either up until the rains come or from when the rains come and onward. Rashi further explains that most people consider it to have rained with the second rainfall when things are visibly wet, but his more plausible explanation is that the plural of "rains" indicates more than one, thus indicating the second rainfall.

2. R. Zebid said: For olives, for it is taught in a mishnah,<sup>136</sup> When is everyone<sup>137</sup> permitted [to take] the left-over gleanings, the forgotten sheaves, and the corners of the field?<sup>138</sup> After the rummagers have gone.<sup>139</sup> The fallen grapes and the deformed clusters? After the poor have come and gone through the vineyard. The olives? After the second rainfall.

a. [Incidentally,] who are "the rummagers"?

b. R. Jochanan said: Old people who walk with a staff.<sup>140</sup> Resh Lakish said: Those who glean after the gleaners.<sup>141</sup>

3. R. Papa said: For those who walk in private domain, for a Master said: Everyone may travel through private domain until the second rainfall.<sup>142</sup>

4. R. Nachman Bar Isaac said: For disposing of the produce of the Sabbatical year, for we learned in a mishnah.<sup>143</sup> Until when may we benefit from and burn straw and stubble of the Sabbatical year? Until the second rainfall. What is the reason? It is written (Leviticus

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<sup>136</sup>Peah 8:1

<sup>137</sup>Rashi: Even the wealthy.

<sup>138</sup>These are the left-over agricultural produce that are designated to the poor by the Bible (See Leviticus 19:9, 10, 23:3, Deuteronomy 24:19, 21.)

<sup>139</sup>Rashi explains that after the rummagers, the last of the poor people, have gone through, one can assume that the poor have taken all that they are going to.

<sup>140</sup>Rashi claims that the elderly go slowly and are thus the most thorough.

<sup>141</sup>Rashi gives the following scenario: A poor man who goes along [gleaning] with his son after him. From then on, all the poor cease from gleaning.

<sup>142</sup>Bava Kamma 81a. Rashi comments that one can cut through the fields as a shortcut for traveling until the second rainfall where such walking would damage the crops.

<sup>143</sup>Sheviit 9:7.

25:7), *And your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield*. During the time that the beasts may eat in the field, one may feed one's cattle from the field. Once there is nothing in the field for the beasts, one must dispose [of food] from one's house for your cattle.<sup>144</sup>

IV. R. Abbahu said: What is meant by the expression "rainfall" (Hebrew: *riviyah*)?

A. It is something that penetrates (Hebrew: *roveah*) the ground, which is in accordance with R. Judah, for R. Judah said: Rain is the husband of the earth, as it is said, (Isaiah 55:10) *For as the rain or snow drops from heaven and returns not there, but soaks the earth and makes it* [lit. "impregnates"] *bring forth vegetation*, etc.

B. R. Abbahu further said: The first rainfall [has fallen] to the extent that it has descended into the ground one hands-breadth.<sup>145</sup> The second rainfall, to the extent that one can form a cover for a barrel.<sup>146</sup>

1. R. Chisda said: Rain that has come down to the extent that one can form a cover for a barrel, [the curse<sup>147</sup> in Deut. 11:17] *And He will shut up [the skies so there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce]* does not apply.

2. Abayē replied: This [a small rainfall that is only enough to form a cover for a barrel] applies only [if it fell during the day] before [the recitation of the verse] *And He will shut*

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<sup>144</sup>Rashi explains that once the second rainfall comes, there is no food in the fields for the wild beasts, for the rain makes the straw and stubble into manure.

<sup>145</sup>Rashi adds that if rain has fallen this amount, then it is enough that there is no need to fast.

<sup>146</sup>Rashi explains that one is able to take enough moist earth to form a barrel-stopper without adding water.

<sup>147</sup>Rashi draws attention to this term as a "curse" for Israel's disobedience toward God.

up [in the Keri'at Shema<sup>148</sup>] in the evening, but [if it fell during the night] before [we recite] *And He will shut up* in the morning, than [the words] *And He will shut up* apply,<sup>149</sup> for R. Judah Bar Isaac said: Those thin morning clouds have not real substance, as it is written, (Hosea 6:4) *What can I do for you, Ephraim, what can I do for you, Judah, When your goodness is like morning clouds, [like dew so early gone]?*

3. R. Papa answered Abaye: But people say when the [morning] gates open, Donkey-driver, lay down your sack and go to sleep!<sup>150</sup>

4. This is not a contradiction. This one [the statement that says the morning clouds keep the donkey-driver from his work applies when the sky is] overcast with thick clouds, and that one [the statement that says morning clouds are of no real substance applies when the sky is] overcast with thin clouds.

C. R. Judah said: Good is the year that [the month of] Tebeth is a widow.<sup>151</sup> There are some who say, "Because the place of [Torah] dissemination is not empty,"<sup>152</sup> and there are those who say, "Because the grain will not suffer from blight."

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<sup>148</sup>Rashi comments that this means the time of the recitation of the prayer, Keri'at Shema, morning and evening which includes Deuteronomy 11:17 which is the statement of the curse.

<sup>149</sup>Rashi explains that if the rain did not fall during the daytime, it is of no benefit to the crops.

<sup>150</sup>Rashi explains that if rain fell in the morning, the roads will be muddy and the donkey-driver cannot work. Hence, it appears that morning clouds might be beneficial.

<sup>151</sup>As above, if the rain is a husband to the earth, than the statement is saying that it is a good year when no rain falls in the month of Tebeth. See Rashi.

<sup>152</sup>This is Rashi's first explanation. If no rain falls in Tebeth, than the roads are clear for people to come to the academies. Another possible translation is, "the gardens do not lie empty."

1. Is this so? Did not R. Chisda say: Good is the year that Tebeth is muddy?

2. There is no contradiction. That one [statement that says it is better if there is no rain during Tebeth applies] when sufficient rain has [already] come, and that one [statement that says it is better if rain falls during Tebeth applies] when sufficient rain has not [yet] come.

D. And R. Chisda said: Rain that falls on part of the country and does not fall on another part of the country, [the curse] *And He will shut up* does not apply.<sup>153</sup>

1. Is this so? For it is written, (Amos 4: 7) *I therefore withheld the rain from you three months before harvest time: I would make it rain on one town and not on another; One field would be rained upon [while another on which it did not rain would wither]*. And R. Judah said in the name of Rab: Both of them are a curse!<sup>154</sup>

2. This is not a contradiction. That one [statement that says rain on part of the country is a curse] refers to when rain comes in excess and that one [statement that says rain on part of the country is not a curse] refers to when rain as is needed.<sup>155</sup>

3. R. Ashi said: Also [one can prove that the verse in Amos refers to excessive rain] from, *Would be rained upon* (Hebrew: *timater*). It will be (Hebrew: *tihei*) a place (Hebrew: *mikom*) of rain (Hebrew: *matar*).<sup>156</sup> Learn thus.

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<sup>153</sup>Rashi explains that the part which received rain can sustain the other parts.

<sup>154</sup>Rashi clarifies that both the part that did not receive rain and the part that did were cursed, for the part that did would have received too much rain.

<sup>155</sup>Rashi: to provide the whole country with produce.

<sup>156</sup>Breaking the word down from the verse in Amos into an acronym, Rashi indicates that it will be a place of too much rain.



V. R. Abbahu said: As from when do we say a blessing concerning rain?<sup>157</sup>

A. When the groom greets the bride.<sup>158</sup>

B. What is it [we say when] we bless? R. Judah said in the name of Rab, "We thank you, the Eternal our God, on each and every drop that you have brought down to us." And R. Jochanan concludes [the benediction] thus, "Even if our mouths were as full with song as the sea and our tongues with joy as the huge number of its waves... Do not forsake us of your compassion, Eternal our God, as they have not forsaken us. Praised [are You] with a multitude of thanks."

1. "A multitude of thanks"? Not, "All thanks"?

2. Raba said: Say, "God of thanks."

3. R. Papa said: Therefore, [7a] we should say both, "God of thanks" and "a multitude of thanks."

C. R. Abbahu said: A day of rain is greater than the day of resurrection, for the day of resurrection is only for the righteous, but a day of rain is for both the righteous and the wicked. This is in conflict with R. Joseph, for R. Joseph said: Since [a day of rain] is equal to [and not greater than] the day of resurrection, [prayer for rain] has been placed into *tichiyat hametim* [the blessing concerning resurrection].

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<sup>157</sup>Rashi refers to Berachot 54a that the blessing over rain is, "Praised are you, the Eternal our God, Ruler of the Universe, who is good and does good." In Berachot 59b, however, there is another benediction, We thank You, the Eternal our God, on each and every drop that you have brought down to us. The first refers to when one hears of rain, the latter when one sees rain. The Meiri makes mention of the latter benediction.

<sup>158</sup>Rashi explains the idiom to mean that when it rains so much the splash from the puddles of rain go up as the rain goes down. Sexual imagery appeared earlier of the rain penetrating and impregnating the earth.

D. R. Judah said: A day of rain is as great as the day the Torah was given, as it is said, (Deut. 32:2) *May my instruction come down as the rain, [my speech distill as the dew.]* *Instruction* can only mean Torah, as it is said, (Proverbs 4:2) *For I give you good instruction, do not forsake my teaching.*<sup>159</sup> Raba said: It is greater than the day the Torah was given, as it is said (Deut. 32:2) *May my instruction come down as the rain.* What is compared [lit. dependent to, hung upon] to what? One must say, the lesser is compared to the greater.

1. Raba contrasted what was written, (Deut. 32:2) *May my instruction come down as the rain*, with what was written [immediately after], *my speech distill as the dew*. If a scholar is worthy, [the Torah affects him for blessing] like dew; if he is unworthy, [the Torah affects him for ill] it breaks him like [violent] rain.<sup>160</sup>

2. It was taught in a Baraita: R. Banna'ah used to say, Anyone who engages in Torah study for its own sake, his Torah study becomes an elixir of life, as it is said, (Proverbs 3:18) *She is a tree of life to those who grasp her*, and it [Scripture] says, (Proverbs 3:8) *It will be a cure for your body*, and it says, (Proverbs 8:35) *For he who finds me finds life*. And anyone who engages in Torah study not for its own sake, it becomes an elixir of death, as it is said, (Deut. 32:2) *May my instruction come down as the rain*. "Coming down" (Hebrew: *arifa*) is only meant to mean "killing," as it is said, (Deut. 21:4) *There, in the wadi, they shall break the heifer's neck* (Hebrew: *arfu*).

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<sup>159</sup>This interpretation rests on how the word, "instruction" (Hebrew: *lekach*) is used in two different contexts.

<sup>160</sup>Rashi points out the double meaning of the verb, "come down," (Hebrew: *ya'arof*) in Deut. 32:2. It can mean to descend or drip, and it can also mean to kill. Specifically, as the text will clarify, it may mean, "to break the neck."

3. R. Jeremiah said to R. Zera: Let the Master teach! [That is, please teach me some Halakhic lesson.] He [R. Zera] answered him [R. Jeremiah]: I do not feel well, and I am unable. [R. Jeremiah then asked:] Then let the Master speak of word of lore [which is less taxing]. He [R. Zera] answered him [R. Jeremiah]: Thus said R. Jochanan: What is the meaning of, (Deut. 20:19) *Trees of the field are human*.<sup>161</sup> Is a human being a tree of the field? Rather, it is written, (Deut. 20:19) *You may eat of them, but you may not cut them down*, and it is written (Deut. 20:20), *[Only trees that you know do not yield food] may be destroyed; you may cut them down*. How so? If a scholar is worthy, you may eat from him and may not cut him down, but if not, he may be destroyed; you may cut him down.<sup>162</sup>

4. R. Chama said in the name of R. Chanina: What is the meaning of the verse, (Proverbs 27:17) *As iron sharpens iron [so a man sharpens the wit of his friend]*? To teach you that just as one iron may sharpen another, also two scholars may sharpen one another in Halacha.

5. R. Chama Bar Bar Chanina said: Why are words of Torah likened to fire, as it is said, (Jeremiah 23:29) *Behold, My word is like fire -- declares the Lord -- [and like a hammer that shatters rock]*? To teach you that just as fire does not ignite by itself, also words of Torah do not endure [when learned] by oneself. And so it was that R. Jose Bar Chanina said: What is the meaning of the verse, (Jeremiah 50:36) *A sword against the diviners*, [Hebrew: *badim*, also

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<sup>161</sup>The actual verse reads, *When in our war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you may not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before into the besieged city?* R. Jochanan took the first half of the last sentence out of context for homiletical purposes.

<sup>162</sup>Rashi makes this analogy explicit by commenting that one may eat the fruit of the scholar's teaching and should do him no harm, you may destroy his character.

meaning, "the lonely"] *that they be made fools of!* [That is,] a sword against (the haters of) scholars who engage in the study of Torah by themselves alone. Not only that but they also become stupid, as it is said, *that they be made fools of*. And not only that but they sin, as it is written here (in Jeremiah 50:36), *that they be made fools of*, and it is written elsewhere, (Numbers 12: 11) *the sin which we committed in our folly*. If you want, I can learn this from here [as well], (Isaiah 19: 13) *The nobles of Tanis have been fools,... Egypt has been led astray*.<sup>163</sup>

6. R. Nachman Bar Isaac said: Why are words of Torah likened to a tree, as it is said, (Proverbs 3:18) *She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, [and whoever holds on to her is happy]*? To tell you that just as a small piece of wood (Hebrew: *Eitz*, same as the word for "tree") ignites one larger,<sup>164</sup> so do lesser scholars sharpen the great ones. So taught R. Chanina: I have learned a great deal from my teachers, even more so from my colleagues than my teachers, but most of all from my students.

7. R. Chanina Bar Papa contrasted what was written, (Isaiah 21:14) *Meet the thirsty with water*, with what was written, (Isaiah 55:1) *Ho, all who are thirsty, come for water*. If a scholar is worthy, *Meet the thirsty with water*, but if not, *Ho, all who are thirsty, come for water*.<sup>165</sup>

8. R. Chanina Bar Chama contrasted what was written, (Proverbs 5:16) *Your springs will gush forth*, with what was written, (Proverbs 5:17) *They will be yours alone*. If a

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<sup>163</sup>Rashi explains that "going astray" means sinning.

<sup>164</sup>Rashi clarifies this analogy by indicating kindling.

<sup>165</sup>If the student is worthy, the teacher will come to the students, but if not, the student must seek out the teacher.

scholar is worthy, *Your springs will gush forth*, but if not, *They will be yours alone*.<sup>166</sup>

9. R. Chanina Bar Idi said: Why are words of Torah likened to water, as it is written, (Isaiah 55:1) *Ho, all who are thirsty, come for water*? Just as water rests in a high place and flows down to a low place, so too with words of Torah that can only endure in a humble mind.

10. And R. Oshaia said: Why are words of Torah likened to these three liquids: water, wine, and milk, for it is written, (Isaiah 55:1) *Ho, all who are thirsty, come for water*, and it is written [immediately afterwards], *Come, buy food and eat: buy food without money, wine and milk without cost*? To tell you that just as these three liquids can only be preserved in lowly vessels,<sup>167</sup> so too with words of Torah that can only endure in a humble mind.

11. So did the daughter of Caesar<sup>168</sup> say concerning R. Joshua Ben Chanina, "What glorious wisdom in such an ugly vessel!" He [R. Joshua] said to her, "Your father keeps wine in earthenware vessels." She answered him, "What [else] might he store them in?" He said to her, "You who are regarded as nobility [may store them in] vessels of gold and silver." She went and told this to her father; [thereupon] he stored the wine in vessels of gold and silver and they went sour. [His messengers] came and told him so. He [the Caesar] said to his daughter, "Who told you such?" [She answered,] "Thus told me R. Joshua Ben Chanina!" They summoned him [R. Joshua]. He [the Caesar] said to him [R. Joshua], "Why did you say such to her?" [R.

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<sup>166</sup>Rashi: If the student is worthy, the teacher will share the secrets of Torah, but if not, he will keep them to himself.

<sup>167</sup>Rashi: earthenware.

<sup>168</sup>Soncino explains this Roman emperor is Hadrian.

Joshua answered,] "As she spoke to me, so did I speak to her."<sup>169</sup>

a. But are there beautiful people who are learned?<sup>170</sup> [7b]

b. If they were despised, they would be more learned.<sup>171</sup>

12. Another interpretation [of why are words of Torah likened to water, wine, and milk]: Just as these three liquids can only become spoiled through inattention,<sup>172</sup> so too are words of Torah only forgotten through neglect.

E. R. Chama said in the name of R. Chanina: A day of rain is as great as the day the heavens and the earth were created, as it is said (Isaiah 45:8) *Pour down, O skies, from above! Let the heavens rain down victory! Let the earth open up and triumph sprout, yes, let vindication spring up: I the Lord have created it.* "Created them" [the heavens and earth] is not said but rather *created it* [the day of rain].<sup>173</sup> R. Oshaia said: A day of rain is great, for even vindication sprouts and springs up, as it is said, [*Let*] *triumph sprout, yes, let vindication spring up.*

VI. R. Tanchum Bar Chanilai said: Rain only comes down if the sins of Israel have been forgiven, as it is said, (Psalms: 85:2-3) *O Lord, You will favor Your land, restore Jacob's fortune; You will*

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<sup>169</sup>Rashi explains R. Joshua's answer to mean that he only extended her reasoning to its logical conclusion.

<sup>170</sup>According to a version in Nedarim 50b cited in the Schottenstein edition, Caesar's daughter asks this question.

<sup>171</sup>Rashi explains that it is extremely difficult for a beautiful person to be humble and therefore easily neglects his or her studies.

<sup>172</sup>Rashi comments that these liquids need to be watched well so that they do not spill or so that nothing falls into them, etc.

<sup>173</sup>Rashi explains that God does not point to the creation of the heavens and earth for exaltation but to "it," the day of rain.

*forgive your people's iniquity, pardon all their sins.*<sup>174</sup> Zeiri of Dahabath said to Rabina: You learn it [this lesson] from here [Psalms 85]; we learn it from here, (I Kings 8:36) *Oh, hear in heaven and pardon the sin of Your servants.*<sup>175</sup>

A. R. Tanchum the son of R. Chiyva of Kefar Acco said: The rains are only withheld only due to -- the enemies of<sup>176</sup> -- Israel being condemned to destruction, as it is said, (Job 24:19) *May drought and heat snatch away their snow waters, and Sheol, those who have sinned.* Zeiri of Dahabath said to Rabina: You learn it [this lesson] from here [Job 24:19]; we learn it from here, (Deut. 11:17) *[For the Lord's anger will flare up against you,] and He will shut up the skies so that there is no rain [and the ground will not yield its produce]; and soon you will perish from the good land that the Lord is assigning to you.*

B. R. Chisda said: The rains are only withheld only due to neglect of heave-offerings and tithes, as it is said, (Job 24:19) *May drought and heat snatch away their snow waters.* What does it teach? The school of R. Ishmael taught in a Baraita: Due to the things that I had commanded you during the days of summer that you did not do, the snow waters were snatched away from you during the rainy season.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup>Favor indicates rain, so in this verse, rain and forgiveness come together.

<sup>175</sup>Rashi explains that "heaven" indicates rain, so again, rain and pardon come together.

<sup>176</sup>A common euphemism in the Talmud is, in the case of Israel committing some transgression or God acting in some unimaginable way, the opposite of what is intended is written.

<sup>177</sup>Rashi explains that the reasoning here is based on a pun on the word drought (Hebrew: *tziya*) and the word "commanded" (Hebrew: *tziviti*). The verse would then read, May what I commanded you during the [time of] head [i.e. summer] snatch away their snow waters. The heave-offering (Hebrew: *terumah*) and the tithes are commanded during the summer, so measure for measure, the unfulfilled commandments take their toll during the winter months.

C. R. Simeon Ben Pazzi said: The rains are only withheld due to wicked speech, as it is said, (Proverbs 25:23) *A north wind produces [the prevention of] rain, and whispered words, a glowering face.*<sup>178</sup>

D. R. Salla said in the name of R. Hamnuna: The rains are only withheld due to insolence,<sup>179</sup> as it is said (Jeremiah 3:3) *And when showers were withheld and the late rains did not come, you had the brazenness of a street woman, [you refused to be ashamed].*

1. And R. Salla said in the name of R. Hamnuna: Anyone who is insolent in the end will stumble into transgression, as it is said, *You had the brazenness of a street woman.* R. Nachman said: It is evident that he [already] stumbled into transgression, as it is said, *You had,* and not, "You will have."

2. Rabbah Bar R. Huna said: Anyone who is insolent may be called wicked, as it is said (Proverbs 21:29) *The wicked man is brazen-faced.*<sup>180</sup> R. Nachman Bar Isaac said: [Anyone who is insolent] may be hated, as it is said (Ecclesiastes 8:1) *A man's wisdom lights up his face.* Do not read *lights up* [Hebrew: *yishuneh*], but rather, "may be hated" [Hebrew: *yisaneh*].

E. R. Kattinia said: The rains are withheld only due to the neglect of Torah, as it is said, (Ecclesiastes 10:18) *Through slothfulness the ceiling sags.* Due to the slothfulness of Israel that

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<sup>178</sup>Rashi shows that the verb *produces* (Hebrew: *ticholel*) can also mean "prevents," as in Numbers 30:3, *He shall not break [Hebrew: *yachel*] his pledge.*

<sup>179</sup>Jastrow also indicates "impudence" (Hebrew: *azei fanim*). "Brazenness" also possible.

<sup>180</sup>Rashi explains that calling someone wicked may be punishable by lashes (see Kiddushin 28a).



did not engage in Torah study, --the enemy of<sup>181</sup> -- God becomes poor [Hebrew: *mach*], and *mach* can only mean "poor," as it said, (Leviticus 27:8) *But if one cannot afford the equivalent.* And *ceiling* can only indicate the Holy One Blessed Be He, as it is said, (Psalms 104:3) *He sets the rafters of His lofts in the waters.* R. Joseph taught [not from that verse but] from here, (Job 37:21) *Now, then, one cannot see the sun, thought it be bright in the heavens, until the wind comes and clears them [of clouds],* and there is no *sun* except for Torah, as it is said, (Proverbs 6:23) *For the commandment is a lamp, the teaching is a light.* The school of Ishmael taught in a Baraita concerning the phrase, *bright in the heavens*: even when the sky is patchy to bring down dew and rain, *the wind comes and clears them [of clouds].*

F. R. Ammi said: The rains are only withheld due to the sin of theft, as it is said, (Job 36:32) *Lightning fills His hands.* [Read differently, the verse can say:] With the sin of the hands, He conceals light. *Hands* can only mean robbery, as it is said, (Jonah 3:8) *And from the injustice of which he is guilty* [lit. which is in his hands]. And light can only mean rain, as it is said (Job 37:11) *[He also loads the clouds with moisture] and scatters His lightning-clouds.*<sup>182</sup> What is his remedy? Let him increase his prayers, as it is said, (Job 36:32) *He orders it [lightning] to hit the mark,* and the *mark* [*pigiya*] is prayer, as it is said, (Jeremiah 7:16) *As for you, do not pray for this people, [do not raise a cry of prayer on their behalf,] do not plead* [Hebrew: *tifga*] *with*

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<sup>181</sup>A common euphemism in the Talmud is, in the case of Israel committing some transgression or God acting in some unimaginable way, the opposite of what is intended is written.

<sup>182</sup>Hence light from lightning is associated with rain.

G. And R. Ammi said: What is written, (Eccles. 10:10-11) *If the ax [lit. iron] has become dull and he has not whetted the edge, [he must exert more strength. Thus the advantage of a skill [depends on the exercise of] prudence. If the snake bites because no spell was uttered, no advantage is gained by the trained charmer<sup>184</sup>]*? If you see the firmament as dark as iron from [its need to] cause dew and rain to descend [but the heavens are restrained], it is due to the deeds of the nation that are cursed, as it is said, *He has not whetted the edge*, [that is, he who has not petitioned the "face" of God is "cursed."<sup>185</sup> What is their remedy? Let them strengthen their prayers for compassion, as it is said, *he must exert more strength. Thus the advantage of a skill [depends on the exercise of] prudence.* So much the more so if their deeds had been fit from the start.<sup>186</sup>

1. Resh Lakish said: If you see a student [8a] whose studies are as hard for him as iron, it is because his studies are not arranged well for him, as it is said, *he has not whetted the edge* [that is, he has "distorted" the passages].<sup>187</sup> What is his remedy? He should increase his

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<sup>183</sup>Rashi comments that *plead* and *pray* are in the same passage. The word for *plead* [Hebrew: *tifga*] can also mean *mark* [Hebrew: *mafgiya*].

<sup>184</sup>The following series of parables rely on the equivocal nature of the phrase, *he has not whetted the edge*. The word for *whetted* [Hebrew: *kilkal*] has the same root as the Hebrew verb, *kilkal*, which may mean, "to curse, corrupt or distort." The word for *edge* [Hebrew: *panim*] literally means "face."

<sup>185</sup>See 171.

<sup>186</sup>That is, wisdom is greater because they could have avoided the situation from the start if they had been wise enough to have worthy actions.

<sup>187</sup>Rashi explains that, because his studies are not in order, he mixes up Mishnah with Gemara, creates problems for himself and reasons in a faulty way, holding liable what is permitted

time in the academy, as it is said, *He must exert more strength*.<sup>188</sup> [As for the phrase,] *thus the advantage of a skill [depends on the exercise of] prudence*, all the more so if his studies had been arranged well for him from the start.

a. Thus in the case of Resh Lakish, who would arrange<sup>189</sup> his studies forty times, corresponding to the forty days of the giving of the Torah, and [only after doing so] he would come before R. Jochanan [his teacher to study].

b. R. Adda Bar Abbahu would arrange his studies twenty-four times corresponding to [the total number of books in] the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, and [only after doing so] he would come before Raba [his teacher to study].

2. Raba said: If you see a student whose studies are as hard for him as iron it is because his teacher did not show him a cheerful face, as it is said, *He has not whetted the edge*, [that is, he has “corrupted” his “face”]. What is his remedy? He should increase his [number of] friends, as it is said, *He must exert more strength*.<sup>190</sup> [As for the phrase,] *thus the advantage of a skill [depends on the exercise of] prudence*, all the more so if his deeds had been worthy before his teacher from the start.

3. And R. Ammi said: What is written, (Ecclesiastes 10:11) *If the snake bites*

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and permitting what is forbidden. Thus he “distorts” [Hebrew: *kilkal*] the “passages,” [also another use of “face”, Hebrew: *panim*, Soncino refers to Avot 3:2].

<sup>188</sup>Rashi comments that, in the academy, he will learn from other students the correct order of Mishnah and Gemara. Another way to translate the verse is, *he will be strengthened by soldiers* [Hebrew: *chayalim*].

<sup>189</sup>Some have “repeat.”

<sup>190</sup>See 175, that “strength” can mean “soldiers.”

*because no spell was uttered, no advantage is gained by the trained charmer* [lit. the one who speaks softly]? If you see a generation [over whose heads] the sky is the [dark] color of copper<sup>191</sup> [because the heavens have been restrained] from pouring dew and rain, it is because there is no one in that generation who speaks softly, [that is, who prays].<sup>192</sup> What is their remedy? They should go to some who knows how to speak softly [that is, pray], as it is written, (Job 36:33) *Its noise tells of him.*<sup>193</sup>

a. [As for the phrase], *no advantage is gained by the trained charmer* [lit. the one who speaks softly], someone who knows how to pray and does not pray, what benefit does he have?

b. But if he prayed and was not answered, what is his remedy? Let him go to the most pious person of his generation and let him [the pious person] increase his prayers, as it is said, (Job 36:32) *He orders it [lightning] to hit the mark*, and the *mark* [*pigiya*] is prayer, as it is said, (Jeremiah 7:16) *As for you, do not pray for this people, [do not raise a cry of prayer on their behalf.] do not plead* [Hebrew: *tifga*] *with Me.*<sup>194</sup>

c. And if he prayed, he was successful, and he becomes haughty, he brings [divine] wrath into the world, as it is said, (Job 36:33) *The kindling of anger against iniquity* [lit., against his “rising up.”]

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<sup>191</sup>Punning on “snake” [Hebrew: *nachash*] and “copper” [Hebrew: *nichoshet*].

<sup>192</sup>Rashi explains that prayer is said softly. The *trained charmer* is the “one who speaks softly.”

<sup>193</sup>Noise [Hebrew: *reiyoh*] can be reread to mean, “friend,” rendering the verse, as Rashi reads it, his friend can speak for him.

<sup>194</sup>See 170.

d. Raba said: Two scholars who reside in one city and are not tolerant of each other in matters of law "inflamm" divine wrath and "raise it up," as it is said, (Job 36:33) *[Its noise [or "friend,"] tells [that is, should speak] to him.] The kindling of anger against iniquity [lit. against its "rising up.]"*<sup>195</sup>

4. Resh Lakish said: What is written, (Ecclesiastes 10:11) *If the snake bites because no spell was uttered, no advantage is gained by the trained charmer?* In the Time-to-Come, all of the animals will gather and come to the snake and say to him, "the lion claws [its prey] and eats. The wolf tears and eats. As for you, what benefit do you have [from striking people if you do not eat them]?"<sup>196</sup> He [the snake] will say to them, *No advantage is gained by the trained charmer.*

H. R. Ammi said: A person's prayer is accepted only if he puts his soul in his hands, as it is said, (Lamentations 3:41) *Let us lift our hearts with our hands [to God in heaven].*

a. Is it so? But Samuel appointed a speaker on his behalf who expounded, (Psalms 78:36-38) *Yet they deceived Him with their speech, lied to Him with their words; their hearts were inconstant toward Him; they were untrue to His covenant.* Nevertheless, [the passage concludes:] *But He, being merciful, forgave iniquity.*

b. There is no contradiction. Here [in R. Ammi's statement it refers to] individual [prayer] and here [in the exposition given by Samuel's speaker, it refers to] public

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<sup>195</sup>This interpretation is according to Rashi who points out the pun on *kindling* [Hebrew: *mikneh*] with "inflames" [Hebrew: *mitkaneh*].

<sup>196</sup>This interpretation is according to Rashi. The parallel is drawn between a poisonous snake bite and the spread of slander and gossip which is of no benefit. Rashi explains that all of the animals are coming to the snake to embarrass him because he seduced Adam and Eve with words. The snake will teach them the lesson that evil speech gets one no advantage.

[prayer].<sup>197</sup>

I. R. Ammi said: Rain only descends for the sake of the faithful, as it is said, (Psalms 85:12) *Truth springs up from the earth; justice looks down from heaven.*<sup>198</sup> And R. Ammi continued: Come and see how great are the faithful. From where? From the weasel and the pit.<sup>199</sup> For just as one may believe in a weasel and a pit, so much the more so in the Holy Blessed Be He.

J. R. Jochanan said: Anyone who makes himself righteous below [on earth] justifies the judgment upon him above [in heaven], as it is said, (Psalms 85:12) *Truth springs up from the earth; justice looks down from heaven.*<sup>200</sup>

1. R. Chiyva Bar Abin in the name of R. Huna [taught the same lesson] from here, (Psalms 90:11) *Your wrath matches the fear of You.*<sup>201</sup>

2. Resh Lakish [taught the same lesson] from here, (Isaiah 64:4) *Yet you have struck him who would gladly do justice, and remember You in Your ways. It is because You are*

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<sup>197</sup>Rashi explains that public prayer is accepted even if not everyone is whole-hearted, but as for individual prayer, the intentions of the heart speak for themselves.

<sup>198</sup>Rashi: When there is trust in business dealings [on earth], then righteousness looks down from heaven, and rain is a righteous gift.

<sup>199</sup>Rashi explains the legend referred to here. A young man promised to marry a woman, and his only witnesses were a pit and a weasel. In the days following, however, his faithfulness waned and he married another. His wife gave birth to two children, both of whom died. One fell into a pit, and the other was bitten by a weasel. When his wife demanded an explanation, he told her of his previous oath.

<sup>200</sup>Rashi explains that the more righteous one's deeds on earth, the more exacting is the justice in heaven, focusing on even the slightest transgression, in order to purge the righteous individual of any wrongdoing (and therefore grant him a greater reward in the World To Come).

<sup>201</sup>Rashi understands this to mean the more one has reverence for God, the stronger the afflictions in order to purge him.

*angry that we have sinned; we have been steeped in them from of old, and can we be saved?*<sup>202</sup>

3. And R. Joshua Ben Levi said: Everyone who rejoices in the afflictions that come upon him brings salvation to the world, as it is said, *in them from of old, and we [can] be saved.*<sup>203</sup>

VII. Resh Lakish said: What is written, (Deuteronomy 11:17) *And He will shut up* [that is, “restrain”] *the skies*? The time that the heavens are restrained from sending down dew and rain is like a woman who is in labor but is not giving birth. And Resh Lakish used to say in the name of Bar Kappara:<sup>204</sup> “Restraining” is mentioned in reference to rain, and “restraining” is mentioned in reference to a woman. [8b] “Restraining” is mentioned in reference to a woman, as it is said, (Genesis 20:18) *For the Lord had closed fast* [or, completely restrained] *every womb [of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, wife of Abraham]*. And “restraining” is mentioned in reference to rain, as it is written, (Deuteronomy 11:17) *And He will shut up* [that is, “restrain”] *the skies*. “Giving birth” is mentioned in reference to a woman, and “giving birth” is mentioned in reference to rain. “Giving birth” is mentioned in reference to a woman, as it is written, (Genesis 30:23) *She [Rachel] conceived and bore a son*. And “giving birth” is mentioned in reference to rain, as it is written, (Isaiah 55:10) *[For as the rain or snow drops from heaven and returns not*

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<sup>202</sup>Rashi explains this verse in light of the previous two, that the person who does righteousness will accept God’s *ways* and *remember* God, even if those ways are ways of affliction.

<sup>203</sup>I have reworded this verse to bring out its homiletical meaning.

<sup>204</sup>The premise of this triple-structured homily is a *gezera shava*, an analogy of the use of words. The same word is compared into two contexts, here in the context of rain and a woman. The first word to be compared is “restraining,” (Hebrew: *atzar*), the second is “giving birth” or “bearing,” (Hebrew: *leida*), and the third is “remembering” or “taking note of” (Hebrew: *pakad*).

*there, but soaks the earth] and makes it bring forth vegetation.* “Remembering” is mentioned in reference to a woman, and “remembering” is mentioned in reference to rain. “Remembering” is mentioned in reference to a woman, as it is written, (Genesis 21:1) *The Lord took not of Sarah.* And “remembering” is mentioned in reference to rain, as it is written, (Psalms 65:10) *You take care of the earth and irrigate it; You enrich it greatly, with the channel of God full of water.* What is *the channel of God full of water*? It was taught in a Baraita: there is a kind of chamber in the firmament from which rain comes out.

VIII. R. Samuel Bar Nachmani said: What is written, (Job 37:13) *Causing each of them [storms] to happen to His land, whether as a scourge or as a blessing? Whether as a scourge* [hard rains fall] on mountains and hills.<sup>205</sup> *As a blessing* [gentle rains fall], *causing each of them to happen to His land,* on the fields and vineyards. [Alternatively, the verse can be divided into three parts for a different explanation:] *Whether as a scourge* [hard rains fall] for trees. *Causing each of them to happen to his land* for the seeds. *As a blessing* He causes them to fill cisterns, pits, and caves.

A. In the days of R. Samuel Bar Nachmani there was a famine and a plague. The people said, “What shall we do? Shall we pray concerning both of them? [Lit. Shall we request mercy?] That is impossible.<sup>206</sup> Rather, let us pray [for the end of] the plague, and we will suffer through the famine.” R. Samuel Bar Nachmani said to them, “Let us pray [for the end of] the famine, for when the Compassionate One gives abundantly, He gives to the living, as it is written, (Psalms

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<sup>205</sup> *As a scourge* is literally, “like a rod.” As Rashi explains, God passes a harsh decree and violent rains come down in force like a rod striking in power, but when the people repent, God diverts the rain to the uninhabited mountains and hills.

<sup>206</sup> See below.



145:16) *You give it [food] openhandedly, feeding every [living] creature to its heart's content.*<sup>207</sup>

1. And from where do we [know] that we do not pray for two things [at the same time]? As it is written, (Ezra 8:23) *So we fasted and besought our God for this, [and He responded to our plea].*<sup>208</sup> Consequently there were other things [for which they might have prayed].

2. In the West [in the Land of Israel] they say in the name of R. Chaggai [that this lesson comes] from here, (Daniel 2:18) *That they might implore the God of Heaven for help regarding this mystery.* Consequently there were other things [for which they might have prayed].

B. In the days of R. Zera a decree was issued, and it was decreed that they [the Jews] may not observe fasts.<sup>209</sup> R. Zera said to them [the people], "Let us accept [a fast] upon ourselves, and when the decree is nullified, let us observe it."<sup>210</sup> They said to him, "From where do you get this?" He said to them, "As it is written, (Daniel 10:12) *Have no fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to get understanding, practicing abstinence before your God, your prayer was heard.*"

C. R. Isaac said: Even years such as the years of Elijah [which were years of drought], if

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<sup>207</sup>Thus, because God would only provide food for the living, God would also have to stop the plague.

<sup>208</sup>Rashi explains that the use of the singular article *this* indicates that they fasted and prayed over one thing that they needed to specify among others.

<sup>209</sup>Others consult alternative texts which read, They passed a decree against religious observance and decreed that they may not observe fasts.

<sup>210</sup>Rashi explains that the acceptance of the fast will be as efficacious as observing the fast itself.

rain fell on the eve of the Sabbath it can only be a sign of a curse.

1. So did Rabbah Bar Shila say: A day of rain is as hard as a day of court.<sup>211</sup>

2. Amemar said: Were it not for the fact that people needed rain, we would pray and nullify it.<sup>212</sup>

3. And R. Isaac said: Sun on the Sabbath is an act of righteousness to the poor, as it is said, (Malachi 3:20) *But for you who revere My name<sup>213</sup> a sun of victory shall rise to bring healing.*

4. And R. Isaac said: A day of rain is great, that even a coin in one's purse is blessed, as it is said, (Deut. 28:12) *To provide rain for your land in season and to bless all your undertakings.*<sup>214</sup>

5. And R. Isaac said: Blessing is only found on things hidden from sight, as it is said, (Deut. 28:8) *The Lord will ordain blessings for you upon your barns.*<sup>215</sup>

a. A Baraita was taught in the school of R. Ishmael: Blessing is only found on things which are unsupervised, as it is said, (Deut. 28:8) *The Lord will ordain blessings for you upon your barns.*

b. It was taught in a Baraita: Upon entering to measure one's granary, one

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<sup>211</sup>Rashi comments that a day of court was on Mondays and Thursdays, when the rabbis would meet in the market before the people.

<sup>212</sup>Rashi explains that rain troubles people and hinders them from coming and going.

<sup>213</sup>Rashi: Those who keep the Sabbath.

<sup>214</sup>Rashi: Even those investments that do not need rain are blessed. The verse demonstrates this through its two clauses: God provides rain and blessing on other undertakings.

<sup>215</sup>Read literally, a *barn* is a "hidden" place (Hebrew: *samui*).

says, "May it be Your will before You Lord or our that You send blessing on the work of our hands."<sup>216</sup> [When] one begins to measure, one says, "Blessed is the one who sends blessing onto this pile [of grain]." If one measured and afterwards blessed, this is a prayer in vain, that blessing is not found on things [already] weighed, measured, or counted but rather on things hidden from sight.

IX. A mnemonic: ingathering, troops, charity, tithing,<sup>217</sup> sustenance.

A. R. Jochanan said: A day of rain is as great as the day of the ingathering of the exiles, as it is said, (Psalms 126:4) *Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like watercourses in the Negeb*, and *watercourses* can only indicate rain, as it is said, (II Samuel 22:16) *The bed of the sea was exposed*.<sup>218</sup>

B. And R. Jochanan said: A day of rain is great, that even troops cease [their movement] on it, as it is said, (Psalms 65:11) *Saturating its [the earth's] furrows, leveling its ridges* [or, "troops"].<sup>219</sup>

C. And R. Jochanan said: Rains are only shut up due to those who pledge charity in public and do not give, as it is said, (Proverbs 25:14) *Like clouds, wind -- but no rain -- is one who boasts of gifts not given*.

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<sup>216</sup>Before the eye has seen the grain.

<sup>217</sup>While the text actually reads, "deed," (Hebrew: *ma'aseh*), it is clear from the context that the intended word is "tithing" (Hebrew: *ma'aser*).

<sup>218</sup>The technique is a *gezera shava*. The Hebrew term, "*afikim*" is used to indicate channels of water is analogous to the restoration of Zion.

<sup>219</sup>The Hebrew word, "*gidud*" can mean either *ridges* or *troops*.

D. And R. Jochanan said: What is written, [9a] (Deut. 14:22) *Tithes you shall tithe?*<sup>220</sup>

Tithe that you may become rich.<sup>221</sup>

1. R. Jochanan happened upon the young son of Resh Lakish.<sup>222</sup> He [R. Jochanan] said to him [his nephew]: Recite to me your verse [of Torah that you are currently studying]. He answered: *Tithes you shall tithe.* He [the nephew] said [further] to him: And what is, *Tithes you shall tithe?* He [R. Jochanan] answered him: Tithe that you may become rich. He [the nephew] said to him [R. Jochanan]: From where is this [interpretation]? He [R. Jochanan] said to him [the nephew]: Go and test it out [for yourself]! He [the nephew] said to him: And is it permissible to test the Holy One Blessed Be He, for it is written, (Deut. 6:16) *Do not try the Lord?* He [R. Jochanan] said to him: Thus said R. Oshaia: [One should not test God] except for this case, as it is said, (Malachi 3:10) *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and let there be food in My House, and thus put Me to the test--said the Lord of Hosts. I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessing on you without limit.* (What is, *Without limit?* R. Rami Bar Chama said in the name of Rab: Until your lips tire from saying, "Enough!")<sup>223</sup> He [the nephew] said to him [R. Jochanan]: If I had reached that verse [in Malachi

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<sup>220</sup>The translation is mine to indicate the repetitive nature of the Hebrew that is the basis for this exposition.

<sup>221</sup>A pun on the Hebrew word for tithing, "*ta'aser.*" "To become rich" is "*titasher.*"

<sup>222</sup>Rashi indicates that this was also R. Jochanan's nephew, the child of his sister, making Resh Lakish his brother-in-law.

<sup>223</sup>This parenthetical remark is based upon a pun. *Without* (Hebrew: *b'li*) is similar to the verb, "to tire," (Hebrew: *yivlu*). The word *limit* is the same as "enough."

in my studies], I would not have needed you or Oshaia your teacher.<sup>224</sup>

2. And another time R. Jochanan happened upon the young son of Resh Lakish who was sitting and reciting, (Proverbs 19:3) *A man's folly subverts his way, and his heart rages against the Lord*. R. Jochanan was sitting and wondered aloud, "Is there anything that is written in the Prophets and Writings that is not [already] hinted at in the Torah?" He [the nephew] said to him [R. Jochanan], "Is this not hinted at? For it is written, (Genesis 42:28) *Their hearts sank; and, trembling, they turned to one another, saying, 'What is this that God has done to us?'*"<sup>225</sup> He [R. Jochanan] raised his eyes and looked at him [to see who answered him so intelligently].<sup>226</sup> His mother came out and took him [the boy] away. She said to him, "Come from that place so that he will not do to you as he did to your father."<sup>227</sup>

E. R. Jochanan said: Rain [is provided by God] for the sake of an individual, sustenance [is provided] for the sake of many. Rain [is provided] for the sake of an individual, as it is written, (Deut. 28:12) *The Lord will open for you [singular] His bounteous store, the heavens, to provide rain for your land in season*. Sustenance [is provided] for the sake of many, as it is written, (Exodus 16:4) *I will rain down bread for you [plural]*.

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<sup>224</sup>In other words, "I would have figured it out myself."

<sup>225</sup>These are the brothers of Joseph who have discovered their money returned to them in their bags of grain on their way home to their father, Jacob. Their brother, Simeon, was being held in Egypt, and the money would appear to Jacob as if they had sold Simeon into slavery for the grain. This was the design of Joseph who they had sold into Egypt years before. Rather than connect the two events and take responsibility for their own "folly," they blame God.

<sup>226</sup>Rashi comments that R. Jochanan had very big eyebrows that covered his eyes and carried an instrument to push them aside to see, citing Bava Kamma 117a.

<sup>227</sup>Rashi explains that R. Jochanan gave Resh Lakish a look that caused his death (Bava Metzia 84a).

1. R. Jose in the name of R. Judah objected, saying: Three good leaders<sup>228</sup> arose for Israel, and they were: Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. And three goodly gifts were given on account of them, and they were: a well, a cloud, and manna. The well was given on the merit of Miriam,<sup>229</sup> the cloud on the merit of Aaron,<sup>230</sup> and the manna on the merit of Moses. [When] Miriam died, the well disappeared, as it is said, (Numbers 20:1) *Miriam died there*, and it is written immediately afterwards, (Numbers 20:2) *The community was without water*. It [the well] returned on the merit of both of them [Aaron and Moses]. Aaron died and the clouds of glory disappears, as it is said, (Numbers 21:1) *When the Canaanite, king of Arad, who dwelt in the Negeb, learned [that Israel was coming by way of the Atharim, he engaged Israel in battle.]* What did he learn? He learned that Aaron had died and the clouds of glory had disappeared and so thought that permission was given him to engage Israel in battle. Thus it is written, (Numbers 20:29) *the whole community saw that Aaron had breathed his last*. R. Abahu said: Do not read, *saw*, but rather, “appeared.”<sup>231</sup> So did Resh Lakish expound that Resh Lakish said: [The Hebrew word] *ki* [translated in the latter verse as, “that”] has four meanings: if, perhaps, but, and

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<sup>228</sup>In Hebrew, “sustenance” (*parnasah*) is related to the word, “leader” (*parnas*). Thus a leader is, among other things, one who provides sustenance.

<sup>229</sup>Rashi explains a well-known legend that this well magically followed the Israelites through the wilderness providing water for them to drink as well as their ritual needs.

<sup>230</sup>This was the cloud that led the Israelites through the wilderness by day and told them where to encamp. See Exodus 13:21.

<sup>231</sup>By revocalizing the Hebrew word, the meaning can be understood as, “appeared,” that is, that the cloud disappeared so they were visible.

because.<sup>232</sup> They [the well and the cloud] both returned on the merit of Moses. [When] Moses died, all of them [the well, the cloud, and the manna] disappeared, as it is said, (Zechariah 11:8) *Then I lost the tree shepherds in one month.* And so in one month did they die? Did not Miriam die in Nisan, Aaron in Av, and Moses in Adar? Rather, [this verse] teaches that all three goodly gifts terminated that were given on their account, and they all disappeared in one month [upon the death of Moses]. Therefore, we find sustenance [is provided by God] for the sake of an individual!

2. Moses is different [and cannot be used in a general rule because he is exceptional] because he prayed for the sake of many he was like many himself.

a. R. Huna Bar Manoach and R. Samuel Bar Idi and R. Chiyya of Wastanya would attend regularly [the lessons of] Raba. When Raba's soul came to rest, they attended [the lessons] of R. Papa. Whenever he [R. Papa] would teach a legal decision to them, and they did not think it was reasonable, they would make signs to one another. This upset him [R. Papa]. [9b] In his dream, he [R. Papa] was made to recite, (Zechariah 11:8) *Then I lost the tree shepherds.* The next day, when they [the three students] parted from him [after class], he said to them, "Go, rabbis, in peace."

b. R. Shimi Bar Ashi attended [the lessons of] R. Papa. He [R. Shimi Bar Ashi] would make his [R. Papa's] life difficult with hard questions a good deal. One day, he [R. Shimi Bar Ashi] saw him [R. Papa] fall on his face and heard him say, "Let the Compassionate One save us from shame of Shimi!" [R. Shimi Bar Ashi thereupon] accepted silence upon himself

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<sup>232</sup>Thus the verse would read, "The whole community appeared because Aaron breathed his last," for the cloud disappeared upon Aaron's death.

and no longer challenged him.

3. And so did Resh Lakish reason that rain [is provided] for the sake of an individual, for Resh Lakish said: From where [do we learn] that rain [is provided] for the sake of an individual? As it is written, (Zechariah 10:1) *Ask the Lord for rain in the season of late rain. It is the Lord who causes storms; and He will provide rainstorms for them, grass in the field for everyone.* It might be possible [to think the verse intends to teach that rain is only provided] for all [who need rain as a group]. Thus it teaches, *for everyone* [that is, for each individual]. And it was taught in Baraita: If [the verse only mentioned] *for everyone*, it might be possible [to think the verse intends to teach that rain is only provided] for all of that individuals fields. Thus it teaches, *in the field*. If [the verse only mentioned] *in the field*, it might be possible [to think the verse intends to teach that rain is only provided] for all of the field. Thus it teaches, *grass*.<sup>233</sup> So it was in the case of R. Daniel Bar Kattinia who had a certain garden. Each day he would go and examine it. He would say, "This row needs water and that row does not need water, and the rain would come and water every place that needed water.

ã. What is meant by, *It is the Lord who causes storms*? R. Jose Bar Chanina said: It teaches that for each and every righteous person, the Holy One Blessed Be He makes a rainstorm for his sake alone. What are *storms*? R. Judah said: "Swift clouds." R. Jochanan said: Swift clouds are a sign of rain. What are "swift clouds"? R. Papa said: A thin cloud [flying under] a thick cloud.

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<sup>233</sup>Rashi explains that even if one worthy person has one plant that needs rain, the rain will fall precisely on that plant alone.



b. R. Judah said: If a fine rain<sup>234</sup> should precede a heavy rain, more rain is coming. [If a fine rain] should come after a heavy rain, the rain is stopping. [If a fine rain] should precede a heavy rain, more rain is coming, and your model for such is a sieve.<sup>235</sup> [If a fine rain] should come after a heavy rain, the rain is stopping, and your model for such is goat dung.<sup>236</sup>

c. 'Ulla happened to go to Babylonia. He saw swift clouds. He said to them [his servants], "Take away the vessels for now rain comes." In the end, no rain came. He said, "As the Babylonians lie, so do their rains lie."

d. 'Ulla happened to go to Babylonia. He saw a basket full of dates for [only] a quarter of a silver shekel [Hebrew: *zuz*]. He said, "A basket full of honey for a *zuz*, and the Babylonians are not engaged in Torah [all the time]?"<sup>237</sup> During that night they [the dates] made him sick. He said, "A basket full of knives for a *zuz*! Then [it is a wonder that] the Babylonians are engaged in Torah [at all]!"

X. It was taught in a Baraita: R. Eliezer says: The entire world drinks from the waters of the ocean, as it is said, (Genesis 2:6) *But a mist would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth.* R. Joshua said to him, "Are not the waters of the ocean salty?" He [R. Eliezer] answered him [R. Joshua], "They are sweetened by the clouds." R. Joshua says: The entire world drinks from the waters of heaven, as it is said, (Deut. 11:11) *[The land] soaks up its*

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<sup>234</sup>Rashi explains that a fine rain is one with small drops.

<sup>235</sup>Rashi explains at first the fine flour falls through and then the larger grains.

<sup>236</sup>Rashi explains that at first goat dung is large and then it crumbles and is no more.

<sup>237</sup>Rashi explains that the Babylonians, with produce so inexpensive, could afford to spend their time studying Torah. 'Ulla thereupon buys and eats the dates.

water from the rains of heaven. But how shall I fulfill [the verse], *But a mist would well up from the ground?* [It actually] teaches that the clouds swell and rise up to the firmament, open their mouths like a water-skin, and take in rain, as it is said, (Job 36:27) *[He forms the droplets of water,] which cluster into rain, from His mist.*<sup>238</sup> They [the clouds] are perforated like a sieve and come and drip water on to the surface of the ground, as it is said, (II Samuel 22:12) *Dripping clouds, huge thunderheads.* And between each and every drop there is no more than a hairsbreadth, to teach you that a day of rain is as great as the day heaven and earth were created, as it is said, (Job 9:10), *Who does great deeds which cannot be fathomed,* and it is written (Job 5:9-10), *[Who does great deeds which cannot be fathomed and wondrous deeds which cannot be numbered,] who gives rain to the earth and sends water over the fields.* And it is written elsewhere, (Isaiah 40:28), *Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is God from of old, Creator of the earth from end to end, He never grows faint or weary, His wisdom cannot be fathomed.* And it is written, (Psalms 65:7) *Who by His power fixed the mountains.*<sup>239</sup>

A. Like whose view [R. Eliezer or R. Joshua] is the following,<sup>240</sup> that it is written, (Psalms 104:13) *You water the mountains from Your lofts; [the earth is sated from the fruit of Your work],* and R. Jochanan explained: From the lofts of the Holy One Blessed Be He? Like whose? It is like R. Joshua [who claims rain originates in heaven]. And R. Eliezer, [how does he

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<sup>238</sup>A *gezera shava*, a comparison, on the use of the word, *mist* (Hebrew: *eyd*), in two different contexts.

<sup>239</sup>See 2a for a more complete version of this tradition.

<sup>240</sup>Now that the Gemara has established two schools of thought as to the origin of rain, R. Eliezer and R. Joshua, the following traditions are divided up as to which would lend support to which school.

explain the latter tradition]? Because [the waters ultimately] rise up to there [to the heavens, even if they do not originate there,] the verse says that God waters from His lofts. If you do not say so, [that such an interpretation is possible,] how can there be what you find here, (Deut. 28:24) *Dust and sand shall drop on you from the sky*? Rather, since they are carried up there [from earth to heaven], they are referred to as *from the sky*. Here [in Psalms 104:13] also, since they are carried up there, they are referred to as, "from his lofts."

B. Like whose view is the following, that R. Chanina said: (Psalms 33:7) *He heaps up the ocean waters like a mound, stores the deep in vaults*, [meaning,] who caused the vaults to be filled with uncultivated grain [that is, what irrigates the prairies of the world]? *The deep*. [Like whose?] Like R. Eliezer [who claims that rain originates in the ocean]. And R. Joshua, [how does he explain the latter tradition]? That verse (Psalms 33:7) [10a] [refers to] the creation of the world.<sup>241</sup>

1. It was taught in a Baraita: The Land of Israel was created first, and all of the world was created afterward, as it is said, (Proverbs 8:26) *[The Lord created me at the beginning of His course...] He had not yet made earth and fields*.

2. The Holy One Blessed Be He waters it [the Land of Israel] personally, and all of the [rest] of the world [is watered] by a messenger, as it is said, (Job 5:10) *Who gives rain to the earth* [referring to the Land of Israel], *and sends* [by messenger] *water over the fields*.

3. The Land of Israel drinks the rain water, and all [the rest of] the world drinks [regular] water, as it is said, (Job 5:10) *Who gives rain to the earth* [referring to the Land of

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<sup>241</sup>Rashi explains that the verse is not talking about watering the grain of the world but rather the days of creation, when God gathered waters that covered the entire world and "stored them" in the oceans, making dry land.

Israel], [*and sends* [the remaining] *water over the fields*].

4. The Land of Israel drinks first, and all [the rest of] the world drinks afterwards, as it is said, (Job 5:10) *Who gives rain to the earth* [first, referring to the Land of Israel, *and sends* [afterwards] *water over the fields*.] A parable: It is like a man who makes cheese who takes the edible part and leaves the refuse.

C. The Master [R. Eliezer] said: They [the salty ocean waters] are sweetened by the clouds. From where does he [know this]? That R. Isaac Bar Joseph said in the name of R. Jochanan: It is written, (Psalms 18:12) *Dark* [Hebrew: *cheschat*] *thunderheads, dense clouds of the sky*, and it written, (II Samuel 22:12) *Dripping* [Hebrew: *chashrat*] *thunderheads, dense clouds of the sky*. Take the Hebrew letter, *chaf*, [from *cheschat*] and place in a *resh* [in *chashrat*, that is, combine the two words], and read: Makes fit [for drinking, Hebrew: *chachsharat*]. And R. Joshua, what does he expound from these verses? He reasons that this is like that [teaching by] R. Dimi who came [from Babylonia to the Land of Israel] who said: The say in the West [in the Land of Israel], "Bright clouds have little water, dark clouds have much water."<sup>242</sup>

D. Like whose view is the following, that it was taught in a Baraita: The upper waters are suspended by God's utterance, and their fruit is rain water, as it is said, (Psalms 104:13) [*You water the mountains from Your lofts;*] *the earth is sated from the fruit of Your work*? Like whose? Like R. Joshua [who claims rain originates in heaven]. And R. Eliezer, [how does he explain the latter tradition]? That verse refers to the handiwork of the Holy One Blessed Be He.

E. R. Joshua Ben Levi said: All of the world drinks from the overflow [of water] of the

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<sup>242</sup>In other words, the darkness and dripping qualities of clouds are simply a function of being full of water.

Garden of Eden, as it is said, (Genesis 2:10) *A river issues from Eden [to water the garden, and then it divides and becomes four branches.]* [And so] it was taught in a Baraita: An area measuring a *tarkab* drinks [and is completely irrigated] from the overflow of a *kor* [a land area sixty times a the area of a *tarkab*].

F. It was taught in a Baraita: The Land of Egypt is four hundred *parsahs* by four hundred *parsahs*, and it is one sixtieth of Ethiopia, and Ethiopia is one sixtieth of the world, and the world is one sixtieth of the Garden, and the Garden is one sixtieth of Eden, and Eden is one sixtieth of Gehenna. Consequently, all of the world is like a lid on the pot of Gehenna. And there are those who say that Gehenna is beyond measure, and there are those who say Eden is beyond measure.

R. Oshaia said: What is [meant by] what is written, (Jeremiah 51:13) *O you who dwell by great waters* [in Babylon], *with vast storehouses, [Your time has come, the hour of your end]*? What caused Babylon to have its *storehouses* be full of grain? One might say: Because it *dwells by great waters*.<sup>243</sup> Rab said: Babylon is rich because it harvests without rain. Abaye said: We have a tradition: [It is] a swamp and never dry.

#### The Meiri

The Meiri does not comment on any of the statements of lore at the beginning of the section. Rather, he immediately begins addressing legal topics, beginning with the definition of kinds of rainfall.

The first topic that the Meiri addresses is the time of the rainy season. The mishnah, attributed to R. Meir, states that the early rain comes

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<sup>243</sup>Rashi explains: Many waters irrigate Babylon because it is the lowest of all lands, and the rains flow and descend into it.

in Marcheshvan and the late rain comes in Nisan.<sup>244</sup> The early rain itself is divided into three different rainfalls on three different dates as to when they are supposed to arrive. R. Meir claims the dates are the third, the seventh, and the seventeenth, excluding special circumstances, such as in the time of the prophet Joel. If rain falls on all three of these dates, they are called in Hebrew, "riviyot," with the first rainfall being called, "bichira." If the first rainfall comes on the second date, the second date is called, "beinonit," and if the first rainfall does not come until the third date, the third date is called, "afeila."

Although the Meiri establishes the Halacha according to R. Meir, Maimonides (Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon, 1135-1204, North Africa) follows the declaration of R. Chisda that the Halacha is with R. Jose with respect to the matter of taking oaths by the second rainfall (see below). Further, Rashi also has a version in which the Halacha is determined by R. Judah. In any case, the Meiri claims that the only consistent position is that of R. Meir, for in the next mishnah, one begins fasting on the seventeenth, which must be the third date.

The first date for rainfall marks the beginning as to when one should begin to "request," (the third of Marcheshvan), while the third marks the time when individuals should begin to fast if no rain has yet fallen. The Gemara then gives various reasons as to why the second date is important to know, and the Meiri reviews them. The date of the second rainfall applies to: those who swear to abstain from something up until or starting with the rainfall (see Nedarim 62b), the right to glean olives that have been left over after the poor have had their chance to glean, the disposal of produce during the Sabbatical year (for the second rainfall turns the straw and stubble of the

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<sup>244</sup>As cited above, the lunar months go as follows: Tishrei (the first month, beginning sometime in September or October), Cheshvan (also called, "Marcheshvan"), Kislev, Tebeth, Shebath, Adar, Nisan (approximately April), Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Ab, and Elul.

field into manure thus indicating the natural time that wild animals would not be able to eat the produce of that year), and the ceasing of traffic through the private domain that it might damage crops. The Meiri claims that what is important to these events pertaining to the second rainfall is the date and not the rain itself. That is, when one swears to abstain from something until the rainfall, one means until the date of the second rainfall, and not until the actual rain descends. The Meiri acknowledges that others, namely Rashi, disagree with him, for the actual rain is instrumental in certain events, such as reducing straw to manure or causing the last gleaners of olives to despair of finding more.

The Gemara also measures the first rainfall by quantity, that one can say the first rainfall has come when enough rain has fallen to soak the earth to the depth of one handsbreadth and the second rainfall if one is able to make a barrel-covering out of the earth. The Meiri explains that Rashi's position is if rain has fallen to such a depth then there is no need to fast, but it must fall during the day before the evening recitation of the Shema. This is problematic, however, as the Ravad explains, for one is not required to fast during the time of the third rainfall. Rather, the Ravad holds that the measurement applies to the first rainfall when comes late in the season beyond the expected time of the third rainfall (the seventeenth of Marcheshvan). If it falls while there is a fast, the fast need not be completed. Alternatively, the Ravad says that there are those who say that if there is a forty day period in between rainfalls, the community sounds the shofar (as will be explained in a forthcoming discussion). If it rains during this time of sounding the shofar, the community ceases to the alarm. In any case, the measure of a handsbreadth in order to halt a fast already in progress must come before the latest possible time of reading the Keriat Shema, that is, midnight, in which one recites the curse, (Deuteronomy 11:17) *And He will shut up the skies so there will be no rain and the ground will not*

yield its produce. If rain falls after midnight, one must complete one's fast, for, as the Gemara explains, rain during the night is of no consequence.

However, the Meiri differs with both Rashi and Ravad. He feels that the Gemara is merely describing the nature and order of the rainfall so that a person can feel confident and act properly. He also feels that this interpretation fits better into the context of the following passage in which rain falls on one part of the country and not another. Here, the unusual nature and order of rain is described. Incidentally, flooding in one region and drought in another is also not a manifestation of the Deuteronomy curse because it involves rainfall, even if its purpose is in fact punishment. The Ravad still notes, however, that the region which does suffer drought must still follow the regimen of fasts.

The Meiri then highlights various aggadic lessons that he finds deals with ethics and the conduct of a student of Torah. In some, he simply reiterates what is already stated explicitly in the Gemara. Beginning with the passages on 7a, the Meiri stresses that there is a direct correlation between the blessings of rain and dew and the gifts of a true Torah scholar. (See the expositions on the verse, (Deut. 32:2) *May my instruction come down as the rain, my speech distill as the dew.*) This is the link that allows the Gemara to digress into matters of Torah study and prayer.

The Meiri points out that the Gemara teaches that the Torah scholar is held to a higher standard than other people. For this lesson, he draws upon the exposition by Raba on Deut. 32:2, that if a Torah scholar is worthy, his teaching is as sustaining as dew, and if not, he is broken as by violent rain. In connection to this lesson, the Meiri also emphasizes the sin of pride that a Torah scholar may exhibit, for Torah knowledge only endures in a humble spirit (see the exposition by R. Oshaia and the parable concerning R. Joshua Ben Chanina. Similarly, words of Torah only endure if one is humble enough to study with others, even those less knowledgeable, as in the lesson taught by



R. Nachman Bar Isaac that those of lesser knowledge can serve as kindling to those of greater.

In terms of prayer, which is more immediately relevant to the topic of the correct procedure of supplication and fasting, the Meiri claims that the unifying theological message of this section is the belief in the idea that drought is a form of punishment for Israel's sins and that repentance earns God's compassion, of which rain is a visible sign. The Gemara lists these sins at length. A direct consequence of this belief speaks to the kinds of leaders that represent Israel. Each community should have someone well-versed in prayer who can plead the cause of the people, and, more importantly, awaken within the people a sense of holiness. These are the only important criteria for appointing a leader, and the Meiri cautions communities against appointments based on other considerations. In relation to this, one should be skeptical of the excuses a Torah scholar offers for failure, and if he says, "I have labored in Torah and have not succeeded," do not believe him (taken from Megillah 6b).

The procedures for repentance and prayer of which a leader should be aware include the tradition that a community should only pray concerning one calamity at a time (supported by the expositions on Ezra 8:23, Daniel 2:18, and the parable of Samuel Bar Nachmani), and, if one is beset upon by numerous catastrophes, one should pray concerning the largest in hopes that it will include the lesser ones. Another such tradition is that, often, intention is enough to elicit God's compassion, even in a matter of fasting. If one is unable to perform a divine commandment but one fully wishes and intends to in the future, concentrating on the deed can serve as a substitute until one is fortunate enough to be able to actually do the deed. Such is expounded upon in this tractate concerning R. Zera with regards to fasting, expounding upon Daniel 10:12, as well as in Kiddushin 40a, where it says in a Baraita, "A good thought is regarded as a good deed."

Incidental to these topics, the Meiri chooses to expound upon two more lessons the Gemara addresses. The first of these concerns the theological lesson of testing God. This subject occurs in one of the parables of R. Jochanan and the son of Resh Lakish. The verse being discussed (Deut. 14:22), whose exposition teaches that one who tithes will become rich. This leads to a discussion that one should never test God, but the case of tithing is an exception, for God invites such testing in Malachi 3:10. The Meiri, however, interprets this to mean that one can examine how people who have tithed have become rich, but one should not tithe on the condition that one become rich. That is, just as a prophet should not demand miracles as proof of God's faithfulness, so should one not separate tithes from one's produce in order to see if God will truly give wealth as a reward. Likewise, the Meiri draws upon parts of the tractate Rosh Hashanah (4a and 16a) to illustrate that one does not give charity nor offer water libations in order to see if God will truly reward him or her with life and blessing, respectively, but one performs such acts confident that God rewards those who perform God's will. The pious person is confident that reward is a natural, measure for measure response to the fulfillment of mitzvot.

Finally, the Meiri refers back in the Gemara to another issue, that of saying a blessing over produce. The Meiri summarizes the Gemara's discussion that one say a blessing over one's produce before one has measured or counted it, and if one does so after one has measured, one has uttered a prayer in vain. Rashi explains that the regular formula of a blessing is used, mentioning God's sovereignty, although the Meiri cites an alternative version of petition as well. A question arises, however, when the Ravad asks why a prayer over measured produce should be a prayer in vain, for if the blessing is that the produce should not rot, such a prayer is relevant all of the time, both before and after measuring. The Meiri responds by saying that the blessing over the produce's freshness is not a prayer in vain but rather that

God should cause the merchant to succeed in the market no matter what, barring all obstacles. Such a prayer is deemed inappropriate.

**I. Our Mishnah:** On the third of Marcheshvan they request rain. R. Gamaliel says: On the seventh, fifteen days after the Festival [of Sukkot], so that the last [pilgrim] who is in the Land of Israel may reach the Euphrates River.<sup>245</sup>

**A. Gemara:** R. Eleazar said: The Halacha is according to Rabban Gamaliel.

1. It was taught in a Baraita that Chanania says: In the Diaspora [that is, Babylonia, they wait to "request" rain] until the sixtieth day in the season.<sup>246</sup> R. Huna Bar Chiyya said in the name of Samuel: The Halacha is according to Chanania.

2. Is that so? [Did Samuel really say so?] But [the people] asked Samuel, As from when do we mention "grant dew and rain" [in the ninth blessing of the Amidah]? He said to them: When wood is brought up to the house of Tabut, the fowler.<sup>247</sup>

3. Perhaps this [the sixtieth day] and that [the day wood is brought up to the house of Tabut] are one and the same.

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<sup>245</sup>Rashi explains that the seventh of Marcheshvan is fifteen days after the last day of Sukkot, and one delays "requesting" rain, that is, inserting *ten tal u'matar* into the ninth blessing of the Amidah, so that the last pilgrim returning to Babylonia may reach the Euphrates River unhindered by rain, which is the furthestmost river a pilgrim would have to cross. The Meiri further explains that rain would cause rivers to overflow and thus make travel for the pilgrims impossible.

<sup>246</sup>Steinsaltz (p.230) clarifies that there are four seasons, Nisan (spring), Tammuz (summer), Tishri (fall), and Tebeth (winter). The fall season begins with the fall equinox which coincides with Sukkot. One thus begins "requesting" sixty days after the fall equinox, which in our century is approximately December 4 or 5.

<sup>247</sup>Rashi explains that they would bring in wood before the rainy season to store it up for winter, and once the rainy season begins, one cannot chop wood anymore (as will be seen in the fourth chapter).

B. The question was asked: Is the sixtieth day [included] with the days that precede it [when one does not include the prayer for rain] or is it [counted] with those that follow it [when one does include the prayer for rain]? [That is, do we "request" on the sixtieth day or the day afterwards?]

1. Come and hear [an answer]: Rab [when he lived in the Land of Israel before coming to Babylonia] said: The sixtieth day is [counted] with those that follow it [and thus we pray for rain on the sixtieth day], and Samuel [who lived in Babylonia] said: it is [included] with those days that precede it [and thus we pray for rain on the day after the sixtieth day].

2. R. Nachman Bar Isaac said: And your mnemonic [to remember who held which position] is: Highlands [that is, the Land of Israel] request water; lowlands [that is, Babylonia] do not request water.<sup>248</sup>

3. R. Papa said: The Halacha is that the sixtieth day is [counted] with those that follow it, [that is, it follows Rab and the prayer is said earlier].

### The Meiri

The Meiri clarifies that there are three possible times for one to start "requesting" rain. The first is that of R. Meir, that one starts on the third of Marcheshvan. The second is that of Rabban Gamaliel (the Meiri's version, however, has the authority as Shimon Ben Gamaliel), that one starts on the seventh of Marcheshvan so as to allow pilgrims leaving the Land of Israel time to go home to Babylonia unhindered by rain and able to cross rivers that would, if it did rain, be overflowing and impassable (see Rashi). Finally, in

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<sup>248</sup>Rashi explains that highlands need more water than lowlands because the water rolls downward off of the highlands into the lowlands. Therefore, one would be more eager to "request" rain in the highlands of Israel than the lowlands of Babylonia and would want to start the prayer for rain a day sooner.

the Diaspora (that is, Babylonia), one starts sixty days after the start of the fall equinox because the land of Babylonia is fertile with crops still in the field, and there is no need to pray for rain as early as in the Land of Israel.

The Meiri then cites a dispute among the legal authorities as to which date we should follow. Normally, we would follow all of the customs of the Babylonians, but Maimonides points out that not all lands are as fertile as Babylonia was. Dryer lands might need earlier rainfalls, like the Land of Israel, so they may begin petitioning for rain earlier. Further, there is an opinion (which is represented later in history by R. Yomtov Ibn Asevili, the "Ritva," died in Seville Spain, c. 1320) which claims that we should logically follow R. Gamaliel's ruling, but, because there are no longer any more pilgrims to the Land of Israel, we should actually start praying for rain immediately after the Festival of Sukkot. The Meiri, however, acknowledges that his native Provence still has produce in the fields at this time and can afford to delay a little while, so his people's custom is similar to Maimonides in that they start on the seventh. He derives support for this custom from Ta'anit 4b, where an objection by R. Zera is cited that the Babylonian Jews' custom is different because they still have produce in the fields. A later authority, R. Joseph Karo (b. Toledo, Spain, 1488; d. Safed, Israel, 1575) rules in the Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim, Hilchot Tefilah* 117), however, that one does follow the custom of Babylonia if one lives in the Diaspora, but if one lives in the land of Israel, one follows Gamaliel's ruling.

**I. Our Mishnah:** If the seventeenth of Marcheshvan arrives and rain has not fallen, individuals begin to fast three fasts. They may eat and drink from the time it gets dark [at the onset of the day and begin fasting at dawn]<sup>249</sup> and are permitted to work, bathe, anoint themselves, wear sandals, and have sexual relations [even during daylight]. If the first of the month of Kisleb arrives and rain has not fallen, the court decrees three fasts on the [entire] public. They may eat and drink from the time it gets dark [at the onset of the day and begin fasting at dawn] and are permitted to work, bathe, anoint themselves, wear sandals, and have sexual relations [even during daylight].

**A. Gemara:** Who are "individuals?"

1. R. Huna said: Our rabbis. And R. Huna said: Individuals fast three fasts, Monday, Thursday, and Monday.

a. What does he mean to teach us?<sup>250</sup> It was [already] taught in a mishnah:<sup>251</sup> They do not decree a [series of] fasts beginning with Thursday so as not to disturb the market.<sup>252</sup> Rather, the first three fasts [must follow the order of] Monday,

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<sup>249</sup>Rashi explains that these initial fasts take place only during daylight hours, unlike the more extreme fasts of Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Ab, and begin with the onset of the day at dusk, lasting until twilight of the next evening.

<sup>250</sup>R. Huna's teaching appears superfluous because the information that the series of fasts goes on Monday, Thursday, Monday already appears in a mishna.

<sup>251</sup>See the mishnah below, 15b.

<sup>252</sup>Rashi explains that, if a series of fasts were to begin on Thursday, people would have to go buy a large quantity of food for two big meals, the meal of breaking the fast as well as Shabbat, and then the merchants would think a famine was coming and would inflate the prices.

Thursday, Monday.

b. [R. Huna's teaching is necessary because] what you might say is that these words [of the mishnah apply only to] a public fast, but not to individuals [since individuals' fasting would not disturb the market]. So thus he [R. Huna] teaches us [about individuals as well].

c. It was also taught in a Baraita thus: When individuals begin to fast, they fast on Monday, Thursday, and Monday, and they interrupt [their fast if a fast day coincides] with Rosh Chodesh [that is, the first of the month], [10b] or with any of the holidays written in the Scroll of Fasting.<sup>253</sup>

2. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: Let no one say, "I am [merely] a student and I am not fit to be an 'individual,' rather, all Torah scholars are 'individuals.'"

3. Who is an "individual" and who is a "student"? An "individual" is anyone who is fit to be appointed as a leader over the people. A "student" is one of whom people may ask a legal question within his area of study and he can answer, even if [his area of study is as simple an area as] Tractate Kallah.<sup>254</sup>

4. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: Not everyone who wants to consider himself an individual may do so, but if he is a student, he may do so. These are the words of R. Meir. R.

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<sup>253</sup>Nahum N. Glatzer in "*Megillat Ta'anit*," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 11, 1230-1231 explains that this scroll listed eventful days in Jewish history when fasting is forbidden.

<sup>254</sup>Another possibility is that this is not a tractate at all but rather a reference to the "months of Kallah," Elul and Adar, when there would be large gatherings of students in academies to study a certain tractate. See "Kallah, months of" by Yitzhak Dov Gilat, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 10, 710-712. This would indicate in this context that even a person who has taken up studies for a brief time may qualify as an "individual."



Jose says: [Anyone] may do so, [that is, consider himself a distinguished individual and fast,] and he will be remembered for good, for [fasting] is not [a source of] praise for him but only of hardship for him. [That is, there is no danger of him appearing excessively pious and therefore arrogant.]

5. [The same lesson was] taught in another Baraita: Not everyone who wants to consider himself an individual may do so, but if he is a student, he may do so. These are the words of R. Simeon Ben Eleazar. Rabban Simeon Ben Gamaliel says: To what do these words apply? To a matter that is [a source of] praise, but a matter that is [a source of] hardship, he may do so and he will be remembered for good, for [fasting] is not [a source of] praise for him but only of hardship for him.

B: Our sages taught in a Baraita: One who fasts concerning a calamity and it passes [while the person is still fasting, or] concerning a sick person and he is healed [during the fast],<sup>255</sup> this person continues fasting and completes [the allotted time of the fast]. One who goes from a place where they are not fasting to a place where they are fasting, this person should fast with them. From a place where they are fasting to a place where they are not fasting, this person continues fasting and completes [the allotted time of the fast]. If he forgot and ate and drank, he should not show himself before the community, and he should not indulge himself in pleasures, as it is said, (Genesis 42:1) *Why do you show yourselves?* [That is,] Jacob was saying to his sons, "Do not show yourselves, for you are satiated, not before the children of Esau or the children of Ishmael, so that they will not envy you." [Joseph also gave his brothers instruction, saying,]

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<sup>255</sup>Rashi adds that the same holds true if the sick person dies during the allotted time of the fast.

(Genesis 45:24) *Do not lose your way*. R. Eleazar said: Joseph said to his brothers, "Do not engage in debates of Jewish law lest you *lose your way*."

1. Is it [that is, the law] so? Did not R. Elia Bar Berackiah say: Two Torah scholars who are traveling on the way and do not have words of Torah between them are fit to be burned, as it is said, (II Kings 2:11) *As they [Elijah and Elisha] kept on walking and talking, a fiery chariot with fiery horses suddenly appeared and separated one from the other*. The reason [they were unharmed] is that there was discussion [of Torah, or revelation], and if there were not [such] discourse, they would have been fit to be burned.

2. This is not a contradiction. This case [of Elijah and Elisha] refers to reciting [one's studies, which is not too distracting], and that case [of Joseph's advice] refers to analyzing deeply.

3. It was taught in a Baraita:<sup>256</sup> Do not take big strides, and gather in the sun to the city.<sup>257</sup>

a. "Do not take big strides," for a Master said: Big strides take one five hundredth of the light of one's eyes. "And gather in the sun to the city," as R. Judah said in the name of Rab: Always one should go out with [the light that] (Genesis 1:4) *was good* and come in with [the light that] *was good*,<sup>258</sup> as it is said, (Genesis 44:3) *With the first light of morning, the*

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<sup>256</sup>It appears that this was taught in a mishnah, but no such mishnah exists.

<sup>257</sup>Rashi's interpretation of the phrase "to gather in the sun" is that travelers should reach their destination while the sun is still shining.

<sup>258</sup>Rashi explains that in the first chapter of Genesis, light is described as "good," and therefore one should only travel in daylight and thus avoid bandits, pits, and other dangers.

men were sent off.<sup>259</sup>

b. R. Judah said in the name of R. Chiyya: One who travels on the way should not eat more than in years of famine. What is the reason? Here [in Babylonia] we understand it to refer to digestion. In the West [in the Land of Israel] they say [it refers to having enough] food. What is [the practical difference] between them? The difference is between [11a] one who sits on a ship [who must ration out his food, thus supporting the reasoning from the Land of Israel]. Or also, one who goes from inn to inn [and has plenty of food but must worry about digestion, thus supporting the reasoning from Babylonia]. R. Papa at each and every *parsah*<sup>260</sup> ate one loaf of bread because he reasoned it referred to digestion.

C. Anyone who starves himself during years of famine will be saved from an unusual death,<sup>261</sup> as it is said, (Job 5:20) *In famine He will redeem you from death*. "From famine" it could have said, but rather thus it means to say, "The reward for anyone who starves himself during years of famine is that he will be saved from unusual death."

D. Resh Lakish said: It is forbidden to engage in sexual relations during years of famine, as it is said, (Genesis 41:50) *Before the years of famine came, Joseph became the father of two sons*. [However,] it was taught in a Baraita: Those who lack children may engage in sexual relations during years of famine.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>259</sup>This verse is also taken from Joseph's interaction with his brothers.

<sup>260</sup>A *parsah* is about two and a half miles.

<sup>261</sup>Rashi explains that "unusual death" means death by sword or famine, that is, not any way by the angel of death which is usually in one's bed.

<sup>262</sup>Rashi explains from Menachot 29a that the phrase, "those who have no children" indicates those who have not fulfilled their obligation of procreation.

E. Our rabbis taught in Baraita: At the time that Israel is filled with trouble and a person disassociates himself from the community, the two ministering angels that accompany each person<sup>263</sup> come and lay their hands on his head, saying, "So-and-so who has disassociated himself from the community shall not see the consolation of the community."

1. [A similar lesson] was taught in another Baraita: At a time when the community is filled with trouble, one should not say, "I will go to my house and eat and drink and let my soul be at peace," for if he does so, Scripture says, (Isaiah 22:13) *Instead, there was rejoicing and merriment, killing of cattle and slaughtering of sheep, eating meat and drinking wine: "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"* What is written immediately following? (Isaiah 22:15) *Then the Lord of Hosts revealed Himself to my ears: "This iniquity shall never be forgiven you until you die."* Thus far the [the lesson is about] the average person [who sins], but as for the truly wicked, what is written?<sup>264</sup> [The truly wicked say,] (Isaiah 56:12) *"Come, I'll get wine; let us swill liquor. And tomorrow will be just the same, or even much grander!"*<sup>265</sup> What is written immediately afterwards? (Isaiah 57:1) *The righteous man perishes, and no one considers; pious men are taken away, and no one gives thought that because of evil the righteous was taken away.*<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup>Rashi anticipates the Gemara by explaining that the verse Psalms 91:11 is in the plural, indicating more than one angel accompanies each person (see below).

<sup>264</sup>Rashi comments that such a comment is from the average sinner because at least they fear the consequence of death whereas the truly wicked defies divine rule.

<sup>265</sup>And thus by referring to tomorrow they show no fear of death.

<sup>266</sup>Rashi explains that the wicked do not understand that the righteous are dying because of their actions. Rashi offers two further comments: the righteous suffer from even the slightest of their own iniquities in this world, as will be explained below, and God wishes to spare the righteous the suffering that will come to all the wicked and thus takes the righteous person early.

Rather, a person should suffer with the community, for so have we found with Moses our rabbi who personally suffered with the community, as it is said, [When Israel was engaged in battle with Amalek] (Exodus 17:12) *But Moses' hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it.* Could it be that Moses did not have a single cushion or a pillow to sit upon? Rather, such did Moses say, "Since Israel is filled with trouble, so, too, will I be with them in suffering." And anyone who causes himself to suffer with the community gains merit and sees the consolation of the community [in their redemption]. But maybe someone might say, "Who will testify against me?" The stones and walls of his house shall testify against him, as it is said, (Habakkuk 2:11) *For a stone shall cry out from the wall, and a rafter shall answer it from the woodwork.*

a. In the school of R. Shila they teach: The two ministering angels that accompany each person testify against him, as it is said, (Psalms 91:11) *For He will order His angels to guard you wherever you go.*

b. R. Chidka says: The soul of a person will testify against him, as it is said, (Micah 7:5) *Be guarded in speech with her who lies in your bosom* [that is, one's soul].

c. And there are those who say: A person's limbs testify against him, as it is said, (Isaiah 43:10) *My witnesses are you -- declares the Lord.*<sup>267</sup>

2. (Deuteronomy 32:4) *A faithful God, never false, [true and upright is He]. A faithful God:* Just as punishment is exacted from the wicked in the World-To-Come, even when they commit a slight transgression, so is punishment exacted from the righteous in this world,

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<sup>267</sup>If "you" is taken to mean a single human being, than the plural understanding of witnesses mean the parts of oneself.

even when they commit a slight transgression. *Never false*: Just as the righteous are given a reward in the World-To-Come, even for fulfilling the least commandment, so are the wicked given a reward in this world, even when they fulfill the least commandment. [Thus,] *True and upright is He*.

3. [The sages] said: At the time of one's departure to his eternal home, all of his deeds are recounted to him, and they [the Heavenly Court] say to him, "Such-and-such did you do in such-and-such a place and at such-and-such a day," and he answers, "Yes." They say to him, "Sign [this record of your deeds]," and he signs, as it is said, (Job 37:6-7) [*And the downpour of rain, His mighty downpour of rain, is signed by every man's hand.*<sup>268</sup> Not only that, but one affirms the judgement upon him and says to them [his deeds], "You have judged me well," fulfilling what was said, (Psalms 51:6) *You are just in Your sentence*.

F. Samuel said: Anyone who fasts may be called a sinner.

1. He reasoned like the Tanna who taught in a Baraita: R. Eleazar Ha-Kappar Berabbi says: What does Scripture [mean when it] says, (Numbers 6:11) *And make expiation on his [the Nazirite's] behalf for the guilt that he incurred through the soul*. Against whose soul did he sin?<sup>269</sup> Rather, because he caused himself to suffer [by abstaining] from wine. And are not these things related from minor to major? Just as this one [the Nazirite] who only causes himself to suffer [by abstaining] from wine is called a sinner, one who causes himself to suffer [by abstaining] from everything [through fasting] all the more so.

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<sup>268</sup>The analogy to rain should not be lost in this context, that, whereas rain normally represents God's compassion, here it represents an aspect of justice.

<sup>269</sup>Although the context of the verse clearly understands the soul to be a corpse that the Nazirite has touched, here it is understood as his own soul.

2. R. Eleazar responded: He is called a holy person, as it is said, (Numbers 6:5)

*He shall remain consecrated [until the completion of his term as Nazirite of the Lord], the hair of his head being left to grow untrimmed.* Just as this man [who is a Nazirite] who has only caused himself to suffer concerning one thing [that he abstains from wine] is called holy, one who causes himself to suffer [by abstaining from] everything all the more so.

3. And how does Samuel [explain the verse where the Nazirite] is called holy?

That refers to his hair growing untrimmed. [That is, it is not the person who is holy, it is only the hair which is consecrated to God.] And how does R. Eleazar [explain the verse where the Nazirite is called] a sinner? That refers to defiling himself [by touching a corpse, not by taking a vow of abstinence].

a. And was it really R. Eleazar who said so? Did not R. Eleazar say:

Always let one regard himself [11b] as if the Holy One dwells within his guts, as it is said, (Hosea 11:9) *The Holy One in your midst: I will not come in fury?*<sup>270</sup>

b. This is not a contradiction. This teaching [that refers to a Nazirite as holy] refers to one who can fast [without risk to himself] and that one [that says one should regard one's guts as if God resided there] refers to one who cannot fast [without risk to himself].

4. Resh Lakish says: He is called devout, as it is said, (Proverbs 11:17) *A man who weans himself [from food and drink] is devout; a cruel man [makes trouble for himself].*

5. R. Shesheth said: [With regard to] a young student in school who fasts, let a

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<sup>270</sup>Rashi explains that one should regard one's insides as holy and not deny them sustenance.

dog have his meal!<sup>271</sup>

6. R. Jeremiah Bar Abba said: There are [presently] no public fasts in Babylonia but Tisha B'Ab alone. R. Jeremiah Bar Abba [further] said in the name of Resh Lakish: A Torah scholar is not permitted to fast because he lessens his heavenly work.

II. They may eat and drink from the time it gets dark [at the onset of the day and begin fasting at dawn], etc.

A. R. Ze'ira said in the name of R. Huna: An "individual" who has accepted upon himself [the obligation to] fast,<sup>272</sup> even if he ate and drank all night long, at dawn he should pray the prayer of fasting.<sup>273</sup> [If he decided to] extend his fast into the night [of the next day], he does not pray the prayer of fasting [during this next day].

1. R. Joseph said: How did R. Huna derive such [a teaching]? Did he reason that one does not fast for a matter of hours<sup>274</sup> or perhaps one does fast for a matter of hours, but for a

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<sup>271</sup>Rashi comments that students should not fast because it weakens them and keeps them from studying.

<sup>272</sup>Rashi explains that the person who has declared he will fast does so the day before and declares such.

<sup>273</sup>Rashi comments that this is the *Aneinu* prayer, inserted into the Amidah. The Meiri refers to this prayer, "Answer us," as "the prayer of fasting." It is inserted into the Amidah to this day (Elbogen, 46, 107). As is stated in the Mishnah, he may eat and drink during the night (the first part of the day, for days begin in the evening as is based on Genesis 1:5, *And there was evening and there was morning, a first day*), but he must begin fasting at dawn which is the beginning of daylight on the day of his fast.

<sup>274</sup>Perhaps abstaining from food and drink for a matter of hours does not constitute a real fast.



fast for a matter of hours one does not say the prayer of fasting?<sup>275</sup>

2. Abaye replied to him [R. Joseph]: R. Huna always reasoned that people may fast [only] for a matter of hours, and [if one] fasts for a matter of hours, one says the prayer of fasting, but this case is different, for [in this case] there is a fast for a matter of hours at night that he did not accept upon himself [with previously declared intent] a fast from the start.

3. Mar 'Ukba happened to come to Ganzaka. [The people there] asked him: May we fast for a matter of hours or may we not fast for a matter of hours? He did not know the answer. Vessels of Gentiles are forbidden or are permitted?<sup>276</sup> He did not know the answer. In what [clothing] did Moses serve all seven days [of the Tabernacle's] consecration?<sup>277</sup> He did not know the answer. He went and inquired in the House of Study. The said to him: The law is that we may fast for a matter of hours and may pray the prayer of fasting. And the law is that vessels of Gentiles are permitted [to be used] after twelve months [of storage]. [And as for] what did Moses serve all seven days [of the Tabernacle's] consecration? In a white garment. R. Kahana taught [in a mishnah] in a white garment without a border.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>275</sup>Rashi explains that the person decided to extend his fast and did not declare his intention to fast for more than one day, thus he is free to break his fast at any time with food or drink. He may have had in mind only to extend his fast to part of the night. Similarly, he may not have eaten anything all day and would like to retroactively declare what he has done a "fast" that he is extending into the night. Such "fasts" are not stringent enough to warrant the prayer for fasting.

<sup>276</sup>Rashi explains that these are vessels for storing wine.

<sup>277</sup>Rashi comments that in Exodus 29 we are told specifically what Aaron wore but not at all what Moses wore.

<sup>278</sup>Rashi explains it was all made of one thread so that he would have no stitching to hide coins and thus fulfill what Scripture says, (Numbers 32:22) *You shall be clear before the Lord and before Israel.*

4. R. Chisda said: [12a] That which you said that one may fast for a matter of hours refers to one who has not tasted anything until evening [that is, a partial fast takes place in the afternoon and ends with the evening].

a. Abaye said to him [R. Chisda]: This is highest kind of fast! [If he did not eat or drink anything all day, then it is not a partial fast.]

b. No. [R. Chisda's statement] is needed [in that it refers to one] who changed his mind.<sup>279</sup>

5. And R. Chisda said: Any fast upon which the sun does not set is not a fast.

a. An objection was raised: The members of the watch [who are not on duty] fast, but do not complete [their fast].<sup>280</sup>

b. That refers to those who afflict their souls [out of sympathy] for the world [and are not fulfilling the stringent requirements for actual fasting].

c. Come and here [another objection], that R. Eliezer Ben Zadok said: I am of the children of Sena'ah of Benjamin, and one time Tisha B'Ab coincided with Shabbat, and we postponed it until after Shabbat. We fasted and we did not complete our fast because [the tenth of Ab] is our [family] holiday.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>279</sup>Rashi explains that R. Chisda's statement refers to someone who had not eaten anything all day and then decided to fast for the rest of the day until evening, with only the latter part of the day is considered a fast.

<sup>280</sup>See Mishnah 15b. Rashi explains that these are the Levites and Cohens who work in the Temple and cannot complete their fast because of their work. Nevertheless, what they do is still called "fasting."

<sup>281</sup>Rashi explains that this is a time when this family is privileged to come and put wood on the altar in the Temple.

d. There also it refers to those who afflict their souls [out of sympathy] for the world [and are not fulfilling the stringent requirements for actual fasting].

e. Come and here [another objection], that R. Jochanan said: I will fast until I come to my house.

f. That he released himself from the [invitations to come and eat that are due] the House of the Nasi that he acted so.<sup>282</sup>

6. Samuel said: Any fast that was not accepted upon himself on the day before cannot be termed a "fast."

a. And if he sits [and fasts], what is it [to be considered under law]?

b. Rabbah Bar Shila answered: It is like bellows filled with air.<sup>283</sup>

B. When does one accept [a fast upon himself]?

1. Rab said: At [any time during which] *mincha* [may be prayed]. But Samuel said: At the Amidah of *mincha*.

2. R. Joseph said: Samuel's view is in agreement with what is written in the Scroll of Fasting, "Therefore any person upon whom came a fast before [the declaration of] this [scroll]<sup>284</sup> prohibits himself [Hebrew: *yeisar*]." Is it not that he prohibits himself in prayer?<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>282</sup>Rashi explains that R. Jochanan did not want to be troubled to go and eat with those who had invited him so he "fasted" on his way home.

<sup>283</sup>Rashi explains that he is filled with air because he did not eat. His fast has no meaning.

<sup>284</sup>Rashi comments that the Scroll of Fasting listed holidays prior to the Temple's destruction upon which it was forbidden to fast. If he declared that he would fast on a day that coincided with one of these holidays before the scroll was promulgated, he should keep his fast.

<sup>285</sup>Rashi explains that the day before he prohibits himself from eating anything by declaring a fast at the Amidah.

3. No. He is forbidden [Hebrew: *yeaser*].<sup>286</sup>

a. There was a disagreement between R. Chiyya and R. Simeon Ben Rabbi. One says [the Scroll of Fasting reads], "prohibits himself" while the other says, "forbidden."<sup>287</sup>

b. The one who said, "prohibits himself" is as we have stated [that it means taking upon the obligation to fast at the time of the Amidah in the *mincha* service], [but as for] the one who said, "forbidden," what does [he mean]?

c. It is as it is taught in a Baraita: In the Scroll of Fasting [it reads], "Any person upon whom came a fast before [the declaration of] this [scroll] is forbidden. How so? An individual who accepts upon himself [to fast] Monday, Thursday, and Monday of an entire year, and the holidays written in the Scroll of Fasting occur on those [days], if he took his vow before our decree, his vow nullifies our decree. And if our decree preceded his vow, our decree nullifies his vow.

C. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: Until when [exactly] may one eat and drink [when one must begin fasting at daylight]?

1. Until sunrise. These are the words of Rabbi. R. Eliezer Bar Simeon says: Until the cock crows. Abaye said: They taught [this] only when one has not finished his meal [during the night], but if he finished his [night's] meal, he may not eat [any more].

2. Raba objected to this [teaching of Abaye's]: [If he] finished and stood up [from

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<sup>286</sup>He is automatically forbidden and does not need to declare anything in prayer. See below in the Gemara.

<sup>287</sup>The question here is a matter of a Hebrew letter, a *yod* or an *aleph*, the former meaning "to prohibit," and the latter meaning "to be forbidden."

his meal], this person can [still] eat.

3. This [teaching of Abaye's] refers to one who has cleared away [the table with his meal] and that [teaching of Raba's] refers to one who has not cleared away [his meal].

4. There are those who say [that] Raba said: They taught [this] only when one has not slept [for the night] but if he slept, he may not eat [any more].

5. Abaye objected to this [teaching of Raba's]: If he slept then stood up [after awakening], this person can [still] eat.

6. This [teaching of Abaye's] refers to one who dozed. What is dozing like? R. Ashi [12b] said: Sleep which is not sleep, being awake which not being away, that they may call to him and he may answer but does not know how to answer reasonably and when they remind him he remembers.

D. R. Kahana said in the name of Rab: An individual who has accepted a fast upon himself is forbidden to wear sandals. We suspect that he may have accepted a public fast upon himself.<sup>288</sup> What should he do [so as to make his intention clear that he is fasting a private fast and not a public one and thus avoid the extra stringency of abstaining from sandals]? Rabbah Bar R. Shila said: Let him say such [explicitly], "Tomorrow I will be before You in a private fast."

1. Our rabbis said to R. Shesheth: We have seen rabbis that have worn shoes [on a fast day] and have come to the house of fasting.<sup>289</sup> He grew angry and said to them: Perhaps they

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<sup>288</sup>Rashi explains that while a private fast does not require abstention from wearing shoes, public fasts do, as seen in the upcoming mishnah on this page. If we do not know the type of fast he fasts, he must follow this stringency.

<sup>289</sup>Rashi explains that these rabbis follow Samuel, who is cited below, that there are no public fasts in the Diaspora except for Tisha B'Ab.

should also eat food!<sup>290</sup>

2. Abaye and Raba would wear the tops of their shoes [and not the soles].

3. Meremar and Mar Zutra would switch their right shoe for the left and the left for the right.

4. The rabbis of the school of R. Ashi went about as normal, reasoning like Samuel who said: There are [presently] no public fasts in Babylonia but Tisha B'Ab alone.

E. R. Judah said in the name of Rab: A person may borrow [from one day as a fast] and pay [on another day]. When I said so in front of Samuel, he said to me: And so did he accept a vow upon himself that he cannot go on without paying? He accepted to afflict himself. If he is able, he afflicts himself. If not, he does not afflict himself.

1. There are those who say [the same lesson in his version]: R. Judah said in the name of Rab: A person may borrow [from one day as a fast] and pay [on another day]. When I said so in front of Samuel, he said to me: That is obvious! He has only taken a vow [as if to give charity]. Can he not pay off the pledge tomorrow or another day?<sup>291</sup>

2. R. Jōshua, the son of R. Idi happened to [visit] the house of R. Assi. They [the servants of the house] served him a three-year-old calf. They said to him [R. Joshua]: Let the Master taste something. He said to them: I am fasting. They said to him: Let the Master borrow [from one day as a fast] and pay [on another day]. Does the Master not reason like what was said by R. Judah, that R. Judah said: A person may borrow [from one day as a fast] and pay [on

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<sup>290</sup>R. Shesheth obviously disagrees with Samuel. See below.

<sup>291</sup>There is a typographical error in this sentence in that the extra word, "*ba'e'i*" appears. The meaning is that, just as he can pay off his pledge on any particular day, a pledge to fast can be fulfilled within a flexible time frame.

another day]. He said to them: It is a fast concerning a [bad] dream [that I am observing].

a. And Rabbah Bar Mechasiah said in the name of R. Chama Bar Guriah in the name of Rab: A fast is good for a [bad] dream as fire is for flax scraps.

b. R. Chisda said: And [it should be observed] on that very day.

c. And R. Joseph said: Even on Shabbat. How shall he make compensation [for fasting on Shabbat, which is usually prohibited]? He shall fast for his fast.

### The Meiri

The Meiri has a lengthy discussion on this section of the tractate. He begins by explaining this mishnah in terms of why it follows the preceding. Whereas the preceding mishnah explains until when we pray for rain, this mishnah explains the time we should stop expecting rain to come from prayer alone and move on to other, more extreme measures. The answer, following R. Meir's reasoning, is the seventeenth of Marcheshvan.

The time of these initial fasts follow, as the Gemara states, the sequence: Monday, Thursday, and Monday. Ravad explains that one should not decree a fast on such a large number of people because it is an unfair burden on the market before Shabbat. Rashi has a more complex explanation, however, that the merchants might misunderstand people coming to buy large quantities of food (for both Shabbat and breaking the fast) and might inflate their prices believing that a famine has struck. In any case, a cycle of fasts beginning on Thursday is deemed to unnecessarily disturb the market.

The Meiri then goes on to define who are individuals and how do their fasts compare to fasts decreed on the public. Individuals are, according to the Meiri, Torah scholars, whether they are appointed to public office or not. As the Meiri continues, three different kinds of fasts come to light. One is the fast mentioned at the beginning of the mishnah, that of individuals fasting on behalf of the community. The second is a fast by the community

itself which is usually more stringent. Finally, there are private, individual fasts that come from someone's personal concerns. A private fast can occur on any day, regardless of the Monday-Thursday-Monday cycle.

A problem arises, however, when a cycle of fasts is undertaken and one of the dates upon which the individual or the community has sworn to fast is a holiday. A conflict then faces those who have sworn to fast. On the one hand they are bound by their words that act as a vow before God. On the other hand they are forbidden to fast on a holiday. Days upon which one is forbidden to fast include the first of the month (Rosh Chodesh) or an intermediate day of Passover or Sukkot (and all the more so an actual Festival). As listed in the Scroll of Fasting, the rabbinic holidays of Channukah and Purim are also prohibited. The Meiri begins to resolve the issue by explaining that neither an individual nor a community should not fast on the minor holidays, but if one has started, one should not interrupt the fast.

However, a great deal depends on the wording of the acceptance of the obligation to fast and who is speaking. Although it may appear that there is no difference between a fast undertaken by an individual or the community in that one may not interrupt it once one has started, in fact, the individuals upon whom the Court decreed a fast may interrupt their fast if it conflicts with a holiday, but the community, in the later cycle of fasts, may not. The reason is that individuals did not themselves explicitly accept the obligation to fast, whereas the Court is the official mouthpiece of the community and has sworn in the name of the public to fast.

The real issue of the matter is whether the obligation is conditional upon a result occurring or whether it is unconditional. As the Ravad explains, if a fast is accepted unconditionally by the community, then the obligation is like that of a vow and cannot be interrupted. All the more so, an individual who has sworn to fast on a specific day under certain circumstances has sworn a vow which cannot be broken, even if it conflicts



with a *mitzvah*. A vow whose terms are inescapable, even if wrong-headed, is still a vow and must be kept. If, however, the obligation undertaken is dependent upon something occurring, such as rainfall coming or a calamity passing as mentioned in the Mishnah, then the obligation does not resemble a vow and may be interrupted. If, in fact, such an obligation were a vow, one would have to seek a legal authority to find a pretext to invalidate the vow in order to get out of it. Fasting for rainfall as decreed by the Court, which includes such variables as whether one swore to fast before the Scroll of Fasting was promulgated or after or rainfall falling before midnight or after, does not resemble a vow closely enough to have such binding force. The reason these minor holidays are taken so seriously with respect to fasting and other matters is, as Maimonides explains, because the rabbis sought to bolster their authority and have the holidays they decreed to be taken seriously.

The Meiri then takes up the subject of the definition of an "individual." As was stated before, an individual is a Torah scholar, and the Meiri reiterates that those who want the extra burden of fasting, even though they are not appointed officials, may do so, for fasting is not a source of praise but rather one of hardship. That is, there is no danger that the person will appear excessively pious and therefore arrogant. As for the Torah scholars themselves, they should be beyond reproach, scrupulous in deeds as well as in business. Scholars who are not appointed officials should fast also, so long as they are worthy of being scholars in the first place and no matter what their level of expertise. This description is supported by the Palestinian Talmud (Ta'anit 1:4) which states that individuals are appointed officials, but being an appointed official does not guarantee that one's prayers will be answered. Rather, so long as one is worthy of being an official, one may pray and fast.

The Meiri mentions as an aside some of the other aspects of the conduct of Torah scholars, but then he returns to the subject of individuals' fasts

and community-wide fasts. The Gemara states that if one fasts concerning a calamity that ceases while one is still fasting or that someone be healed and they recover while one is still fasting (Rashi adds: or they die), one must still complete one's fast. The Meiri, however, states that the Gemara's intent is that one must complete that day's fast, but, if one swore to undertake an entire cycle of fasts, one is free from the rest of the days. The Ravad, however, states that one must complete the entire cycle.

With a public fast, however, the Meiri agrees with Maimonides in stating that the public does not even have to complete that day's fast, as in the fall of rain coming before noon. The Ravad also disagrees with this conclusion, however, in that this may be the policy regarding rain, but not in reference to sickness or another calamity. According to the Ravad, "until noon" applies only to rain, whereas other calamities might return, a sickness might relapse, or, if a sick person has died, the welfare of the deceased's family should be safe-guarded by completing the fast.

Further, the Meiri reiterates the Gemara's ruling that one should always join the community in a fast and never disassociate oneself from the troubles of the community. Even if one travels from a place where one is not obligated to fast to a community that is, one should not appear publicly satiated or indulge oneself in front of the whole community lest one appear like a groom in front of mourners. The Meiri then adds the following aggadic comments from the Palestinian Talmud with regard to times of famine. First, one should not be building while God is engaged in destroying. As explained in a verse from Job (30:3, Palestinian Talmud Ta'anit 1:6), *Wasted from want and desolation*, one should also refrain from sexual relations when the community has extended its strictures to such, for if one sees that the land is "*wasted from want*" then one should regard one's wife with "*desolation*." This excludes, however, those who lack children, that even though (according to an interpretation in Sotah 12a) Jochebed was conceived during years of famine on the journey down

to Egypt, Jacob still demanded of his sons, (Genesis 42:1) *Why do you show yourselves?* Thus one should not be insensitive to the suffering of others who are less fortunate. The Meiri concludes this aggadic section by pointing out that even those who lacked children were able to refrain from sexual relations during the forty days that Moses was on top of Sinai.

The Meiri then takes up the subject of one who fasts too much, corresponding to the debate in the Gemara starting with Samuel and R. Eleazar Ha-Kappar Berabbi on the status of the Nazirite. Is the person who fasts continually committing a sin or doing something good? The Meiri declares that intention decides the issue. If one fasts for the sake of what the Meiri calls "healing of the soul," perhaps in atonement, then his fast is acceptable even if it is not especially meritorious. Such a person is even deemed a sinner in that person has gotten himself into a situation in which he has no recourse but to fast. If one fasts, however, out of the fear of God so as to always set God before his eyes and to never let his mind be absent of God's presence, then this person is extremely meritorious and worthy of being called, "devout" and "holy." As for Torah scholars, the Meiri concludes with the passage that they should never fast because it diminishes "the work of heaven," that is, Torah learning. All the more so if one is a professional teacher of the basics of Torah. For support, the Meiri draws upon the Palestinian Talmud, (Demai 7:3) in which R. Jochanan rebukes a schoolteacher who is sleeping because he is weakened from fasting. The parable continues that, if one is forbidden to do anything that would lessen one's work due a human employer, all the more so when one works for God.

The Meiri's next subject is to address R. Jeremiah Bar Abba's statement that there are no community-wide fasts in Babylonia except for Tisha B'Ab. The Meiri takes up the two following issues: What of Yom Kippur, and what are the reasons for not observing the different kinds of public fasts in the Diaspora, whether they be for drought or otherwise?

The first issue the Meiri resolves quickly, namely, that Yom Kippur comes directly from the Torah and did not need to be explicitly stated in the Gemara. Therefore, the statement should be understood as saying that Tisha B'Ab is the only community-wide fast observed in the Diaspora on rabbinic authority.

As for the reasons for not observing the different kinds of public fasts, the reasons vary with each legal authority. Rashi believes that community-wide fasts were not declared in Babylonia because that country was extremely fertile and never suffered from drought. Nachmanides (Moses Ben Nachman Gerondi, 1194-1270, born in Gerona, Spain and died in the Land of Israel) differs with Rashi, claiming that other lands not as fertile do declare community-wide fasts. The Meiri resolves the issue by claiming that the rabbis were only strict about the Land of Israel and not the Diaspora, and the custom is to follow Babylonian decisions in that Babylonia is perceived to be the height of all Diaspora life.

This does not address the issue of other fasts that are instituted for other reasons, however, such as those emergency fasts brought up later in the tractate. Maimonides claims that the legal category of "community-wide fasts" actually only applies to cases of drought in the Land of Israel (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Ta'anit 3:1), and other "emergency fasts" are of a different status altogether. As community-wide fasts, then, apply only to lack of rainfall in the Land of Israel, then there can be no such fasts in Babylonia. Rain merits such attention because of the world's need for it to sustain life. Other calamities, on the other hand, affect only some people in certain situations.

The Meiri highlights the legal difference between "community-wide fasts" and "emergency fasts" by citing an instance later in the tractate (14a) when R. Judah Nesiah wants to continue fasting even beyond the declared limit of thirteen in response to blight. Here, emergency fasts are even more stringent

than community-wide fasts in that there can be more than thirteen of them. Whereas a lack of rain has a step-by-step protocol that has a limit of thirteen community-wide fasts, withered crops demand even more extreme measures.

However, Nachmanides points out a place in which there appear to be "community-wide fasts" in response to something other than rain. Nachmanides cites a passage in the Palestinian Talmud (1:5) in which a fast is mentioned that is undertaken by the community in which there is a debate as to whether pregnant women and nursing mothers must participate. R. Samuel, in that passage, states that such women are not obligated to fast unless it is an emergency. This would conflict with the rule that, in community-wide fasting for rainfall, these women do in fact have to fast. This may indicate that there was another kind of community-wide fast other than that for rain. The Meiri answers Nachmanides' objection, however, by claiming that the passage is referring to community-wide fasting at all but rather exclusively to the protocol for emergency fasting.

Ravad offers the explanation, which the Meiri appears to accept, that the reason community-wide fasts are not declared in the Diaspora is because Jews living in the Diaspora are for the most part poor, and one should not create more hardship for them, especially in a place of bad air and disease. Thus was the original reason in Babylonia, and we have followed Babylonian custom ever since.

Nachmanides, however, has a different explanation. According to Nachmanides, the lack of rabbinic, community-wide fasts stems from the fact that the rabbinic court in the Diaspora lacked the authority to declare such a fast. As explained in a homily on Joel 2:16 in that Palestinian Talmud (2:1) in the name of R. Jose that such fasts require the authority of a Patriarch and the Sanhedrin. A rabbinic court without clear inherited authority from Moses cannot decree a community-wide fast. The Meiri dismisses this

explanation, however, by claiming that if a community were all in agreement to fast, they could easily do so without such inherited authority to give them permission. All that would be needed was mutual consent within the rabbinic community. The Geonim agree with this position.

None of this discussion, however, applies to individual, private fasts. Individuals, of course, can fast to the strictest allowable degree.

The next subject upon which the Meiri comments is when one must stop eating before a fast, whether that fast begins at dusk or dawn. The Mishnah states that one may eat all night long from the time it gets dark until the onset of the day. The rabbis, however, want a more exact time. The Meiri claims that one may eat until that actual start of the day with the declaration of the sanctification of the day in prayer. He draws support from Lamentations Rabbah 3:6 where R. Judah Ben Bathyra is cited as having stopped eating on the day before Yom Kippur and then started again to please the wishes of the Exilarch by joining him at his table. Other explanations, such as that of Maimonides, say that one must stop eating before daybreak when one has resolved in one's mind that one's last meal is over. In the text just cited, R. Judah Ben Bathyra never made such a resolution. Another possibility is that one may have made an error as to when the day actually begins, and a resolution made on such an error is null and void.

With regard to eating during the night when one must start fasting at daybreak, two possibilities offer themselves as to when one must stop eating. One is taking away the portable table upon which one ate (and not the food, as Rashi explains), and the other is that when one has fallen asleep, one cannot eat again. The Meiri claims that sleep is the determining factor, such as legislated by the Rif (Isaac Ben Jacob Alfasi of Fez, Morocco, 1013-1103). Support for this comes from Pesachim 120b where Abaye sees Rabbah dozing at the Passover seder table, and a discussion begins as to whether Rabbah was just dozing (in which it would be permissible to continue) or actually slept.

The Palestinian Talmud (1:4) also supports the notion that complete sleep, and not dozing, is the deciding factor. Ravad, however, supports the position that clearing away the table may be reason to stop eating, in that either sleep or clearing the table may be deciding factors. Finally, the Meiri cites an opinion which declares that both sleep and clearing away the table must happen for a person to be prohibited from eating more. The Meiri decides, however, that complete sleep is the only deciding factor before dawn itself.

The Meiri's next subject is the need to declare one's intention to fast before the fast cycle begins, whether one is fasting only for one day or for a sequence of days. In this matter, the Meiri follows the rulings of the Rif. Unless one has specifically prohibited oneself from eating and drinking at night, one may eat and drink the night before a fast. This holds true even in a sequence of consecutive fasts one day immediately after the other. Further, if one has declared the intention to undertake a series of fasts, that declaration need not be repeated before each and every fast day. Legitimate fasts are marked by permission given to the individual to recite "Aneinu" in the Amidah, a prayer that the Meiri refers to as "the prayer of fasting". The issue of liturgy for fast days, however, becomes more elaborate in the next chapter. A person who has fasted a legitimate fast, such as eating during the night and fasting from dawn until dusk, may include "Aneinu" in his prayers at the beginning of that morning. A person who fasts an undeclared or informal fast, such as one who decided to fast but did not declare his intention to do so beforehand, may not pray "Aneinu." This is true even if the person one day fasted a legitimate fast and then decided in the middle of the fast day to extend his fast overnight or even another day. If the fast was undeclared, it is not valid.

A person may also change the day of his fast so long as he did not declare that he was to fast at a specific time. If circumstances arise that the intended day of fasting is no longer convenient or if one forgot it was

the fast day and ate on it, one can postpone the fast day to another date. If however, one indicated a specific day, or if one even declared a specific month and only the time allotted remains in that month, then one is bound as in a vow.

Further, as the Gemara indicates, a fast that is only for a matter of hours is also a valid fast, so long as one a) has not tasted anything all day and is thus extending one's abstention from food and drink, b) declares beforehand one's intention to fast for the remainder of the day, and c) concludes the fast with dusk and not any other time. In that case, one can pray, "Aneinu" with one's afternoon and evening prayers. As in any other individual fast, one may also eat at night. Any other combination of times and circumstances is not valid, such as fasting during the night and the next morning and wishing to stop midday, etc.. Thus, a fast for a matter of hours proceeds that one awakened, forgot to eat breakfast, and then resolved to finish the day fasting and declared to do so. That evening, the person may pray, "Aneinu." Thus two statements by R. Chisda (12a) are upheld: that one who fasts for a matter of hours has not tasted anything all day, and that the sun always sets on a fast for a matter of hours. The Gemara poses some incidents that may seem to contradict this formula, such as the fasting done by the keepers of the watch (which is mentioned later in the tractate) or by a family holiday. The Meiri adds to these incidents fasts undertaken by individuals during or after the destruction of the Second Temple. Such fasts are not technically fasts. Rather, they are abstentions out of empathy for the community. The Gemara also includes an incident of R. Judah claiming to "fast" on his way home, but by this he was only seeking to avoid invitations for meals due his office.

The Meiri, in the name of the Ravad, takes issue with Maimonides decision (Hilchot Ta'anit 1:13) that one could fast for a matter of hours even if one did eat that morning. He tries to guess at Maimonides' reasoning,



proposing that perhaps Maimonides thought R. Chisda's statement that one could not taste anything all day was not legally binding and only followed R. Chisda's second statement, that the sun must set on a fast for a matter of hours. Further, perhaps Maimonides thought that this latter statement of R. Chisda's resembled a vow enough to warrant permission to pray, "Aneinu" when one completed the fast. However, none of these speculations are legitimate, for R. Chisda's first statement is binding, and a fulfilled vow to fast for any random part of the day does not merit the right to pray, "Aneinu."

The Meiri tangentially brings up a remark in the Gemara dealing with the use of Gentile's vessels for eating, reiterating that vessels that have not been used for twelve months that once belonged to Gentiles may be used by Jews.

Returning to the subject of fasting, the Meiri emphasizes the Gemara's comment that a declaration to fast for the next day must take place during the time of the Amidah of *mincha*, as is stated by Samuel, and the explicit wording is given in the text. Such a declaration must occur at that time on the day before. Even if one made such a declaration a week before, come the eve of the fast, the declaration must be repeated at the time of the Amidah of *mincha*.

Some fasts, however, do not need a declaration. Specifically, the Gemara mentions a fast in response to a bad dream. The Meiri adds that one can also fast if the leader of the community who has inherited authority declared a fast and one did not hear about it until after the appropriate time of declaration. Such an incident is recorded later in the tractate (24a) between Resh Lakish and R. Jochanan. The declaration by the Patriarchal leader will suffice. Ravad claims that such is true today if the declaration is made by the prayer leader.

The Meiri also reiterates the policy of being able to change the day of one's fast if that day has become inconvenient. His proof comes from the

passage in the Gemara that states that if one swore to fast for certain days before the holidays on the Scroll of Fasting (such as Channukah and Purim) was promulgated, one must keep one's fast. If one promised to fast after the list was received, one must change the day of one's fasting. This can also happen on a community level so long as the community agrees together as to the change. The community, however, cannot unanimously agree to change the time of fasting with regard to the Tenth of Tebeth, the Fast of Esther, the Seventeenth of Tammuz, and the Fast of Gedalia. (All the more so for Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Ab.) One must fast on those days.

After repeating the relation of fasting to the taking of a vow, the Meiri concludes this section by stating that one inserts the prayer, "Aneinu," into the blessing, "Shomea T'fillah," (One Who Hears Prayer, the sixteenth benediction of the Amidah).<sup>292</sup> According to the Palestinian Talmud, one makes this insertion during all of one's prayers during the day of the fast save for the initial aravit prayer. If he forgot to say it, he may insert it into the petitions that follow the Amidah. If he forgot to say it and left the place where he was praying, however, he does not return to say the prayer.

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<sup>292</sup>See Elbogen, 49.

I. **Our Mishnah:** If these [series of fasts on the public] passed, and they were not answered [from Heaven with rain], the court decrees three more fasts on the public. They may [only] eat and drink while it is still [the] day [before, until dusk], and they are forbidden to work, bathe, anoint, wear sandals, and have sexual relations, and they lock up the bathhouses. If these [series of fasts] passed, and they were not answered [from Heaven with rain], the court decrees on them [the populace] another seven days, that is [a total of] thirteen fasts the court may decree on the community. These [seven fasts] are more stringent than the first ones, and on these they sound the alarm and lock up stores. [However, with regard to the stores,] on Monday they opened [their doors] a little when it gets dark [at the end of the day], and on Thursday they are permitted [to open the food shops] for the honor of Shabbat. If these [series of fasts] passed, and they were not answered [from Heaven], the people decrease trade, building, planting, betrothals, marriages, and greetings to one another, [acting] as people who have been rebuked by God. Individuals start their fasting again until [the month of] Nisan has passed. If the month of Nisan departs and rain descends, it is a sign of a curse,<sup>293</sup> as it is said, (I Sam. 12:17) *It is the season of the wheat harvest today. [I will pray to the Lord and He will send thunder and rain; then you take thought and realize what a wicked thing you did in the sight of the Lord when you asked for a king.]*

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<sup>293</sup> As explained in the Gemara above, after Nisan is not a beneficial time for rain and can only hinder the wheat harvest.

A. **Gemara:** It makes sense that all of these, bathing, anointing, and sexual relations, [are forbidden] because they are sources of pleasure, but work is a hardship.

1. R. Chisda said in the name of R. Jeremiah Bar Abba: Scripture says, (Joel 1:14) *Solemnize a fast, proclaim an assembly; gather the elders.* It is like an assembly.<sup>294</sup> Just as on the Assembly it is forbidden to engage in work, also on a fast it is forbidden to engage in work.

2. If so, just as [the restrictions apply] on the Assembly from the evening [at the start of the day], so also on a fast [should the restrictions apply] from the evening.

3. R. Zeira said: R. Jeremiah Bar Abba himself explained the issue to me: Scripture says, *Gather the elders.* It is like a gathering of elders. Just as a gathering of elders only takes place during the day, so also a fast takes place during the day.

4. But say from the afternoon.

5. R. Shisha Bar Idi said: This [R. Zeria's statement] supports R. Huna, who said: They gather in the morning.<sup>295</sup>

B. How did they act? Abaye said: From morning until midday we examined the affairs of the city [for any kind of unethical conduct]. From here through the third quarter of the day we read Torah and Haftarah. From here onward we pray for compassion, as it is said, (Nehemiah 9:3) *Standing in their places, they read from the scroll of the Teaching of the Lord their God for one-fourth of the day, and for another fourth they confessed and prostrated themselves before the Lord their God.* [13a]

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<sup>294</sup>Rashi explains that "assembly" is another way to indicate Shavuot and Shemini Atzeret.

<sup>295</sup>Rashi comments that the statement that elders gather during the day, in its simplest and most straightforward sense, indicates daylight, and the elders were accustomed to gather in the synagogue in the morning.

1. I could switch it. [One could pray before one examines the city's affairs because the verse does not specify which came first.<sup>296</sup>]

2. Let that not enter your mind, for it is written, (Ezra 9:4) *Around me gathered all who were concerned over the words of the God of Israel because of the returning exiles' trespass, [while I sat desolate until the evening offering].* And [then] it is written, (Ezra 9:5), *At the time of the evening offering I ended my self-affliction, I [got down on my knees and] spread out my hands to the Lord my God.*

C. Rafram Bar Papa said in the name of R. Chisda: On any [fast that is established] because of mourning, such as Tisha B'Ab or mourning [itself], it is forbidden [to wash] either in warm water or in cold. On any [fast that is established to refrain from] pleasure, such as a community-wide fast [in response to drought], it is forbidden [to wash] in warm water but it is permissible in cold.

1. R. Idi Bar Abin said: We also learned in the mishnah, They lock up the bathhouses, [thus supporting the statement that warm water is forbidden during community-wide fasts].

2. Abaye said to him [R. Idi Bar Abin]: And if cold water were forbidden, should he not have taught in the mishnah they need to stop up the rivers?

3. He [R. Idi Bar Abin] responded to him [Abaye]: R. Shisha Bar Idi answered: My father considered that difficulty. Consider, it is taught in the mishnah that they are forbidden to bathe. Why additionally must I know that they lock up the bathhouses [in which there is heated water]? Do we not learn from it [this additional phrase] that warm water is forbidden and cold

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<sup>296</sup>This explanation follows Rashi.

water is permitted?

4. Let us say that [what follows] supports him [R. Chisda, that mourners may not wash in either warm or cold water]: All who are obligated to immerse themselves in a ritual bath may immerse themselves in the usual way whether it is Tisha B'Ab or Yom Kippur. In what? If one should say, in warm water, is there such a thing as ritual immersion in warm water? [Such water must be] drawn [and is unfit for a ritual bath]. Rather, is it not cold water? But [only] those who are obligated to immerse themselves and no other people. [Thus, ordinary people cannot bathe in either warm or cold water.]

a. R. Chana Bar Kattina said: No. The passage is needed only to [teach about] the hot springs of Tiberias.

b. If so, [that the passage cited above refers to the hot springs of Tiberias,] I will say the end [of the passage, not quoted above but given here, supports R. Chisda]: R. Chanina, the Deputy High Priest said: The house of our God is worthy to be mourned over once a year. And if you should say [immersion] in cold water is permitted, let him [the one who is obligated to immerse himself in a ritual bath] wash in cold water.<sup>297</sup>

c. R. Papa said: [It refers to] a place in which cold water cannot be

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<sup>297</sup>If the sentence, "All who are obligated to immerse themselves in a ritual bath may immerse themselves in the usual way whether it is Tisha B'Ab or Yom Kippur," refers only to the hot springs of Tiberias, then perhaps R. Chanina's statement, that "the house of our God is worthy to be mourned over once a year," supports R. Chisda's ruling that one may not bathe in either warm or cold water on a fast of mourning, for it indicates that one should skip all immersions in honor of the destruction of the Temple. Or, if should say that R. Chanina meant that one who is obligated to immerse himself may not, out of the Temple's honor, immerse himself in warm water, then he may immerse himself in cold water. In any case, only those who are obligated to immerse themselves may do so, and all others should skip washing altogether.

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5. Come and here [a response to R. Chisda that one should not bathe in either warm or cold water on a day of mourning]: When they said that work is forbidden, they only meant during the daylight, but at night it is permitted. And when they said that wearing sandals is forbidden, they only meant in the city, but on the road it is permitted. How so? When one goes out to the road, he puts on his shoes. When one enters the city, one takes off one's shoes. And when they said it was forbidden to bathe, they only meant [bathing] all of the body, but one's face, hands, and feet are permitted. And so do you find with one placed under a ban and with a mourner.

a. Do not all of the [modifications] apply [to the one placed under a ban and the mourner]? And what may we do [in reference to washing]? If one should say [a mourner can wash] one's face, hands, and feet in warm water, is such permitted? Did not R. Shesheth say: A mourner is forbidden to dip his finger in warm water? Rather, is it not cold water [that a mourner may wash the indicated parts of his body in]?

b. No. It indeed refers to warm water. And as to that part in which you find conflict, "so do you find with one placed under a ban and with a mourner." [This statement refers to] those [restrictions, that is, working and wearing sandals] that remain [and not to bathing].

6. Come and learn [a response]: R. Abba the Priest said in the name of R. Jose the

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<sup>298</sup>That is, if hot springs are prohibited and there is no cold water in which to immerse, one may skip one's immersion and say it is in honor of the Temple's destruction. The passage is merely referring to the laws of immersion and does not say anything about ordinary people abstaining from washing in cold water on a fast day.

Priest: A precedent, that the sons of R. Jose Ben R. Chanina died, and he washed in cold water all seven days [of mourning].

a. That case [is different than normal], that his mourning was such that his relatives died in close succession, and it is taught in a Baraita: When one's mourning for one's relatives is in close succession, one after the other, and one's hair becomes matted, one may lighten it with a razor and wash one's clothes in water.

b. R. Chisda said: With a razor, but not with scissors. In water, but not with powder or in sand.

7. Raba said: A mourner is permitted to bathe in cold water all seven days [of mourning] as he would [eat and drink] meat and wine.

a. An objection was raised: **[13b]** A postpubescent girl is not permitted to make herself unpresentable during the days of her father's mourning, and [therefore it stands to reason that] a prepubescent girl is permitted.

b. What is meant [by making herself presentable or unpresentable]? Is it not a matter of washing? And in what [kind of water]? If one should say in warm water, [is it not true that] a postpubescent girl is not permitted to make herself upresentable, and did not R. Chisda say that a mourner is forbidden to dip his finger in warm water? Rather, is it not cold water [of which the prohibition is speaking]?<sup>299</sup>

c. No. [Making herself presentable or unpresentable refers to] eye make-up and dying the hair.

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<sup>299</sup>Thus, if special permission is given to the prepubescent girl to bathe in cold water, than for the ordinary mourner, such bathing is forbidden.



8. Let us say [the following] supports him [Raba]: R. Abba the Priest said in the name of R. Jose the Priest: A precedent, that the sons of R. Jose Ben R. Chanina died, and he washed in cold water all seven days [of mourning].

a. That case [is different than normal], that his mourning was in close succession, and it is taught in a Baraita: When one's mourning is in close succession, one after the other, and one's hair becomes matted, one may lighten it with a razor and wash one's clothes in water.

b. R. Chisda said: With a razor, but not with scissors. In water, but not with powder, sand, or aloe.

c. There are those who say that Raba said: A mourner is forbidden [to bathe] in cold water all seven days [of mourning].

d. What is the difference [between bathing in cold water and eating and drinking] meat and wine? In the latter case, he does so to relieve his anxiety [as a mourner, whereas washing in cold water is done for comfort].

9. Let us say [the following] supports him [Raba]: A postpubescent girl is not permitted to make herself unpresentable during the days of her father's mourning, and [therefore it stands to reason that] a prepubescent girl is permitted.

a. What is meant [by making herself presentable or unpresentable]? Is it not a matter of washing? And in what [kind of water]? If one should say in warm water, [is it not true that] a postpubescent girl is not permitted to make herself unpresentable, and did not R. Chisda say that a mourner is forbidden to dip his finger in warm water? Rather, is it not cold

water [of which the prohibition is speaking]?<sup>300</sup>

b. No. [Making herself presentable or unpresentable refers to] eye make-up and dying the hair.

c. R. Chisda said: This indicates a mourner is forbidden to wash his clothing all seven [days of mourning].

10. And the law is: A mourner is forbidden to wash all of his body, whether in warm or cold water, all seven [days of mourning], but as for his face, hands, and feet, in warm water he is forbidden, [but] in cold water he is permitted. But as for anointing, it is not permitted in the slightest bit, but if it is to remove an awful smell, it is permitted.

II. The prayer of fasting, where do we mention it?

A. R. Judah brought his son, R. Isaac, [for a walk], and expounded: An individual who accepts a fast upon himself prays the prayer of fasting.<sup>301</sup> Where does he say it? Between "*Goel*" [the seventh blessing of the Amidah] and "*Rofei*" [the eighth blessing of the Amidah]. R. Isaac challenged him [R. Judah, his father]: Can an individual establish [a new] blessing [in the Amidah] for himself? Rather, said R. Isaac, [one mentions the prayer of fasting] in "*Shomeah Tefillah*" [as a part of the sixteenth blessing of the Amidah, thus combining it with an existing blessing]. And so did R. Shesheth teach: In "*Shomeah Tefillah*."

1. An objection was raised [against R. Isaac from the following tradition]: There is no difference between an individual and the community except that the former prays eighteen

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<sup>300</sup>Thus, if special permission is given to the prepubescent girl to bathe in cold water, than for the ordinary mourner, such bathing is forbidden.

<sup>301</sup>Rashi: *Aneinu*.

blessings [in the Amidah] and the latter prays nineteen blessings [in the Amidah].<sup>302</sup>

a. What is meant by an "individual" and the "community"? If one should say an actual individual, and the community [means] the prayer leader, then does [the prayer leader say] nineteen blessings? [Does he not say, rather,] twenty-four blessings?<sup>303</sup>

b. Rather, does not [the above passage] mean that "there is no difference" between an "individual" who accepts upon himself a private fast and an individual who accepts upon himself [the stringencies of] a "community-wide" fast except that the former prays eighteen blessings and the latter prays nineteen blessings. Thus learn: an individual may establish for himself [a new] blessing [in the Amidah].

2. No. I can tell you definitely that ["community" refers to] the community prayer leader. And as for your conflict that the prayer leader prays twenty-four [blessings], on the first three fasts [undertaken by individuals] twenty-four [blessings] are not [said by the prayer leader].

3. But no! Is it not taught in a Baraita: there is no difference between the first three fasts and the three intermediate fasts except that the former permit engaging in work and the latter forbid engaging in work? But with regard to the twenty-four [blessings], they are equal.

4. The Baraita taught [about the difference in permission to work or not work], but left out [some other differences, such as what to pray].

5. [If that is so,] what [else] did it leave out besides leaving out this? Further, the

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<sup>302</sup>Rashi refers to Berachot 28b which clarifies that the Amidah is called, "the Eighteen Blessings" even though it actually contains nineteen in that an additional prayer was included by the sages at Yavneh against slanderers.

<sup>303</sup>Rashi points out that this anticipates the mishnah on 15a which tells of six additional blessings that were instituted for fast days.

Baraita teaches [explicitly,] “there is no [other] difference.”

6. Rather, the Baraita teaches the prohibitions [between these series of fasts] and not anything with regard to prayers. And if you want, I can say [this alternative solution]: On the intermediate [fasts] also they do not pray twenty-four blessings [in the Amidah, thus making the first cycle of fasts and the intermediate cycle equal with regard to prayer].

7. And do they not? But is it not taught in a Baraita: there is no difference between the second series of three fasts and the seven final fasts except that these they sound the alarm and lock the shops? Thus in all other respects they are equal. And if you should say here also the Baraita taught [its subject] but left out [some other differences, does it not say, “there is no [other] difference [between the second series of three fasts and the seven final fasts]”?

8. And do you think [the phrase], “there is no difference” is exclusive, [that is, that is means there is no other difference]? [14a] But did not the Baraita leave out [the procedure for] the Ark?<sup>304</sup>

9. If you [contend that certain matters were left out of the Baraita] because of the Ark, [I can argue that] the Ark is not [actually] an omission [in the Baraita]. [The Baraita teaches about] private matters, and does not teach about public matters.<sup>305</sup>

a. [Further,] R. Ashi said: The mishnah also taught, In what ways are

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<sup>304</sup>Rashi comments that the procedure for taking out the Ark is explained in the mishnah on 15a. Thus, the Ark may construe proof that the Baraita may have taught some things with regard to fasting and left out other lessons for later, such as when to take out the Ark and when and where to insert the prayer for fasting.

<sup>305</sup>Rashi explains that praying the full twenty-four blessings is a private matter in that it takes place inside the synagogue, but the Ark is a public matter in that it takes place in an open place in the city.

these [seven fasts] are more stringent than the first ones? On these they sound the alarm and lock up the stores. But in all other respects they [these final fasts and the preceding ones] are equal.

b. And if you should say here also it taught [some differences] and left out [others], it [explicitly] teaches, In what ways, etc. [That is, why would the mishnah state the ways in which these fasts were different if it were not going to state all the ways in which these fasts were different?]

10. And do you think, In what ways, etc., is meant exclusively? But it left the [procedure for] the Ark!

11. If you [contend that certain matters were left out of the Baraita] because of the Ark, [I can argue that] the Ark is not [actually] an omission [in the mishnah], for the Ark is taken under consideration in another chapter.

12. Now that you have come to such [a conclusion, that the mishnah teaches of all the ways that the last series of fasts differ from the previous except for those mentioned in the forthcoming mishnah], are not the twenty-four blessings also not an omission, in that they are taught in a mishnah in another chapter?

• B. What [decision] arose [from this debate]? R. Samuel Bar Sasartai, and also R. Chiyya Bar Ashi in the name of Rab said: One [creates a new blessing] between "*Goel*" and "*Rofei*," and R. Ashi said in the name of R. Jannai, the son of R. Ishmael: [One inserts the prayer for fasting as a part of] "*Shomeah Tefillah*." And the law is: In "*Shomeah Tefillah*."

III. One Baraita teaches: Pregnant women and nursing mothers fast on the first [cycle of fasts] and do not fast on the last [cycle of fasts], but another Baraita teaches that they fast on the last

[cycle of fasts] and do not fast on the first [cycle of fasts]. Yet another Baraita teaches: they do not fast either on the first [cycle of fasts] and they do not fast on the last [cycle of fasts]. R. Ashi: Take the middle fasts [of the three cycles as the one in which they fast] and all [of the Baraitot] will be reconciled.<sup>306</sup>

### The Meiri

The Meiri reiterates much that is explicitly stated in the Gemara. He begins by pointing out that the Mishnah indicates three community-wide fasts: a first cycle of three fasts that begin at dawn, an intermediate cycle of three fasts that begin at dusk, and a final series of seven fasts that have even stricter measures. As will be seen in the upcoming section, thirteen fasts is the limit that the court could decree upon the community in response to drought, but other measures could follow the third cycle of fasts if rain still had not come.

The Meiri anticipates the Gemara by pointing out that pregnant women and nursing mothers only needed to fast for the intermediate cycle (as will be explained). In addition, the intermediate cycle was also marked by the cessation of labor during the day, based upon the declaration in Joel 1:14 that the Israelites should "assemble" the people for fasting. The term, "assembly" (Hebrew: Atzeret) is also used in reference to the holidays, Shemini-Atzeret and Shavuot. Through an association of the similarity of terms, cessation from labor is also applied to a fast day.

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<sup>306</sup>Rashi explains that the first Baraita, which claims that pregnant women and nursing mothers fast on the first and do not fast on the last, refers to the second and third cycle of fasts. Thus they fast on the intermediate fasts, which come before the last, and are thus "first" in that they are prior to the last fasts. The second Baraita, which claims that they fast on last and do not fast on the first, actually refers to the first and second cycle of fasts. They do not fast on initial series of fasts, but they do fast on intermediate ones which are "last" in that they come after the first fasts. Finally, the third Baraita, which says they do not fast on either the first or the last, applies in that they fast on the intermediate fasts and not on the first or the third.

The use of the verse from Joel is not the only biblical text cited to describe the procedure for a fast day. Ezra (9:4-5) and Nehemiah (9:3) illustrate a fast day in which, during the first half of the day, the community authorities investigate the society for any illicit activity, searching for a sin for which the calamity had come as punishment. The third quarter of the day was spent reading Torah as well as selections from Prophets and Writings. The Geonim, supported by Megillah 31a, comments that the portions read included the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy (as opposed to other fasts in which a section beginning with Exodus 32:11 was recited). Maimonides adds that the selections from the Prophets or Writings were those of rebuke to the people to cause them to repent. The people then spent the last fourth of the day in supplication and prayer.

The Meiri then investigates the subject of washing on a fast day. He believes that the procedure to be followed has three levels of severity. The lowest level of prohibition of fasting is that of a community fast day, in which one is permitted to wash all of one's body in cold water and able to wash one's face, hands, and feet in warm water. A mourner has a stricter prohibition against fasting, in which one may wash one's face, hands, and feet in cold water and may not wash at all in warm water. The third, and strictest, degree of prohibition against washing occurs on Tisha B'Ab and Yom Kippur in which one cannot even touch cold water in order to wash. This last degree of strictness comes from a statement in Pesachim 54b. The Meiri, however, cites an opposing viewpoint which understands the status of the mourner and the days of Tisha B'Ab and Yom Kippur to be equivalent in the lenient sense (they may wash their face, hands, and feet in cold water). This viewpoint holds that the statement in Pesachim 54b is not binding law.

In any case, the Palestinian Talmud (1:6) supports the Meiri's view, stating that, on a community fast day, one can wash one's hands, face, and feet in the usual way (that is, with warm water), and on Tisha B'Ab and Yom

Kippur, one can wash one's hands and splash one's face. The Meiri then cites some apparent exceptions to the prohibition against washing, although not without controversy. It appears that some hold that such prohibitions only apply to comfort and cleanliness, but one can wash in order to perform a *mitzvah* or at the beginning of one's prayers as described in Berachot 60b. The Ramban, citing Yoma 77b and 88a, claims that one can also go to the ritual bath if one needs to, although Maimonides disagrees with him in the case of the immersion of one who has had a discharge. Such immersions, in any case, are no longer practiced. The Meiri states that most authorities hold that no ritual immersions are permitted in his day on Tisha B'Ab and Yom Kippur.

Similarly, anointing is strictly forbidden unless it is to remove filth or a very bad odor. Further, the prohibition against wearing sandals does not apply to those traveling on a highway but only to those who are in cities. The Meiri also reiterates that a mourner whose relatives have died in close succession and who may not wash, may also not cut his hair, shave, or do laundry, but someone whose hair has become heavy and matted can thin it out with a razor.

The Meiri's final comment on the Gemara's discussion of washing on fasts and days of mourning addresses the issue of the postpubescent girl who has become a mourner. The Gemara states that she should not make herself too unpresentable and must therefore bathe in cold water, but she may refrain from eye make-up, hair dye, and washing her hands, etc., in warm water. The reason the Meiri cites is so she will not diminish the number of potential suitors (literally, "pouncers"!).

The Meiri returns to the subject of the order of fasting at the conclusion of this section. He notes that the addition of six blessings to the Amidah take place only in the final cycle of seven fasts as well as the sounding of the alarm. Even though there is a statement in the Gemara that there is no difference between the second and third cycle of fasts except for



the alarm, the Meiri notes that this statement did not mean to include prayers, which is also argued in the Gemara.

With regard to the intermediate cycle of fasts, as previously stated, the Meiri agrees with Rashi that pregnant women and nursing mothers only fast on the intermediate cycle. This decision comes from harmonizing three Baraitot that seemingly hold three completely different positions. One states they fast on the "first" but not the "last," another on the "last" but not the "first," and a third says that they do not fast on either the "first" or the "last." The passages can be reconciled in that there are three cycles of fasts. If we accept that such women fast during the intermediate cycle, the Baraita that states that they fast on the "first" does not actually mean the first cycle but that which is prior to the last. Likewise, the Baraita that states they fast on the "last" does not actually mean the last cycle but actually the one that comes after the first. Finally, the Baraita that states they do not fast on either the first or the last actually means exactly what it says, and pregnant women and nursing mothers fast in between them.

Maimonides read the solution in the Gemara quite differently (Ta'anit 3:5), however, stating that, when the Gemara states the law follows the "middle," it meant the second of the three Baraitot and not the second of the three fast and therefore holds that such women fast on the last, strictest and most dire cycle of fasts and nothing previous. The Meiri cites the Palestinian Talmud (1:5) in his defense, however, that his is the correct interpretation.

I. In what ways are these [seven fasts] are more stringent than the first ones? On these they sound the alarm and lock up the stores.

A. How do we "sound the alarm"? R. Judah said: With shofars. R. Judah the son of R. Samuel Bar Shilath in the name of Rab said: With "*Aneinu*."<sup>307</sup>

1. Thus was it once thought: The one who said, with "*Aneinu*," [Rab] did not advocate using shofars, and the one who said, with shofars, [R. Judah] did not advocate saying "*Aneinu*." But it was taught in a Baraita: No less than seven fasts [are decreed on the community in the third cycle of fasts], that they constitute eighteen alarms, and a mnemonic for such is, "Jericho." At Jericho [they used] shofars.<sup>308</sup> And thus this is a refutation to the one who said that one says, "*Aneinu*," but not with shofars. All agree that there is not a dispute whether they call such [use of the shofars], "sounding the alarm." Rather, the dispute is over, "*Aneinu*." One authority [Rab] thought that ["*Aneinu*"] can be called, "sounding the alarm," and another authority [R. Judah] thought that it cannot be called, "sounding the alarm." The one [Rab] who advocated saying, "*Aneinu*," also [advocated the use of] shofars as well, but the one [R. Judah] who advocated the use of shofars did not with "*Aneinu*."

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<sup>307</sup>Rashi explains that the dispute is over the meaning of "sounding the alarm." Does it mean sounding the shofar or praying, "*Aneinu*"? It is quite clear from Rosh Hashanah 34a and Numbers 10:10 that sounding the alarm is used in the context of blowing the shofar, but perhaps in this context the mishnah means praying, "*Aneinu*," in a loud voice. Incidentally, Rashi points out that the "*Aneinu*" prayer meant here is not the insertion into "*Shomeah Tefillah*" for fasting that any individual can do but rather a more elaborate version similar to the one recited shortly before Rosh Hashanah during Selichot.

<sup>308</sup>Rashi comments that in Joshua 6:20 the Israelites used shofars to elicit a response from God to help them take the city of Jericho. So should Jews to day sound the alarm with shofars for a similar response.

2. But it was taught in a Baraita: But as for other kinds of afflictions which break out, such as itching, locusts, flies, wasps, mosquitoes, and an outbreak of snakes and scorpions they do not sound the alarm but rather cry out. From this, [we learn that] “crying out” is done with the mouth whereas “sounding the alarm” is with shofars.

3. It is a dispute of the Tannaim,<sup>309</sup> for it is [also] taught in a mishnah:<sup>310</sup> Concerning these [calamities] they sound the alarm on the Sabbath: the city that is surrounded by troops, [flooding by] a river, or the boat that is foundering at sea. R. Jose said: For help not for crying out [to God for intervention]. What is [meant by sounding the alarm]? If one should say, with shofars, who permits shofars on the Sabbath? Rather, is it not with “*Aneinu*”? And [in this instance] it is called, “sounding the alarm.” Learn thus.

B. In the years of R. Judah the Patriarch there was a catastrophe [other than drought]. [14b] he [R. Judah] decreed thirteen fasts [on the community], and they were not answered.<sup>311</sup> He thought to increase even more [fasts]. R. Ammi said to him [R. Judah]: It is said, do not create hardship for the community too much.

1. R. Abba the son of R. Chiyya Bar Abba: R. Ammi acted in his own interest.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>309</sup>That is, the early authorities have passed down conflicting teachings with regard to the use of the phrase, “sounding the alarm.”

<sup>310</sup>Later in the tractate, 19a.

<sup>311</sup>As Rashi explains, the total number of fasts, three in the first cycle, three in the intermediate, and seven in the third cycle, adds up to thirteen.

<sup>312</sup>Rashi comments that this means R. Ammi simply did not want to fast himself, so he convinced R. Judah not to decree any more fasts.

Rather, such did R. Chiyya Bar Abba say in the name of R. Jochanan: They only taught [that they should not decree more than thirteen fasts] with regard to [a lack of] rain, but with other kinds of afflictions, they fast and continue to do so until they are answered from Heaven.

2. It is also taught in a Baraita: that when they taught three [fasts were to be decreed on the community] and they taught seven [stricter fasts were to be decreed on the community], they were only speaking with respect to [a lack of] rain. But with other kinds of afflictions, they fast and continue to do so until they are answered.

a. Let us say that [this Baraita] is a refutation of R. Ammi.

b. He could say to you: it is a dispute of the Tannaim, for it is taught in [a different] Baraita: do not decree more than thirteen fasts on the community so that you do not create hardship for the community too much. These are the words of Rabbi [and the opinion of R. Ammi]. R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel says: It is not for this reason [of not troubling the community that we do not decree more than thirteen fasts] but because the time of rain has passed.

C. The citizens of Nineveh sent [a question] to Rabbi to the effect of: As for us who are in need of rain even in [the summer] period of Tammuz, what should we do? Are we like "individuals" or are we like a "community"? If we are like individuals, [we would make the insertion of "*Aneinu*" into the prayer,] "*Shomeah Tefillah*." Or if we are like a community, [we would "request" rain in the prayer,] "*Birkat Hashanim*." He responded to them: You are like individuals, and [you should make the insertion of "*Aneinu*" into the prayer,] "*Shomeah Tefillah*."

1. An objection was raised: R. Judah said: When [does the normal protocol of praying for rain take place]? At a time when the seasons are as they should be,<sup>313</sup> and Israel is

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<sup>313</sup>Rashi comments that means sowing is in Marcheshvan and reaping is in Nisan.

dwelling in their land. But at a time like this, all depends on the season, and the place and the time.

2. He said to him:<sup>314</sup> You bring a Baraita to contradict a statement of Rabbi's. Rabbi is a Tanna and may differ [with a Baraita. That is, Rabbi's opinions are equal to those teachings left out of the Mishnah].

3. What [law] arose [from this debate]? R. Nachman said: [They should "request" rain] in "*Birkat Hashanim*." R. Shesheth said: [They should insert, "*Aneinu*"] into "*Shomeah Tefillah*." And the law is: [They should insert, "*Aneinu*"] into "*Shomeah Tefillah*."

II. [However, with regard to the stores,] on Monday they opened their door a little when it gets dark [at the end of the day], and on Thursday they are permitted [to open the food shops] for the honor of Shabbat.

A. They asked: How does this mishnah teach? [That is, how is this to be carried out?] On Monday they open their doors a little when it gets dark and on Thursdays [they likewise open their doors a little] all day long for the honor of Shabbat, or perhaps on Monday they open their doors a little and on Thursday they completely open them all day long?

B. Come and hear [an answer] that it [another, more explicit version] was taught in a Baraita: On Monday they open their doors a little bit until evening and on Thursday they completely open them all day long for the honor of Shabbat. If one had two entrances, one completely opens one and locks the other. If one had a stand<sup>315</sup> in front one's entrance, he opens

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<sup>314</sup>It is unclear who the speakers are.

<sup>315</sup>Rashi explains that if one had a chair or something similar in front of one's shop blocking the entrance, so long as the door is open, the commandment is fulfilled.

as usual and need not worry.<sup>316</sup>

VI. If these [series of fasts] passed, and they were not answered [from Heaven], the people decrease trade, building, planting, etc.

A. It was taught in a Baraita: With respect to building, [what is meant is] building in joy. With respect to planting, [what is meant is] planting in joy.

B. What is "building in joy"? This is one who build a wedding-chamber for one's son. What is "planting in joy"? This is one who plants a tree for the kings.<sup>317</sup>

VII. And greetings, etc.

A. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: Scholars do not greet one another. With regard to common people who do greet [scholars], they may return [their greeting] in a soft voice and in a solemn way. And they wrap themselves and sit like mourners and those placed under a ban like people who have been rebuked by God until compassion comes to them from Heaven.

B. R. Eleazar said: Not just any prominent man is permitted to fall on his face [in supplication], but only if he may be answered like Joshua Ben Nun, as it is said, (Joshua 7:10) *But the Lord answered Joshua: "Arise, why do you lie prostrate?"*

C. And R. Eleazar said: Not just any prominent man is permitted to put on sackcloth, but only if he may be answered like Jehoram Ben Ahab, as it is said, (II Kings 6:30) *When the king heard what the woman said, he rent his clothes; and as he walked along the wall, the people could see that he was wearing sackcloth underneath.*

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<sup>316</sup>Rashi adds that this pertains even on Monday.

<sup>317</sup>Rashi explains that when a son is born to the king, the people would plant a tree, and when he was crowned, they would make his throne out of it. It could also mean a large tree for a king to walk under, as in Eruvin 25b.

D. And R. Eleazar said: Not just anyone may rend his clothes and not just anyone may fall prostrate [and may have their prayers answered]. Moses and Aaron [had their prayers answered] through falling prostrate, as it is written, (Numbers 14:5) *Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces [before all the assembled congregation of the Israelites]*. Joshua and Caleb [had their prayers answered] through rending their clothes, as it is written [in the next verse], (Numbers 14:6) *And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, [of those who had scouted the land,] rent their clothes*. R. Ze'ira and some say, R. Samuel Bar Nachmani, challenged this: If it had been written, "Joshua," [it would be] as you say. But now it is written, *And Joshua*, he did both [prostration and rending].<sup>318</sup>

E. And R. Eleazar said: Not everyone will rise [in the Messianic era], and not everyone will prostrate themselves. Kings will rise, and nobles will prostrate themselves. Kings will rise, as it is written, (Isaiah 49:7) *Thus said the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, [15a] To the despised one, to the abhorred nations, to the slave of rulers, kings shall see and stand up*. And nobles will prostrate themselves, as it is written [in the remainder of the verse], *Nobles, and they shall prostrate themselves [to honor the Lord, who is faithful, to the Holy One of Israel who chose you]*. R. Ze'ira and some say, R. Samuel Bar Nachmani, challenged this: If it was written, *And nobles shall prostrate themselves*, it would be as you say. But now it is written, *Nobles, and they shall prostrate themselves*. They will do both [rising and prostration due to their lesser status].

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<sup>318</sup>Rashi explains that Joshua and Caleb were not on the same level as Moses and Aaron and needed to take the more extreme measure of rending their garments. The Gemara expands upon this and says that, in order for their prayers to be answered, they needed to both prostrate themselves and rend their clothes.

F. R. Nachman Bar Isaac said: I also say that not all [will merit] light and not all [will merit] joy. The righteous [will merit] light, as it is written (Psalms 97:11) *Light is sown for the righteous*. And the upright [will merit] joy, as it is written [in the remainder of the verse], *Joy for the upright*.

#### The Meiri

The Meiri begins his explanation to this section by stating that we have now arrived to the last cycle of fasts, seven in number, in which the added measures of sounding the alarm and closing stores takes place. After paraphrasing the Gemara, he explains that the phrase, "sounding the alarm," in this context means blowing the shofar. The shofar is blown, as will be explained, at the closing benediction of each of the six additional blessings to the Amidah described in the upcoming chapter (seven in all counting "Goel Yisrael"). Ramban points out, in addition, that Rosh Hashanah 27a indicates that the original idea of "sounding the alarm" was done with trumpets. As stated in Numbers 10:10, trumpets were used for national alarm. Ramban teaches that the shofar was used in addition to the trumpets mentioned in Scripture. Ravad understands the use of the shofar differently, however, indicating that shofars are specifically meant in this passage of Talmud as well as in other situations, such as war, and the blasts that take place after prayer. The alarm that takes place during prayer is done by trumpets. In any case, after the destruction of the Temple, Ravad holds that there is no such thing as "sounding the alarm" except with shofars. Ramban would add to this comment in that he believes the term, "trumpets," occasionally means shofars, as is expounded in the midrash on Numbers 10:10, in Sifrei. The Meiri doubts this last point of the Ramban's, however, pointing out sharp distinctions made in the Palestinian Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 2:1, 3:4) between shofars and trumpets.



The Meiri then addresses the Gemara's discussion on the use of the term, "sounding the alarm," to possibly refer to increasing the community's crying out in prayer. With regard to such crying out, the Meiri agrees with Rashi in that he believes the Gemara means the prayer, "Aneinu," as during the turn of the year and not the insertion an individual makes into the Amidah. Although the Meiri has found evidence in Geonic liturgy for extra blessings being added to the Amidah even in the previous cycle of fasts. The Meiri dismisses these liturgical innovations, however, for the Mishnah and Gemara of this tractate (15b) clearly indicate to him that the only time additional blessings are added is during the final cycle of community fasting. There is a difference of opinion as to whether or not the additional blessings were to take place only in the morning or, as Maimonides prescribes, during all of the services. In any case, any time that "sounding the alarm" is prescribed during Shabbat, the Meiri indicates it means an increase in prayer and not the sounding of the shofar, which is prohibited on Shabbat.

These three cycles of community-wide fasts are the limit the rabbis could decree in response to drought, although other calamities are not governed nor limited by this protocol. The Meiri then reiterates the decision by Rabbi with regard to the Jews of Nineveh who need to pray for rain all year due to the climate in which they live. Rabbi ruled that the citizens of Nineveh needed to pray as individuals, making the appropriate insertion into the Amidah, and not pray as a community, requesting rain in "*Birkat Hashanim*." To rule otherwise, the Meiri explains, would unnecessarily disrupt the cycle of prayers established in the liturgy as well as the cycle of blessing and curse that is associated with the seasons.

The Meiri then returns to the mishnah for a final, small section of this chapter. Even though no more fasts can be decreed upon the community, individuals can still fast while measures such as halting the use of greetings and asking about others' welfare are taken. The Meiri first takes up the last

statement of the mishnah, that rain after Nisan is a sign of a curse. The Meiri qualifies this statement with a passage from the Palestinian Talmud (1:8) that states that rain after Nisan is a curse only if it has not rained prior to the end of the month. Based upon this statement, the Meiri advocates fasting for rain, for his community, even into the summer months.

With regard to prohibitions against building and planting, the Meiri repeats the Gemara's explanation that such refers only to "joyous" building and planting. Therefore, only building a wedding chamber is forbidden. The Meiri also agrees with Rashi's second explanation that planting refers to planting large, shady trees such as kings are wont to use. The Meiri then qualifies these prohibitions by stating that some Sephardic rabbis hold that these are not really prohibitions in the strict sense, and one build a wedding chamber if one has no pre-existing one. Marriage, as well, may take place if one does not have children.

After repeating the Gemara's comments about lessening greetings, the Meiri concludes by expounding upon the Gemara's closing remarks prohibiting people from purporting themselves to be saints or devout leaders. Not just everyone can go through the pious actions of publicly prostrate himself before God, wear sackcloth, and rend his garments as acts of eliciting God's compassion, for not all are fit to pray to God in such an extreme fashion. In fact, the Meiri states, only those who are truly humble and have empathy for the people may make such public displays after the community has asked them to do so. Such people should plead on behalf of the community in all due piety.

## END OF CHAPTER ONE

## Chapter II

### The Meiri

The Meiri summarizes the main themes and topics of this section in three steps. These are:

1. To explain the procedure and prayers during the last seven fast days.
2. To outline who is required to fast and in what order.
3. To establish when is a fitting time to fast.

Incidental to these themes are the procedures of the members of the watch and issues dealing with the chief house.

I. **Our Mishnah:** What is the [liturgical] procedure on fast days?

A. They bring out the Ark into the open area of the city, and they put ashes from wood on top of the ark, on the head of the Patriarch, and on the head of the President of the Court, and so does everyone put [ashes] on his head. The eldest of them says in their presence words of rebuke, [beginning with,] "Brothers, it does not say [in the book of Jonah], "God saw their sackcloth and their fasting," but rather, (Jonah 3:10) *God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways*. And in the received tradition of the Prophets<sup>319</sup> it says, (Joel 2:13) *Rend your hearts rather than your garments*.

B. They stood in prayer, and they brought down before the Ark [to lead them in prayer] an elder who was well-versed in prayer, who had children [who depended upon him] but whose house was empty so that his prayer was heartfelt. And he says before them twenty-four blessings [in the Amidah], eighteen [that are said] every day and he adds to them another six.

C. And they are: [1] *Zichronot*, [2] and *Shofarot*,<sup>320</sup> [3] (Psalm 120) *In my distress I called to the Lord and He answered me*, etc. [4] (Psalm 121) *I turn my eyes to*

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<sup>319</sup>The question arises as to why Jonah's words are distinct from the received tradition of the Prophets. The Tosofot state in the place of Rashi that the sages only referred to explicit commandments as prophetic received tradition and all other narrative or poetic passages were a separate category.

<sup>320</sup>*Zichronot* and *Shofarot* are prayers included on Rosh Hashanah composed of biblical verses. *Zichronot*, the "remembrance verses," refer to God as judge, while *Shofarot*, the "shofar verses," refer to God a redeemer. See Elbogen, 118-121.

*the mountains; from where will my help come?, etc., [5] (Psalm 130) Out of the depths I call to You, O Lord, etc. [and, 6] (Psalm 102) A prayer of the lonely man when he is faint. R. Judah says: He did not need to say Zichronot and Shofarot, but rather in their stead, (I Kings 8:37ff.) So, too, if there is a famine in the land, if there is pestilence, etc. and, (Jeremiah 14:1ff.) The word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah concerning the droughts, etc., [respectively].*

D. And one says their closing benedictions. On the first [blessing which receives an addition in the Amidah, the seventh blessing,] one says [as a closing benediction], "May the One who answered Abraham at Mount Moriah<sup>321</sup> answer you and hear the sound of your cries this day. Praised is the Lord who redeems Israel." On the second [addition to the Amidah, *Zichronot*], one says [as a closing benediction], "May the One who answered our ancestors at the Sea of Reeds<sup>322</sup> answer you and hear the sound of your cries this day. Praised is the Lord who remembers things forgotten." On the third [addition to the Amidah, *Shofarot*], one says [as a closing benediction], May the One who answered Joshua at Gilgal<sup>323</sup> answer you and hear the sound of your cries this day. Praised is the Lord who hears the shofar." On the fourth [addition to the Amidah, Psalm 120], one says [as a closing benediction], "May the One who answered Samuel at Mizpah<sup>324</sup> answer you and hear the sound of your cry this

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<sup>321</sup>Genesis 22.

<sup>322</sup>Exodus 14:9ff.

<sup>323</sup>Joshua 6.

<sup>324</sup>I Samuel 7:5-9.

day. Praised be the Lord who hears cries this day." On the fifth [addition to the Amidah, Psalm 121], one says [as a closing benediction], "May the One who answered Elijah at Mount Carmel<sup>325</sup> answer you and hear the sound of your cries this day. Praised is the Lord who hears prayer." On the sixth [addition to the Amidah, Psalm 130], one says [as a closing benediction], "May the One who answered Jonah from the belly of the fish<sup>326</sup> answer you and hear the sound of your cries this day. Praised is the Lord who answers in a time of distress." On the seventh [addition to the Amidah, Psalm 102] one says [as a closing benediction], "May the One who answered David<sup>327</sup> and Solomon, his son, in Jerusalem<sup>328</sup> answer you and hear the sound of your cries this day. Praised is the Lord who has compassion on the land."

E. A precedent: [15b] In the days of R. Chalfita and R. Chanina Ben Tradyon, one came before the Ark and finished a blessing in its entirety, and they did not say, "Amen" after it. [The prayer leader said:] "Sound a *tekiah*, priests, sound a *tekiah*!<sup>329</sup> May the One who answered Abraham our father at Mount Moriah answer you and hear the sound of your cry this day." [And the prayer leader continued,] "Sound a *teruah*, children of Aaron, sound a *teruah*! May the One who answered our ancestors at the

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<sup>325</sup>I Kings 18: 36-39.

<sup>326</sup>Jonah 2.

<sup>327</sup>II Samuel 21:1, 14.

<sup>328</sup>I Kings 8:35, 37, 9:3.

<sup>329</sup>A *tekiah* is a shofar blast that is a simple, uninterrupted sound. A *teruah* is a series of quick shofar blasts. See Steinsaltz, 274.

Sea of Reeds answer you and hear the sound of your cry this day." [And so on.] And when the case came before the sages, they said: We only acted in such a way at the Eastern Gate and in the Temple [before the Destruction].

F. During the first three fasts, the members of the watch<sup>330</sup> [who are not on duty in the Temple] fast, but do not complete [their fast], and the members of chief house<sup>331</sup> [who are on duty in the Temple] did not fast at all. During the second three fasts, the members of the watch fast and complete [their fast], and the members of the chief house fast, but do not complete [their fast]. During the seven final fasts, both groups fast and complete [their fast]. These are the words of R. Joshua. But the sages say: During the first three fasts, neither group fasts at all. During the second three fasts the members of the watch fast, but do not complete [their fast], and the members of chief house did not fast at all. During the final seven fasts, the members of the watch fast and complete [their fast], and the members of the chief house fast, but do not complete [their fast].

G. [Incidentally, dealing with the members of the watch and the members of the chief house,] the members of the watch are permitted to drink wine during the nights [that they are at the Temple], but not during the days. But as for the members of the

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<sup>330</sup>Priests who served and worked in the Temple did so on a rotating basis. See Chapter Four. Twenty-four groups ("watches") would be on duty approximately twice a year for a week at a time. These priests would travel from their local area to come to the Temple for their watch. (Steinsaltz, 224-225.)

<sup>331</sup>Each watch, which served in the Temple a week at a time, was divided into six or seven "houses." Each one of these "houses" served during one day of the week of the group's watch. The house that was on duty on a particular day was the "chief house." (Steinsaltz, 168.)

chief house -- not during the day or the night. The members of the watch and the members of the station<sup>332</sup> are forbidden to cut their hair or wash their clothing, but on Thursday they are permitted [to do so] for the honor of the Sabbath.

H. All [the days] about which it is written in the Scroll of Fasting<sup>333</sup> that "there is no mourning," [on the day] before it is [also] forbidden, [on the day] after it is permitted.

R. Jose says: [Mourning on both the days] before it and after it is forbidden. [All the days about which it is written in the Scroll of Fasting] that "there is no fasting on it," [fasting on both the days] before it and after it is permitted. R. Jose says: [Fasting on the day] before it is forbidden, [on the day] after it is permitted.

I. They do not decree a [series of] fasts beginning with Thursday so as not to disturb the market.<sup>334</sup> Rather, the first three fasts [must follow the order of] Monday, Thursday, Monday, and the second three fasts [follow the order of] Thursday, Monday, Thursday. R. Jose says: Just as the first ones [cannot begin] with Thursday, so may not the second ones and the last ones.

J. They do not decree a fast on the community on the first of the month, during

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<sup>332</sup>While the priests of a certain locality came to the Temple to serve their watch, a corresponding group of non-priests from that same locality performed complementary functions. These non-priests, "members of the station," had two roles. Some would accompany the priests to Temple to supervise, and some would remain at home in their local region and perform special liturgical functions for that week. (Steinsaltz, 221.)

<sup>333</sup>As explained earlier in section 9, the Scroll of Fasting is a list of days on which the rabbis' prohibited fasting.

<sup>334</sup>Rashi explains that when the merchants see people buying enough food for two large feasts (for preparing for the fast and for the Sabbath), they may misunderstand and believe a famine has struck. With such a misunderstanding, they may unnecessarily inflate the prices.



Chanukka, and on Purim, but if they began [to fast] they do not cease. These are the words of R. Gamaliel. R. Meir said: Even though R. Gamaliel said they do not cease, he acknowledges that they do not complete [their fast]. And so on Tisha B'Ab when it falls on the eve of the Sabbath.

II. **Gemara:** How is the order of fasts [carried out]? They bring out the Ark, etc..

A. Even in the first [two fast cycles]? But there is a contradiction [with a Baraita that reads as follows]: During the first three fasts and second [three] fasts, they enter into the synagogue and pray the way they would pray all year, but during the seven final fasts, they bring out the Ark into the open area of the city, and they put ashes from wood on top of the ark, on the head of the Patriarch, and on the head of the President of the Court, and so does everyone put [ashes] on his head. R. Nathan says: They are wood ashes that they put [on their heads, and not merely dust].<sup>335</sup>

B. R. Papa said: So did the Mishnah [intend] to teach [that they bring out the Ark only in reference to] the final seven fasts.

III. On the head of the Patriarch, [and on the head of the President of the Court], etc.

A. And then afterwards the Mishnah teaches: And so does everyone put [ashes] on his head. Is it so? For it is taught in a Baraita, Rabbi says: With regard to matters of greatness, we begin with the great, and with regard to curses we begin with the least. With regard to matters of greatness we begin with the great, as it is said, (Leviticus 10:6) *And Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar* [in descending order with regard to tending the Tent

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<sup>335</sup>Rashi comments that wood ashes are preferred because they serve as a reminder of the homiletical tradition of the ashes of Isaac, that is, the tradition that Isaac was actually slain in Genesis 22, burned to ash, and resurrected.

of Meeting].<sup>336</sup> And with regard to curses we begin with the least, that a Master taught: In the beginning the snake was cursed, and afterwards Eve was cursed, and afterwards Adam was cursed.<sup>337</sup>

B. But [this matter of putting ashes on the head of the Patriarch and the President of the Court] is a matter of prominence for them, that they are saying to them, "You are prominent enough to pray for compassion for all the world on our behalf."

IV. And so does everyone put [ashes] on his head.

A. R. Adda said: And so does everyone put [ashes] on his head. Let the Patriarch and the President of the Court also take [ashes] for themselves and let them place it on their own heads. What is [the meaning of the teaching] that another person takes [ashes] and places [the ashes] for them?

B. R. Abba of Caesarea answered: One who humiliates himself is not like [16a] one who is humiliated by others.<sup>338</sup>

C. And where does one put them? R. Isaac said: In the place of *tefillin* [on the forehead at the hairline], as it is said, (Isaiah 61:3) *To provide for the mourners in Zion, to give them a turban instead of ashes.*<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>336</sup>Rashi explains that the verse deals with a subject of greatness and lists the biblical figures in order of greatness.

<sup>337</sup>Genesis 3.

<sup>338</sup>Rashi teaches that, just as the Patriarch and the President are singled out for prominence by being worthy of praying on behalf of the community, they also need to be more humble than the rest of the community. Thus, this extra measure of humiliation is reserved for them alone.

<sup>339</sup>Rashi explains that the homily deals with the word, *turban* (Hebrew: *p'eir*), is also used in reference to *tefillin*, as in Berachot 11a and in Rashi's understanding of the Targum to Ezekiel

D. A mnemonic: open area, Ark, sackcloth, ashes, ashes, cemetery, Moriah.

1. Why to they bring out [the Ark] to an open area?

a. R. Chiyya Bar Abba said: To express that we have cried in private [in the synagogue], and we were not answered. We will [therefore] debase ourselves in public. Resh Lakish said: We are in exile [from the synagogue]. May our exile atone for us.

b. What is the difference between them [where one reason would make sense and the other not]? The difference is apparent when they go from one synagogue to another.<sup>340</sup>

2. And why do they bring out the Ark to an open area of the city? R. Joshua Ben Levi said: We had a vessel that was kept private, but it has become debased by our sins [and is now publicly exposed].

3. And why do we cover ourselves in sackcloth? R. Chiyya Bar Abba said: To express that now we are thought of as animals.<sup>341</sup>

4. And why do we put wood-ashes on the Ark? R. Judah Bar Pazzi said: As though to say, (Psalms 91:15) *I will be with him in his distress*. Resh Lakish said: [As though to say,] (Isaiah 63:9) *In all their troubles He was troubled*.<sup>342</sup> R. Zera said: At first when I saw our sages put wood ashes on top of the Ark, my whole body trembled.

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24:17.

<sup>340</sup>In such a case, Resh Lakish's reason still makes sense, but R. Chiyya Bar Abba's does not since there is no public humiliation.

<sup>341</sup>Rashi explains that sackcloth is hairy like an animal.

<sup>342</sup>That is, that God joins His people in their distress and debasement.

5. And why does everyone put ashes on his head?

a. There was a dispute between R. Levi Bar Chama and R. Chanina. One said: Now we are thought of before You as dust. And one said: In order that [God] may recall the ashes of Isaac on our behalf.<sup>343</sup>

b. What is the difference between them [where one reason would make sense and the other not]? The difference is apparent [with the use of] plain dust [instead of the preferred wood-ashes].<sup>344</sup>

6. Why do they go out to a cemetery?

a. There was a dispute between R. Levi Bar Chama and R. Chanina. One said: Now we are thought of before You as the dead. And one said: In order that the dead should pray for mercy on our behalf.

b. What is the difference between them [where one reason would make sense and the other not]? The difference is apparent [when they go to visit] the graves of idolaters.<sup>345</sup>

7. What is [the significance of] Mount Moriah?<sup>346</sup> There was a dispute between R. Levi Bar Chama and R. Chanina. One said: Instruction (Hebrew: *hora'ah*) came out from the

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<sup>343</sup>See note 329.

<sup>344</sup>That is, when they use plain dust instead of the preferred wood-ashes, the first opinion still holds while the second no longer makes sense.

<sup>345</sup>In such a case, the first opinion still holds while the second one no longer makes sense.

<sup>346</sup>Rashi believes this is included because it is another dispute between R. Levi Bar Chama and R. Chanina.

mountain to Israel.<sup>347</sup> And one said: Terror (Hebrew: *morah*) came out from the mountain to the idolaters.<sup>348</sup>

V. The eldest of them says in their presence words of rebuke, etc.

A. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: If there is an elder, an elder speaks, and if not, a scholar, and if not, a distinguished man.<sup>349</sup>

1. Can it be they teach that an elder [should speak] even though he is not a scholar?

2. Abaye said [in response]: This is what the Baraita meant to say: if there is an elder who is a scholar, the elder who is a scholar speaks, and if not, a scholar, and if not, a distinguished man.

B. [The Baraita continues:] "Brothers, it is not sackcloth and fasting that elicits [God's compassion], but rather repentance and good deeds elicit [God's compassion]. So we find with the people of Nineveh, that it is not said [in the book of Jonah], God saw their sackcloth and their fasting, but rather, (Jonah 3:10) *God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways.*

1. (Jonah 3:8) *They shall be covered in sackcloth -- man and beast.* What did they do? They tied the cattle separately from the young. They said before Him, "Master of the

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<sup>347</sup>Rashi gives numerous examples that this word implies Torah.

<sup>348</sup>Rashi explains that when the idolatrous nations heard of the greatness of Israel and of Jerusalem, which is built upon Mount Moriah, they became afraid, as in Psalm 86.

<sup>349</sup>Rashi explains that "a distinguished man" indicates someone of stature whose words will be heeded by the people.

Universe, if You are not compassionate on us, we may not be compassionate on these.”<sup>350</sup>

2. (Jonah 3:8) *And shall cry mightily to God.* What did they say? They said before Him, “Master of the Universe, [considering] one who is humble and one who is not humble, one who is righteous and one who is wicked, who would [graciously] yield to whom?

3. (Jonah 3:8) *Let everyone turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice which is in his hands.* What is meant by, *the injustice which is in his hands*? Samuel said: Even if one stole a beam and built it into [the structure of] a palace, one should knock down the whole palace and return the beam to its owner. R. Adda Bar Ahaba said: [Considering] a man who has transgressed, confesses, but does not return [to the way he should act in his deeds],<sup>351</sup> what is he like? He is a man who grasps an impure, creeping thing in his hand and even if he immerses in all the waters of the world, immersion will not benefit him. If he casts it from his hand, when he immerses in forty measures of water, immediately immersion benefits him, as it is said, (Proverbs 28:13) *[He who covers up his faults will not succeed;] he who confesses and gives them up will find mercy.* And it says, (Lamentations 3:41) *Let us lift up our hearts with our hands to God in heaven.*<sup>352</sup>

#### The Meiri

With regard to the first mishnah of this chapter, the Meiri stresses that the procedure of taking the Ark into the public square is done only with the seven final fasts and not the two previous cycles. He also stresses that

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<sup>350</sup>Rashi expounds this practice in light of Psalms 145:9, *The Lord is good to all; His mercy is upon His works*, as if to say, “Just as You say you will be compassionate to these animals, so have mercy on us.”

<sup>351</sup>Rashi believes that “return” here refers to stolen goods, as in the previous passage.

<sup>352</sup>As Rashi explains, not just with our hearts, but also with our hands.

ashes, and not just ordinary dust, are to be used in the ritual of public debasement for reasons to be explained. Finally, the mishnah deals with the sermon that is to be given to the people so as to inspire repentance.

The first issue of the Gemara that the Meiri highlights is that the Patriarch and the President of the Court are to be the first to be publicly shamed with ashes being put on their heads. The Meiri points out that there is a balance struck here. On the one hand, these leaders are the first to be debased because they are the most prominent members of the community. On the one hand, it is a ritual of humiliation, so one might think that they should go last. The Gemara points out, however, that by going first, they are essentially told how important they are in the life of the community and that they are worthy of representing the world to God in their pleas. On the other hand, these leaders get an extra measure of humiliation in that they do not put the ashes on their own heads but rather someone else does so to them for an extra measure of disgrace.

The second issue of consequence that the Meiri comments upon is the bringing of the Ark into the public square during the final seven fasts. Two reasons are given for this, one being a matter of heightening their disgrace so as to inspire repentance, the other being a matter of comfort. The exposure of the Ark in the public square, as well as the placing of ashes upon it, is designed to cause fear and trembling in the hearts of the viewers of such a spectacle. A correlation is drawn between the sin of the community and the corruption of their most holy object. Just as the people's immodesty has brought them shame, so too is the Ark exposed to disgrace. On the other hand, based upon an interpretation from Isaiah 63:9, the Ark's "humiliation" along with the people brings them comfort, for the Ark represents God's presence. The ritual indicates that they are not alone in their debasement, for wherever they go, God's presence goes with them no matter how corrupt they become. Thus, as amplified in the homiletics of Pesikta Rabati 12:9, when Israel sins,

out of compassion for His people, God's power and sovereignty is diminished. Finally, the need for ashes to be used in the ritual, and not just dust, is to recall the near-sacrifice of Isaac. If God will not relent for the sake of the people, than perhaps God will recall the faithfulness of their ancestors and have mercy.

In the Gemara, the words of the sermon that are recorded stress that it is not one's sackcloth or other humiliation that elicits God's compassion but rather true repentance. The Meiri then inquires as to what the purpose of putting on sackcloth in any case. As taken from the Palestinian Talmud 2:1, that putting on sackcloth, a product made of animal hair, reminds God that people are essentially creatures just like the rest of creation and are therefore deserving of pity. Even the blowing of the shofar is to enable the people to bellow like cattle. The Meiri's opinion is that sackcloth and such is an illustration that, when Divine Providence is taken from the people, they become just like animals. (See Habakkuk 1:14.) Thus all measures are designed to win God's mercy and to inspire repentance. Even visiting one's family graves, which the Gemara offers as possibly enlisting aid from one's dead predecessors, is only efficacious in that it breaks people's hearts and makes them more willing to change their ways.

The Meiri then reiterates the pecking order of who may deliver the sermon to the people. He stresses that an elderly scholar is most favorable, but scholarship is more important than age. If neither can be found, a "distinguished person" is to plead Israel's case, which the Meiri defines as one whose devotion and ethics are well-known to the community. This person delivers the sermon as outlined in the mishnah and amplified in the Gemara, asking the people to remove corruption from their homes. The Gemara adds that even one has stolen a beam and built it into an essential part of a palace, one should knock down the palace to give back the beam. Such hyperbole contradicts rabbinic law (as stated in Bava Kamma 62a) that says monetary



payment is sufficient, the Meiri stresses that such a speech is designed to inspire regret and anxiety over one's sins as well as a desire to confess one's transgressions and make true change. Without such moral examination, any ritual of repentance is not efficacious. The Gemara likens it to someone who goes into a ritual bath so as to become pure while holding a source of impurity in one's hand. If one were only to let go of the source of one's corruption in honest repentance, one would find oneself cleansed and, as it says in Proverbs 28:13, able to *find mercy*.

I. **[Our Mishnah:]** They stood in prayer, and they brought down before the Ark [to lead them in prayer] an elder [who was well-versed in prayer, who had children [who depended upon him] but whose house was empty [of sustenance] so that his prayer was heartfelt,] etc.

A. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: When they would stand in prayer, even though there might be an elder [who is also a] scholar, they do not bring him down before the Ark [to lead them in prayer] unless he is a man who is well-versed in prayer. (Who is well-versed in prayer?)

R. Judah says: One who is burdened [with a large family and many children] but does not have [means to support them], who has toiling work in the field and whose house is empty [of sustenance], whose youth is proper, who is humble [lit. has fallen to his knees] and acceptable to the people, who is pleasant, has a pleasing voice, who is an expert in reading Torah, Prophets, and Writings, and the literature of Midrash, Halacha, and Aggadah, and who is an expert in all of the liturgical blessings. Then all of the rabbis' eyes fell upon R. Isaac Bar Ammi. **[16b]**

1. "One who is burdened [with a large family and many children] but does not have [means to support them]" is the same as one "whose house is empty." R. Chisda responded: This [latter comment refers to] one whose house is empty of transgression.<sup>353</sup>

2. "Whose youth is proper." Abaye said: This refers to one who did not have a bad reputation in his childhood.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>353</sup>Rashi explains that this means there is nothing stolen or taken unjustly in the house.

<sup>354</sup>Rashi adds that this includes one who did not get a bad reputation even with adolescence, which is a time when one is most likely to do so.

B. (Jeremiah 12:8) *My own people acted like a lion to me in the forest; she raised her voice against Me -- therefore I have rejected her.* What is [the meaning of], *She raised her voice against Me*? Mar Zutra Bar Toviyah said in the name of Rab, and some say R. Chama said in the name of R. Eleazar: This refers to a prayer leader who comes down before the Ark [to lead prayer] and is unfit.

II. And he says before them twenty-four blessings [in the Amidah], eighteen [that are said] every day and he adds to them another six.

A. Is it six [blessings that he adds]? There are seven [that are mentioned in the next section of the Mishnah], as it is taught in the Mishnah: On the seventh [addition to the Amidah, Psalm 102] one says [as a closing benediction] "... Praised is the Lord who has compassion on the land."

B. R. Nachman Bar Isaac replied: What is [meant by] "the seventh"? Seventh from the extended blessing [that is, as explained above, the first addition is an expansion upon an every day blessing of the Amidah, and then six whole additional blessings are inserted], as it was taught in a Baraita: In "the redeemer of Israel," [the seventh blessing of the Amidah,] one extends [it with additional words], concluding it by saying, "May the One who answered Abraham our father at Mount Moriah answer you and hear the sound of your cry this day. Praised is the Lord who redeems Israel." And they answer after him, "Amen." Then the synagogue leader says to them, "Sound a *tekiah*, children of Aaron, sound a *tekiah*!" And he [the prayer leader] repeats and says, "May the One who answered our ancestors at the Sea of Reeds answer you and hear the sound of your cry this day. Praised [is the Lord] who remembers things forgotten." And they answer after him, "Amen." And then the synagogue leader says, "Sound a *teruah*, children of Aaron, sound a

*teruah!*” And so on for each and every blessing, on one he says, “Sound a *tekiah*,” and on [the next] one he says, “Sound a *teruah*.”

C. To what do these words [that they respond, “Amen”] refer? To the country, but in the Temple it is not so, because they do not answer, “Amen,” in the Temple. And from where [do we learn that] they do not answer, “Amen,” in the Temple? As it is said, (Nehemiah 9:5) *Rise, bless the Lord your God who is from eternity to eternity: “May Your glorious name be blessed, exalted though it is above every blessing and praise!”* It is possible [one should think that one should respond so after] all of the blessings have been said all together in nothing but one act of praise, so Scripture says, *Exalted though it is above every blessing and praise*, [that is to say,] give Him praise on every blessing. Rather, in the Temple, what does he [the prayer leader] say? “Praised are You, Lord God, God of Israel from eternity to eternity. Praised is the Redeemer of Israel.” And they answer after him, “Praised is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.” And the synagogue leader says to them, “Sound a *tekiah*, priests, children of Aaron, sound a *tekiah!*” And then he [the prayer leader] returns [to the blessings] and says, “May the One who answered Abraham at Mount Mōriah answer you and hear the sound of your cries this day. Praised is the Lord, God of Israel, who remembers things forgotten.”<sup>355</sup> And they respond after him, “Praised is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.” And the synagogue leader says to them, “Sound a *teruah*, priests, children of Aaron, sound a *teruah*,” etc.. And so on for each and every blessing, on one he says, “Sound a *tekiah*,” and on [the next] one he says, “Sound a *teruah*,” until he finishes all of them. Such did R. Chalafta set as the custom in Sepphoris, and R. Chananya Ben

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<sup>355</sup>According to the Mishnah, this is the wrong concluding benediction for this blessing. It is unclear whether the prayer leader is repeating the prayer here or if the format has been condensed for the sake of brevity.

Tradition set as the custom in Siknin, but when the case came before the sages, they said: We only acted in such a way at the Eastern Gate and in the Temple [before its destruction].

D. There are those who teach [the following version of] the Baraita: [The prayer leader] says before them twenty-four blessings [in the Amidah], eighteen [that are said] every day and he adds to them another six. As for those six, where do they recite them? Between "the Redeemer," [the seventh blessing of the Amidah] and "the One who heals the sick" [the eighth blessing of the Amidah]. And one extends the blessing of redemption, and they respond after him, "Amen," on each and every blessing. Such did they do in the country, but in the Temple they would say, "Praised is the Lord, God of Israel from eternity to eternity. Praised is [the Lord] Redeemer of Israel. And they would not answer after him, "Amen." Why is this so? Because they do not respond, "Amen," in the Temple. And from where [do we learn that] they do not answer, "Amen," in the Temple? As it is said, (Nehemiah 9:5) *Rise, bless the Lord your god who is from eternity to eternity: "May Your glorious name be blessed, exalted though it is above every blessing and praise!"* Give Him praise on each and every blessing.

E. Our rabbis taught [a third version of this Baraita]: On the first [blessing], he [the prayer leader] says, "Praised is the Lord, God of Israel, from eternity to eternity. Praised is [the Lord,] the Redeemer of Israel. And they answer after him, "Praised is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever." And the synagogue leader says, "Sound a *tekiah*, priests, sound a *tekiah*!" And he repeats and says, "May the One who answered Abraham at Mount Moriah answer you and hear the sound of your cry this day. (And they blow a *tekiah*, *teruah*, and a *tekiah*.) And on the second [blessing] he says, "Praised is the Lord, God of Israel, from eternity to eternity. Praised is [the Lord] who remembers things forgotten." And they answer after him,

"Praised is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever." And the synagogue leader says, "Sound a *teruah*, priests, sound a *teruah*!" And he repeats and says, "May the One who answered our ancestors at the Sea of Reeds answer you and hear the sound of our cry this day." And they sound a *teruah*, a *tekiah*, and a *teruah*. And so on for each and every blessing. On one he says, "Sound a *tekiah*," and on [the next] one he says, "Sound a *teruah*," until he finishes all of the blessings. Such did R. Chalafta set as the custom in Sepphoris, and R. Chananya Ben Tradyon set as the custom in Siknin, but when the case came before the sages, they said: We only acted in such a way at the Eastern Gate and in the Temple [before the Destruction].

F. R. Judah says: He did not need to say *Zichronot*, etc. R. Adda of Jaffa said: What is R. Judah's reason? Because they do not say *Zichronot* and *Shofarot* [17a] unless it is Rosh Hashanah, Jubilee years, or in a time of war.<sup>356</sup>

G. On the first [blessing which receives an addition in the Amidah, the seventh blessing,] one says [as a closing benediction], "May the One who answered Abraham... [On the fourth, one says [as a closing benediction], "May the One who answered Samuel at Mizpah<sup>357</sup> answer you and hear the sound of your cry this day. Praised be the Lord who hears cries this day." On the fifth, one says [as a closing benediction], "May the One who answered Elijah at Mount Carmel<sup>358</sup> answer you and hear the sound of your cries this day. Praised is the Lord who hears prayer."], etc.

1. It was taught in a Baraita that there are those who switch [and mention]

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<sup>356</sup>Rashi adds Yom Kippur.

<sup>357</sup>I Samuel 7:5-9.

<sup>358</sup>I Kings 18: 36-39.

“crying” with Elijah and “prayers” with Samuel. With Samuel, it is acceptable, for “prayer” is written in Scripture (I Samuel 7:5) and “crying” is written in Scripture (I Samuel 15:11).<sup>359</sup> But in reference to Elijah, “prayer” is written in Scripture (I Kings 18:37), but “crying” is not written in Scripture.

2. [But it says in Scripture,] (I Kings 18:37) *Answer me, O Lord, answer me* [as said by Elijah] is an expression of “crying.”

H. On the sixth [addition to the Amidah, Psalm 130], one says [as a closing benediction], “May the One who answered Jonah [from the belly of the fish<sup>360</sup> answer you and hear the sound of your cries this day. Praised is the Lord who answers in a time of distress.”] On the seventh [addition to the Amidah, Psalm 102] one says [as a closing benediction], “May the One who answered David [and Solomon, his son, in Jerusalem answer you and hear the sound of your cries this day. Praised is the Lord who has compassion on the land.”]

1. Since Jonah lived after David and Solomon, what is the reason that one puts him [Jonah] before [David and Solomon in the order of blessings]?

2. Because one needs to conclude with, “compassion on the land.”<sup>361</sup>

3. It was taught in a Baraita in the name of Symmachos they say [as a concluding

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<sup>359</sup>These citations follow Rashi. The result is that it would be appropriate to mention either “crying out” or “prayers” in the closing benediction citing Samuel.

<sup>360</sup>Jonah 2.

<sup>361</sup>Rashi explains that, at the end of all of the additional blessings, one needs to conclude with a blessing over the land, for it indicates the land of Israel (which is suffering from drought). Rashi also adds that one needs to conclude with a blessing over the land because this indicates the Temple in Jerusalem which is the land of Israel’s core.

benediction], "Praised [is the Lord] who humbles the arrogant."

### The Meiri

The Meiri reviews the subject of who is fit to lead the community in prayer, made especially pressing here in that a similarly fit person must also deliver words of rebuke to the community in order to "soften their hearts" and inspire repentance. The speaker has a two-fold role. Not only is he supposed to inspire repentance in his listeners, and thus he should be an elder well-versed in prayer and Scriptures with a pleasant voice, but he should also inspire compassion from God. As an elderly individual free of any fault due to youthful impetuosity or pretext for blame, he should also be a worker of the land whose family has suffered considerably from drought. While under normal circumstances a community representative should be upright and respectable, in the situation at hand, namely, the cosmic catastrophe of the land of Israel being deprived of rain, the people's advocate to God need be especially worthy. It is for this reason that the Meiri invokes Ecclesiastes Rabbah on verse 9:14-15, *There was a little city, with few men in it; and to it came a great king, who invested it and built mighty siege works against it. Present in the city was a poor wise man who might have saved it with his wisdom, but nobody thought of that poor man.* The "little city" is like a synagogue. The "few men in it" are the community. The "great king" is God. And the "poor wise man" is the community prayer leader who the community should seek out.

The Meiri then reiterates in great detail the liturgy as listed in the Gemara regarding the six additional blessings that are inserted into the Amidah in between the seventh and eighth blessing of the regular weekday Amidah (between the blessings of "redemption" and "healing"), noting that the prayer, "Aneinu" is already inserted into the body of the text of the seventh, "redemption," blessing. The Meiri clarifies the apparent discrepancy in the



mishnah by explaining that the first addition to the Amidah is an extension on the seventh blessing, in addition to "Aneinu," which includes a shofar call, but is not a new blessing in and of itself. The liturgy of the Amidah, as outlined by the Meiri, thus proceeds as such:

7. Blessing of Redemption, including "Aneinu," with the extension citing Abraham and the regular closing benediction praising God as Redeemer.

1. *Zichronot*,<sup>362</sup> with an extension citing the Sea of Reeds and with the closing benediction, "who remembers things forgotten."

2. *Shofarot*, with an extension citing Joshua and with the closing benediction, "who hears the shofar."

3. Psalm 120, with an extension citing Samuel and the closing benediction, "who hears cries this day."

4. Psalm 121, with an extension citing Elijah, and the closing benediction, "who hears prayer."

5. Psalm 130, with an extension citing Jonah, and the closing benediction, "who answers in a time of distress."

6. Psalm 102, with an extension citing David and Solomon, and the closing benediction, "who has compassion on the land."

8. Blessing-of Healing, etc.

Three parts thus emerge in the text of the additions to the Amidah. First is a passage from Scripture, usually a Psalm, than an addition or extension connecting the first passage from Scripture with a thematically related event, and finally a closing benediction. Even though one might think that the events from Scripture should be prayed in chronological order, in fact they are arranged for dramatic appeal and emotional effect. The final additional blessing to the Amidah, Psalm 102, with an extension citing David and Solomon, is saved for last because these figures prayed in response to

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<sup>362</sup>See note 316. For all explanations of Scriptural citations, see the text of this mishnah.

drought and were most closely linked with the Land of Israel in that they were sovereigns over it. They, therefore, speak most directly to the rabbis' present need of brining rain to the Holy Land.

The liturgy as outlined above encounters complications, however, in how it would be applied after the destruction of the Temple. These issues are raised in the name of R. Judah. The first issue is that R. Judah claims that one does not recite either *Zichronot* or *Shofarot* except for on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur of a Jubilee year, or a time of war, but the sages disagree with him, saying that a time of drought is also an appropriate time. Another issue is that one does not say, "Amen," to any of the benedictions inside the Temple, but rather, one responds, "Praised is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever." With the Temple no longer standing, however, one does answer, "Amen."

The Meiri raises these issues that come from R. Judah as a lead in to a larger subject, that is, the issue of when and with what liturgy one blows the shofar. It appears that the procedure outlined above was not the procedure used in the Temple besides the use of the response, "Amen." In fact, the prayer leader would recite the first Scriptural passage and then skip directly to the closing benediction. The additional Scriptural passage would come after the benediction, citing Abraham or Samuel, etc., and would be followed by shofar blasts. The shofar blasts would either alternate *tekiah* for one blessing and *teruah* for the next, and so on back and forth, or, according to some opinions (including the Ravad), the blasts would be *tekiah-shevarim-tekiah* for one blessing and *tekiah-shevarim-tekiah* for the next. The order of the blessing would thus go: Scripture (usually a Psalm), benediction, additional passage, and then shofar blasts.

Maimonides has a completely different procedure, which is that they do not do shofar blasts at all during the entire length of the Amidah but only

sound the shofar afterwards. The Meiri completely rejects this stance.

All of the preceding differences are changes in the liturgy from when the Temple was still standing to after its destruction. Even without the Temple, the community proceeded to fast for rain in response to drought, apparently following the liturgy as outlined above. An example of such an instance comes from later in this tractate, 25b, where R. Eliezer and R. Akiba pray for rain, both living after the Temple's destruction. Further changes occur, however, when the community no longer lives in the land of Israel, and, as R. Judah pointed out before, the institution of a community-wide fast proclaimed by the Court no longer applies. Evidence can be found that the Jewish community still continued to fast for rain wherever they may have lived, such as the fast in Nineveh described in the Palestinian Talmud, Berachot 5:2.

The Meiri, taking into account the fact that these further changes came about, proceeds to describe how a liturgy of fasting occurred in his day, and it is similar to the penitential prayers one would recite before Rosh Hashanah. The Meiri bases himself on the liturgical arrangements of the Geonim, and the liturgy is long and elaborate. While many of the Scriptural passages (*Zichronot*, *Shofarot*, Psalm 120, Psalm 121, etc.) are all exchanged or rearranged with other passages, the extensions citing Scriptural events (May the One who answered Abraham..., May the One who answered our ancestors at the Sea of Reeds..., etc.) remain, as well as the various closing benedictions. Interwoven among these many supplicatory passages from Scripture occur two liturgical passages as a refrain, "God, the King who sits," (see Elbogen, 178, 216) or "God, the faithful King," (see Elbogen, 20) as well as the thirteen attributes of God's mercy listed in Exodus 34:6-7 (see Elbogen, 107). After each Scriptural passage, along with the refrain, would come the blowing of the shofar. After this long, elaborate interjection is finished, the Meiri claims the congregation would return to the eighth

blessing of the Amidah, and they perhaps would conclude with the recital of *Avinu Malkeinu* (see Elbogen, 127). The Torah scroll would then be read, highlighting the blessings and the curses as described in Deuteronomy. Finally, the community would also make a point of giving money to the poor.

Ta'anit Section 11 (17a-17b)

I. During the first three fasts, the members of the watch [who are not on duty in the Temple] fast, but do not complete [their fast], etc. [The members of the watch are permitted to drink wine during the nights [that they are at the Temple], but not during the days. But as for the members of the chief house -- not during the day or the night.]

A. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: Why did they say that the members of the watch are permitted to drink wine during the nights but not during the days?

1. Lest the workload become too heavy for the members of the chief house so that they [the members of the watch] may come and help them.

2. Why did they [forbid wine from] the members of the chief house during the day and the night?

3. Because they are engaged continually in service.

B. From this it is taught that any priest [living after the destruction of the Temple] who knows his time of watch<sup>363</sup> and [the day] his chief house would serve<sup>364</sup> and knows for certain that the members of this chief house had a set time [to serve] there [in the Temple] is forbidden from drinking wine all during that day [that he would have been on duty in the Temple had it been standing]. As for one who knows his time of watch but does not know [the day] his chief house would serve and knows for certain that the members of this chief house had a set time [to serve] there [in the Temple] is forbidden from drinking wine all during that week [lit., that "Shabbat"]. As for one who does not know his time of watch and does not know [the day] his chief house

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<sup>363</sup>That is, what week he would have been called to the Temple.

<sup>364</sup>That is, what day of the week he would have actually been serving.

would serve but knows for certain that the members of this chief house had a set time [to serve] there [in the Temple] is forbidden from drinking wine all year.

1. Rabbi says: I say that [priests] are forbidden always, but what can I do? His repair is his defect.<sup>365</sup>

2. Abaye said: According to whose opinion do priests drink wine today?  
According to Rabbi.

II. The members of the watch and the members of the station are forbidden to cut their hair or wash their clothing, but on Thursday they are permitted [to do so] for the honor of the Sabbath.

A. What is the reason? Rabbah Bar Bar Chana said in the name of R. Jochanan: In order that they do not come onto their shift of duty unkempt.

B. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: A king has his hair cut every day. A High Priest [has his hair cut] every eve of Shabbat. A regular priest [has his hair cut] once every thirty days.

1. "A king has his hair cut every day." What is the reason? R. Abba Bar Zabda said: Scripture said, (Isaiah 33:17) *When your eyes behold a king in his beauty*.

2. "A High Priest [has his hair cut] every eve of Shabbat." What is the reason? R. Samuel Bar Isaac said: Because the watch changes [each week, and all those serving in the Temple must come before the High Priest].

3. "A regular priest [has his hair cut] once every thirty days." From where do we learn this? It comes from the word, "hair" (Hebrew: *perah*). "Hair" is used in reference to a

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<sup>365</sup>Rashi explains that his repair (his ability to drink wine) is his defect (that we no longer expect the Temple to be built immediately).

nazirite, as it is written here [in reference to priests], (Ezekiel 44:20) *They shall neither shave their heads nor let their hair go untrimmed.* And it is written elsewhere [in reference to nazirites], (Numbers 6:5) *It shall remain consecrated [until the completion of his term as nazirite of the Lord,] the hair of his head being left to grow untrimmed.* Just as there [in reference to a nazirite's hair being cut every] thirty [days, as will be demonstrated], so also here [in reference to priests, that they should have their hair cut every] thirty [days].<sup>366</sup>

a. As for the nazirite himself, where do we learn [that he cuts his hair every thirty days]?

b. R. Mattena said: A regular period of being a nazirite is thirty days. From where do we learn this? Scripture said, (Numbers 6:5) *It shall remain* (Hebrew: *yihyeh*). In numerical values, the Hebrew letters [of that verb] equal thirty.<sup>367</sup>

c. R. Papa said to Abaye: But perhaps the Compassionate one said [that priests, as described by the verse, (Ezekiel 44:20) *They shall neither shave their heads nor let their hair go untrimmed,*] should not let their hair go untrimmed at all?

d. He [Abaye] said to him [R. Papa]: If it were written, "Nor let untrimmed go [any of] their hair," it would be as you say. Now it is written, *Nor let their hair go untrimmed.* There is hair [on their heads] that they may not let go untrimmed.

e. If that is so, even now [should this rule apply] as well.

f. It is similar to drinking wine. Just as the drinking of wine is forbidden at

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<sup>366</sup>The technique is a *gezera shava*. The same word for "hair" is used in two contexts, one in reference to priests, the other to nazirites. The laws of one are therefore to apply to the other.

<sup>367</sup>*Yihyeh*: *Yod* (10) + *heh* (5) + *yod* (10) + *heh* (5) = 30.

the time of entering [the Temple] and is permitted at a time where there is no entering [the Temple because it is destroyed], so too here [do the prohibitions against cutting hair apply only in a time when the Temple still stands].

g. But it is taught in a Baraita: Rabbi says: I say that [priests] are forbidden always, but what can I do? His repair is his defect. Abaye said: According to whose opinion do priests drink wine today? [17b] According to Rabbi. Consequently, our rabbis forbid [priests to drink wine and therefore also to cut their hair].<sup>368</sup> What is the reason? The Temple may be speedily rebuilt and therefore a priest should be fit for service but there may be none [if they drink wine or let their hair grow inappropriately].

h. In this case [of growing hair] it is possible to cut one's hair and then enter [the Temple ready for service, as opposed to drinking wine].

I. If so, also in the case of drinking wine it is possible to sleep a little and enter [the Temple ready for service], as Rami Bar Abba [taught], that Rami Bar Abba said: Traveling a mile and sleep for some time dissipates wine.

j. It [Rami Bar Abba's statement] was only taught in reference to one who drank only a quarter measure [of wine], but as for one who drank any amount more than a quarter measure, traveling debilitates him and sleep makes him more intoxicated.

4. R. Ashi said: The rabbis decreed against drinking wine because it profanes the Temple service. The rabbis did not decree against growing one's hair [though prohibited] because it does not profane the Temple service.

a. An objection was raised [from a Baraita]: These are those [priests]

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<sup>368</sup>Rashi explains that the sages would forbid such even when the Temple is not standing.



deserving of death: those who drink wine and who grow their hair.

b. It is understandable with regard to drinking wine, for it is explicitly written, (Leviticus 10:9) *Drink no wine or other intoxicant, [you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die]*. But as for growing hair, where do we learn [that they are deserving of death]? As it is written, (Ezekiel 44:20) *They shall neither shave their heads nor let their hair go untrimmed*. And it is written immediately thereafter, (Ezekiel 44:21) *No priest shall drink wine when he enters into the inner court*. So growing hair is compared to drinking wine. Just as drinking wine is deserving of death, so also growing hair is deserving of death. And consequently, if [such is true], just as drinking wine profanes the Temple service, so growing hair profanes the Temple service.

c. (They are only compared with regard to being deserving of death, but as for profaning the Temple service, they are not analogous.)

d. Rabina said to R. Ashi: Who taught it [this principle regarding hair] before Ezekiel came [in that all revelation originates at the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai]?

e. He [R. Ashi] said to him [Rabina]: According to your opinion, how [would you understand] what R. Chisda said: This matter we have not learned from the teaching of Moses, but rather we learn it from the words of the prophets, (Ezekiel 44:9) *Let no alien, uncircumcised in spirit and flesh, enter My Sanctuary*. Who taught it [the principle of not letting one who is uncircumcised enter the Temple] before Ezekiel came? Rather, it is a latent tradition [from Moses at Sinai],<sup>369</sup> and then Ezekiel came and supported it from Scripture. In this case

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<sup>369</sup> The phrase "a tradition from Moses at Sinai" indicates a tradition whose origin is lost but is not in dispute.

[regarding hair] also, it is a latent tradition, and Ezekiel came and supported it from Scripture.

(For they transmitted the law [that those who grew their hair] were deserving of death. As for profaning the Temple service, they did not transmit [any such tradition].)

### The Meiri

The next two *mishnayot* are grouped together by the Gemara but are treated separately by the Meiri. Both deal with the subject of the members of the watch, the members of the chief house, and the members of the station. As the Meiri explains, the members of the watch were a group of priests that worked in the Temple in Jerusalem during a certain week or two during the year. As found in I Chronicles 24, there were twenty-four such groups established during the monarchy of David and Solomon, and during their week-long shift, the group would divide into seven sub-divisions. A sub-division was a "chief house," and it would perform the Temple service for twenty-four hours until the next shift took over. While one chief house would be working, the other members of the watch would be standing by in case extra assistance was needed. The first mishnah thus asks how these priests were to conduct themselves during a series of fasts (Monday-Thursday-Monday).

The Meiri explains that the members of the watch, and even of the chief house who happened to be working that day, were not completely exempted from the obligation to fast, but neither were they bound as strictly as a normal Israelite. According to R. Joshua, the members of the watch would fast but not be obligated to complete their fast during the first cycle of fasts, while the members of the chief house did not need to fast at all. During the second cycle of fasts, the members of the watch would fast as a normal citizen, while the members of the chief house would fast but not be obligated to complete the fast in its entirety. For the seven final, most extreme fasts, both groups, regardless of the importance of their work, would fast. The sages, however, believed that the procedure operated with one degree of leniency. For the

first cycle of fasts, neither the members of the watch nor the chief house were required to fast. During the second cycle of fasts, the members of the watch would fast but not be obligated to complete their fast during the first cycle of fasts, while the members of the chief house did not need to fast at all. During the final seven fasts, the members of the watch would fast as a normal citizen, while the members of the chief house would fast but not be obligated to complete the fast. The Meiri says the law follows the sages and not R. Joshua.

Incidental to this topic, the next mishnah brings up the subject of the regular procedure of the members of the watch and of the chief house, as well as a third group, the members of the station, with regard to drinking wine and cutting hair. The third group, the members of the station, were a group of non-priests who would pray over and supervise the sacrifices from their region so that all of the offerings presented would be accepted in good will and to represent the people in the priestly venue. The Meiri, based on 26a, believes that one ought to be present when one's sacrifice is being offered, so these people serve as representatives for the community offering.

The mishnah declares that the members of the watch could drink wine at night but not during the day, when they could be called upon to offer assistance, and the members of the chief house could not drink wine at all during their entire twenty-four hour shift, because even at night there was work to do. While Maimonides appears to think that wine during the night might cause them to fall asleep during the day, the Meiri declares in the name of the Ravad that the real reason is a matter of night following day. That is, the priests were engaged at work even at night, offering up the limbs that were not eaten that day, so drinking during the day might cause them to fall asleep at night.

The members of the watch and the members of the station were also forbidden from cutting their hair during the week of their duty and from doing

laundry, although they may do so on Thursday in honor of the Sabbath. After explaining that a king should have his hair trimmed every day, and the High Priest every week, due to their honor, the Gemara then declares a priest should have his hair cut every thirty days. The Ravad raises a two questions against this procedure, however, asking 1) how disheveled could they really be, and 2) in that priests are required to cut their hair every thirty days, what happens if the thirtieth day occurs during their week-long shift? The answer is that they can simply have their hair cut the week before they come on duty, or they can wait until that Thursday.

The Gemara then raises some issues about the prohibitions about entering the Temple with long hair or intoxicated. Maimonides says that these prohibitions showed proper respect for the Temple, but the Ravad goes further and says that when one is not going to enter the Temple these prohibitions applied in some degree. The issue is then raised as to how do these laws apply today.

A Baraita is cited that declares that a priest who knows the day of his chief house, and therefore the week of his watch and that his clan indeed worked in the Temple, is forbidden from drinking wine on that day. A priest who does not know the day of his chief house, but does know the week of his watch and that his clan worked in the Temple is forbidden from drinking wine all that week. Thirdly, a priest who does not know the day of his chief house or the week of his watch but does know his clan did indeed work some time in the Temple is forbidden from drinking wine ever, lest the Temple be speedily rebuilt and the priests be needed to dedicate the house, start sacrifices, etc.. R. Judah Ha-Nasi finishes the Baraita, however, but saying that because today everything has become disrupted, priests are allowed to drink wine.

Maimonides reads this Baraita understanding it to mean that it refers to a time when the Temple is still standing. He thus does not see a need to either know or not know whether or not one's clan does work in the Temple.

Such knowledge is inconsequential, for if one knows one's chief house or one's watch, then one does indeed work in the Temple, and if one does not, then one cannot work anyone. The disruption, according to Maimonides, of which R. Judah complains is that a priest who does not know when he is to work is useless to the worship service and therefore can drink wine. One might additionally argue that, if one knows one's chief house, one should not drink at all that week because one might be called to assist on another day, but the Meiri claims that this is too long a chain of doubtful assumptions to rely upon.

In contrast to Maimonides, the Meiri understands the Baraita to refer to after the Temple was destroyed. This is the disruption of which R. Judah complains. Even though the Temple could be speedily rebuilt and the priests needed immediately, we no longer truly expect it to happen soon. Thus the priest's repair (that he can drink wine) is his defect (that the Temple is destroyed and is not expected to be rebuilt in the immediate future).

The Meiri concludes this section with an explanation that the drinking of wine and long hair profanes the Temple service, even though only drinking wine actually renders an offering invalid. The Meiri clarifies that this refers to drinking more than a *revi'it* of wine, which cannot be dissipated by a short walk or a nap.

Ta'anit Section 12 (17b-18b)

I. All [the days] about which it is written in the Scroll of Fasting that "there is no mourning," [on the day] before it is [also] forbidden, [on the day] after it is permitted.

A. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita [in the Scroll of Fasting]: These are the days during which one should not fast on them and during some of which one should not eulogize on them: From Rosh Chodesh Nisan until the eighth [of Nisan] the *tamid* offering was established, and one should not eulogize then.<sup>370</sup> From the eighth until the end of the Festival [of Passover], the Festival of Shavuot was settled, and one should not eulogize then.<sup>371</sup>

1. A Master said: From Rosh Chodesh Nisan until the eighth [of Nisan] the *tamid* offering was established, and one should not eulogize then. Why do I need, "from Rosh Chodesh"? [That is, including the first of the month appears superfluous as Rosh Chodesh is a biblical holiday and one would not eulogize on it in any case.] Let it say, from the second of Nisan, for Rosh Chodesh itself is a holiday and it is forbidden [to fast or eulogize].

a. Rab said: It is only needed to [indicate that] the day before [Rosh Chodesh] is forbidden."

b. But so also with regard to the day before [it should be assumed that there is no eulogizing or fasting], that it would apply to the day before Rosh Chodesh.

c. Rosh Chodesh is a biblical, and biblical ordinances do not need

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<sup>370</sup>Rashi explains that during this time, the Pharisees debated with the Sadducees about whether or not an individual can offer a *tamid* sacrifice (Numbers 28:3). The Pharisees felt that only the community would supply the sacrifice, and they won the debate. These eight days commemorate the resolution.

<sup>371</sup>Rashi explains that during this time, the Pharisees debated with the "*Baitusim*" over the date of Shavuot, and the Pharisees won the debate. These days commemorate the resolution.

strengthening [to insure they will be observed, so it is not an natural assumption that the extra measure of stringency of including the day before should apply]. As it is taught in a Baraita: These days written in the Scroll of Fasting, [the days] before and after them are forbidden [from fasting and eulogizing]. As for Sabbaths and Festivals, the prohibitions apply one the days before them but not on the days after them. And what is the difference between these two groups? The latter are words of Torah, and words of Torah do not need strengthening, and the former are words of the Sages, and the words of the Sages do need strengthening.

2. A Master said: From the eighth until the end of the Festival [of Passover], the Festival of Shavuot was settled, and one should not eulogize then. Why do I need, "until the end of the Festival"? [That is to say, it is forbidden to eulogize during the Festival of Passover in any case, so it appears superfluous to prohibit it here.] Let it say, "Until the Festival," for the Festival itself is a holiday, and it is forbidden [to eulogize or fast].

a. R. Papa said: It is as Rab said, "It is only needed [18a] to [indicate that] the day before [Rosh Chodesh] is forbidden." So here [in this case] as well, it is only needed to [indicate that] during the day afterwards it is forbidden [to eulogize or fast].

b. With whose opinion [is R. Papa's view harmonious]? With R. Jose who said: [Mourning on both the days] before it and after it is forbidden.<sup>372</sup>

c. If so [that both the days before and after a holiday are days in which eulogizing is prohibited], on the twenty-ninth [of Adar, preceding the first of Nisan] as well, why

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<sup>372</sup>That is, regarding the preceding passage, both the Tanna Kamma of the Mishnah and R. Jose agree that eulogizing is prohibited on the day preceding a holiday, but only R. Jose holds that eulogizing is prohibited on the day after a holiday. The Baraita is therefore in accord with R. Jose.

should it be specified [that eulogizing is prohibited], for it is the day before the day that the *tamid* offering was established?<sup>373</sup> Let it be result from [the fact that] it is the day after the twenty-eighth [of Adar, which is also a holiday], as it is taught in a Baraita: On the twenty-eighth [of Adar], good news came to the Jews that they would not be kept back from the Torah, for once a decree was decreed on Israel that they should not engage in Torah study, nor circumcise their sons, and they should profane the Sabbath. What did Judah Ben Shammua' and his colleagues do? They went and took counsel with a certain matron with whom all of the great Romans could be found. She told them, "Arise and cry out at night." They went and cried out at night [to God, in the presence of the Romans], saying, "O Heavens! Are we not brothers? Are we not children of the same father? Are we not children of the same mother? What is different about us from all of the nations and languages that You should decree cruel decrees on us?" And they [the Romans] nullified them, and that day [the twenty-eighth of Adar] became a holiday.

d. Abaye said: It is only needed for a full month [when Adar has thirty days, and not twenty-nine, thus having two days between the twenty-eighth and first of Nisan].

ë. R. Ashi said: Even if you should say a deficient month, [that is, of twenty-nine days,] during all [the days] that come after [holidays] fasting is prohibited, [but] eulogizing is permitted. But this, [the twenty-ninth of Adar] because it is located between two holidays, they [the sages] made it like a holiday itself, and even eulogizing is forbidden.

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<sup>373</sup>That is, as Rashi explains, in the passage before, it was taught that the Scroll of Fasting needed to include the first of Nisan so as to indicate the day before was also a day in which eulogizing was prohibited, namely, the twenty-ninth of Adar. Now that the Gemara appears to be following R. Jose, in that eulogizing is prohibited on both the preceding and the following days around a holiday, it does not appear necessary to include the first of Nisan in the Scroll of Fasting's list, for the twenty-eighth of Adar is also a holiday, as will be explained.



3. A Master said: From the eighth until the end of the Festival [of Passover], the Festival of Shavuot was settled, and one should not eulogize then.

a. Why do I need him to state, "From the eighth"? [That is, the first statement in the Baraita already included the eighth when it said, "From Rosh Chodesh Nisan until the eighth." The eighth appears to be indicated twice.] Let it say, "From the ninth," for on the eighth itself it is [already] forbidden [to eulogize] because it is a day in which the *tamid* offering was established.

b. Because if something [disastrous] were to happen [that would cause the rabbis to cancel this time as a holiday] and they [the rabbis] nullified the seven [days from the second of Nisan until the eighth as days commemorating the establishment of the *tamid* offering], on the eighth itself [it would still be] forbidden [to eulogize], for it was [also] a day when the Festival of Shavuot was settled.

4. Now that you have come to such [reasoning, there is a simpler answer to the previous discussion supporting R. Papa's view], on the twenty-ninth also [one could argue such], because if something [disastrous] were to happen [that would cause the rabbis to cancel this time as a holiday] and they [the rabbis] nullified the twenty-eighth [as a holiday], on the twenty-ninth itself [it would still be] forbidden [to eulogize], for it is a day before a day in which the *tamid* offering was established.

B. It was taught: R. Chiyya Bar Asi said in the name of Rab: The Halacha follows R. Jose. But Samuel said: The Halacha follows R. Meir [who is assumed to be the Tanna Kamma<sup>374</sup>].

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<sup>374</sup>As explained by Rashi.

1. Did Samuel really say so? For it is taught in a Baraita: R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel said: Why does the text [of the Baraita] use the phrase "on them" twice?<sup>375</sup> To teach you that on them [and only on them, eulogizing] is forbidden; on the days before and after, [eulogizing] is permitted. And Samuel said: The Halacha follows R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel.<sup>376</sup>

2. At first he [Samuel] thought there was no one more lenient than R. Meir, [thus] he said, "The Halacha follows R. Meir." When he heard [the teaching] of R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel who was more lenient, he [retracted his earlier ruling and] said: The Halacha follows R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel.<sup>377</sup>

C. And so did Bali say in the name of R. Chiyya Bar Abba in the name of R. Jochanan: The Halacha follows R. Jose.

1. R. Chiyya said to him [Bali]: I will explain to you what R. Jochanan said, "The Halacha follows R. Jose." [The Halacha follows R. Jose only with regard to] not to fast on them.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>375</sup>The Baraita from 17b reads: These are the days during which one should not fast on them and during some of which one should not eulogize on them.

<sup>376</sup>R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel's opinion is in direct conflict with the Tanna Kamma's.

<sup>377</sup>Rashi indicates that Samuel wanted to be lenient with rabbinic rulings as opposed to Toraitic law.

<sup>378</sup>The Mishnah reads: All [the days] about which it is written in the Scroll of Fasting that "there is no mourning," [on the day] before it is [also] forbidden, [on the day] after it is permitted. R. Jose says: [Mourning on both the days] before it and after it is forbidden. [All the days about which it is written in the Scroll of Fasting] that "there is no fasting on it," [fasting on both the days] before it and after it is permitted. R. Jose says: [Fasting on the day] before it is forbidden, [on the day] after it is permitted. R. Jochanan only meant the Halacha follows R. Jose with regard to the second half of the Mishnah (underlined).

2. Did R. Jochanan really say so? Did not R. Jochanan say that the Halacha [always] follows the anonymous opinion of a mishnah [which does not have a dissenting view],<sup>379</sup> and it was taught in [just such] a mishnah:<sup>380</sup> Even though they [the sages] said [the Scroll of Esther] could be read earlier but not later, [18b] they are permitted to eulogize and to fast.<sup>381</sup> When [does this apply]?

a. Does it refer to those [who should read] on the fifteenth and read on the fourteenth? But who would permit such, for it is written in the Scroll of Fasting, "The fourteenth and fifteenth [of Adar] are the days of Purim. We do not eulogize on them." And Raba said: It [the preceding statement] is needed to forbid this one [who should read on the fifteenth] from that one [from reading on the fourteenth] and that one [who should read on the fourteenth] from this one [from reading on the fifteenth].

b. Does it refer to those [who should read] on the fourteenth and read on the thirteenth? That is Nicanor's Day [a minor holiday itself].

c. Does it refer to those [who should read] on the fourteenth and read on the twelfth? That is Třajan's Day [a minor holiday itself, as well].

d. Rather, does it not refer to [those who should read on the fourteenth

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<sup>379</sup>Traditionally attributed to R. Meir.

<sup>380</sup>Megillah 5a, 1:3. It is stated that the normal time of reading the Scroll of Esther is the fifteenth of Adar for walled cities from the time of Joshua and the fourteenth for all other cities and villages.

<sup>381</sup>As Rashi explains, the reading of the Scroll of Esther that would normally be read on the fourteenth of Adar can be read on the eleventh, twelfth, or thirteenth of Adar (on a Monday or a Thursday). While eulogizing and fasting are not permitted on Purim itself (the fourteenth), it appears that eulogizing and fasting are permitted on one of these earlier days, even if the Scroll is read early on that date.

but] read on the eleventh? Thus, it is taught in an [anonymous] mishnah [without dissent, which is the Halacha] that it is permitted to eulogize and fast [on a day before a minor holiday, as opposed to R. Jose's view].

3. No. [It refers to] those [who should read] on the fourteenth but read on the thirteenth, that even though you said it is Trajan's Day, Trajan's Day itself was canceled because Shemaiah and his brother Ahijah were killed on it.<sup>382</sup> So did R. Nachman decree a fast on the thirteenth [of Adar]. They [the sages] said to him, "It is Trajan's Day!" He answered them, "Trajan's Day itself was canceled because Shemaiah and his brother Ahijah were killed on it."

a. Then derive it from the fact that it is the day before Nicanor's Day.<sup>383</sup>

b.<sup>v</sup> R. Ashi said: Now that they have canceled the day [Trajan's Day, because of a tragedy] itself, should we decree [fasting is not permissible just] because it is the day before Nicanor's Day?<sup>384</sup>

4. What is Nicanor's Day? And what is Trajan's Day?

a. It was taught in a Baraita of a certain Nicanor who was one of the Greek generals who each and every day would shake his fist at Judah and Jerusalem and say, "When will it fall into my power that I may trample it?" And when the kingdom of the Hasmoneans came into power and triumphed, they cut off his thumbs and big toes and hung them

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<sup>382</sup>Rashi indicates that these were pious men whose story is lost to us.

<sup>383</sup>The thirteenth is still the day before a minor holiday.

<sup>384</sup>The solemnity of the day outweighs the fact that it is the day before a minor holiday, and thus fasting is permitted. Thus, R. Jochanan can hold with R. Jose who forbids fasting on a day before even a minor holiday, but in this particular instance, the Mishnah applies because a day of tragedy immediately precedes a minor holiday and serves as an exception.

from the gates of Jerusalem,. And they said, "The mouth which spoke in arrogantly and the hands which shook against Jerusalem, take retribution upon them!"

b. What is Trajan's Day? They said that when Trajan demanded to execute Lulianus and his brother Pappus in Lydia,<sup>385</sup> he said to them, "If you are of the people of Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, let your God come and rescue you from my power as He rescued Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah from the power of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>386</sup> They answered him, "Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were completely righteous men and were worthy of having a miracle performed on their behalf, and Nebuchadnezzar was worthy to be king and fit to have a miracle performed through him, but this one [Trajan] is a wicked commoner and is not fit to have a miracle performed through him. And we are liable for death before God. If you do not execute us, God has many executioners, and God has many bears and lions in His world that may attack us and kill us. But the Holy One Blessed Be He has handed us over into your power only so that in the future God can punish you for our blood." Despite this [warning], he [Trajan] killed them immediately. It is said that they had not so much as moved from there when two officials came from Rome and split open his head with clubs [in a political dispute].

II. They do not decree a [series of] fasts beginning with Thursday, etc. They do not decree a fast on the community on the first of the month, [during Chanukka, and on Purim, but if they began [to fast] they do not cease. These are the words of R. Gamaliel.

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<sup>385</sup>Rashi explains from Bava Batra 10b that a special place is reserved in the Garden of Eden for these two righteous men, for some say that when the daughter of King Hadrian was found killed, they blamed the Jews. They came to kill the Jews of Lydia, so Lulianus and Pappus arose and claimed that they killed her. The king then executed them alone.

<sup>386</sup>Daniel 3:19-27.

R. Meir said: Even though R. Gamaliel said they do not cease, he acknowledges that they do not complete [their fast],] etc..

A. How many [fasts] constitutes a "beginning," [that if they "began" to fast they do not cease?

1. R. Acha said: Three [fasts].

2. R. Asi said: One.

B. R. Judah said in the name of Rab: This [opinion that one should not complete the fast if one has begun it] comes from the words of R. Meir who said so in the name of R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel, but the sages say they fast and complete [their fast until dusk]. Mar Zutra expounded in the name of R. Huna: The Halacha is that they fast and complete [their fast until dusk].

#### The Meiri

The Scroll of Fasting, the Meiri explains, is a list of days in which it is forbidden to either fast or eulogize because of an event that happened on that particular day. The Mishnah expands upon these requirements by declaring that any day upon which eulogizing is forbidden, the day before is likewise forbidden but the day after is permitted. The days upon which it is forbidden to fast do not include the days before or after. R. Jose, however, is a degree stricter than the sages, and he holds that, with regard to days upon which it is forbidden to eulogize, both the days before and after are likewise forbidden, and as for day upon which it is forbidden to fast, the day before is also forbidden but the day after is permitted. The Meiri holds with R. Jose. The Meiri goes on to immediately qualify that these added strictures apply only to rabbinically ordained holidays, and not to biblical days, such as Rosh Chodesh, for rabbinical holidays need bolstering in order to be taken seriously, but biblically ordained holidays do not need such bolstering. Today, as will be explained, only Chanukkah and Purim remain in force of these

rabbinical holidays, and Purim is observed either on the fourteenth or the fifteenth of Nisan, depending upon where it is celebrated.

Of the holidays that are listed in the Scroll of Fasting in addition to Purim and Chanukkah, the Gemara makes special mention of the following: from the first of Nisan until the eighth of Nisan (celebrating the settling of a legal dispute over the *tamid* offering), from the eighth until the end of Passover (celebrating the settling of a legal dispute over Shavuot), the twenty-eighth of Adar (celebrating the lifting of a decree of religious persecution under Rome), the thirteenth of Adar (Nicanor's Day, celebrating the execution of a wicked Greek general named Nicanor), and the twelfth of Adar (Trajan's Day, celebrating Trajan's miraculous failure to execute some righteous men of Israel).

None of these holidays still exist, however, in that the Scroll of Fasting was nullified by the rabbis, as is explained in Rosh Hashanah 19b. When the Scroll was still in force, it was forbidden to declare a community-wide fast on these days because of their celebratory nature. An individual today, as the Ravad explains, can hold a private fast even on a day when the community is still prohibited from doing so. An interesting event that called these strictures into question was the cancellation of Trajan's Day because this day coincided with the death of some righteous men in Israel. Even if one were to cite that the Scroll of Fasting was no longer in force, the cancellation of the holiday itself removed the prohibitions against fasting.

The Ravad, however, believes that, during the time the Scroll was in force, one could not decree a fast on the day of the holiday but one was permitted to fast on the days before and after, in consonance with the sages. The majority of legal authorities, however, hold with R. Jose, as does the Meiri. Nevertheless, private fasts are not bound by this rule, and the thirteenth of Adar, the Fast of Esther, is an exception to R. Jose's rule.

The Fast of Ester takes place before Purim, so from all opinions it should not be permitted to fast. The Meiri, however, cites several explanations as to why this exception is allowed, including that the Fast of Esther is a celebratory fast and should be allowed in that spirit and that it is linked to the establishment of Purim and should thus be allowed, etc..

The Meiri then turns to the mishnah that concludes this chapter which explains that no series of fasts begins on a Thursday because it may potentially disrupt the market before the Sabbath, and R. Jose clarifies that this includes any cycle of fasts (first, second, or third). Likewise, the Mishnah reiterates that fasts cannot be declared on Chanukkah, Purim, or Rosh Chodesh. The Mishnah adds, however, that if one has begun to fast, R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel holds that one need not interrupt one's fast. R. Meir qualifies R. Gamaliel's statement by saying that he meant that one need not interrupt, but one also need not complete one's fast. The person who has begun fasting on one of these days upon which he or she is really not supposed to fast thus can fast for a certain time but should eat before sundown. The Halacha, however, as the Gemara explains, is that they should in fact complete their fast, even on the day before the Sabbath.

The Meiri goes on to say that even if a fast in a series is canceled because it coincides with one of the aforementioned holidays, the following fasts are still in force. Therefore, if a fast coincided with a holiday which was on a Thursday, the person would still fast on the following Monday.

The Meiri concludes this section by explaining that one can in fact fast on the day before the Sabbath if one has begun to do so. There is the opinion that this rule only applies to fasts that commemorate a tragedy, such as Tisha B'Ab, but as for the Fast of Esther, it is held instead on Thursday. The obligation to conclude one's fast holds true in spite of the fact that a passage in Eruvin 40a-40b seems to hold with R. Meir as well as a passage in the Palestinian Talmud (Ta'anit 2:14) that allows a person to eat a certain



volume of food before the Sabbath begins so as not to enter it in pain. There is even an objection raised that an oath to fast on Friday is a vain oath because the laws applying to the Sabbath or to any Festival begin during the eve of the holiday. Nevertheless, fasting is considered a different matter altogether, and the Halacha follows R. Zeira, in the Palestinian Talmud, who declares that one needs to complete one's private fast even on the eve of a Sabbath. The Ravad qualifies, however, that one breaks one's fast with the onset of the Sabbath, at the setting of the sun and one need not wait for darkness. The Meiri likewise cites other instances of practices that occur if one fasts on Friday, such as adding supplications in the afternoon instead of in the morning, but he has never seen such behavior himself.

## END OF CHAPTER TWO



### Chapter III

#### The Meiri

The Meiri introduces the chapter by explaining that the over-all theme of the Mishnah and Gemara is to name and explicate other types of calamities besides rain that call for fasting and emergency prayer. Within this major theme, there are four topics that the chapter takes up:

1. The calamities, some of which involve a lack of rain but are nonetheless classied separately from drought, require a similar protocol of prayer and fasting, but these require immediate responses from the community and not gradual community-wide involvement.
2. Which type of calamity requires community-wide fasting and which kind does not.
3. Which type of calamity do we "call out" or "sound the alarm" -- either with the shofar or in prayer -- whether it be on any day, including the Sabbath, not at all, or just on weekdays and not on the Sabbath.
4. For those who are answered in the course of their fasting, under what circumstances do they complete their fast and under what circumstances do they cease.

I. (Our Mishnah:)

A. The procedure of these [aforementioned] fasts [applies to] the first rainfall,<sup>387</sup> but crops that have changed [abnormally for the worse], we sound the alarm over them immediately. And so if rain ceased for a period of forty days between [expected] rains, we sound the alarm over them because it is an affliction of drought.

B. [If rain] fell for crops but did not fall for trees, for trees but not for crops, for both of them but not for cisterns, ditches, or caves,<sup>388</sup> we sound the alarm over them immediately.

C. And so with a city upon which rain has not fallen, as it is written, (Amos 4:7) / *would make it rain on one town and not another; one field would be rained upon [while another on which it did not rain would wither]*. [19a] That city fasts and sounds the alarm, and all those around it fast but do not sound the alarm. R. Akiba says: They sound the alarm but do not fast.

D. And so a city that has plague or collapsed buildings,<sup>389</sup> that city fasts and sounds the alarm and all those that surround it fast but do not sound the alarm. R. Akiba says: They sound the alarm but do not fast. What [counts as] plague? A city in

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<sup>387</sup>Rashi explains that the aforementioned fasts are all of the previously discussed fasts in the Mishnah, that is, the fasts undertaken by individuals as well as the thirteen fasts by the community.

<sup>388</sup>Rashi explains that such rain is used for drinking water. The Meiri apparently has another clause here in his version of the Mishnah, "for cisterns, ditches, or caves but not for any of the previous."

<sup>389</sup>Rashi suggests that buildings collapse due to wind storms.

which can be found five hundred foot soldiers, and out of them three die in three consecutive days, this is a plague. Less than this is not plague.

E. On these we sound the alarm in every place: wind-blasting, withering, *arbeh*-locusts, *chasil*-locusts, wild beasts, and a war-party we sound the alarm because it is an affliction which travels.

F. A precedent: The elders came down from Jerusalem to their cities and decreed a fast because it was seen in Ashkelon [grain enough] to fill the mouth of an oven [affected by] wind-blasting. And furthermore, they decreed a fast when two wolves ate two children across the Jordan. R. Jose says: Not that they ate them, rather [only that two wolves] were seen.

G. Concerning these do they sound the alarm [even] on Shabbat: A city that is surrounded by foreigners or a river, and a ship that is tossed about at sea. R. Jose says: For help, but not for crying out. Simeon the Temanite says: Also concerning the plague, but the sages did not agree with him.

H. On every calamity that should not come upon the community they sound the alarm except for too much rain. A precedent: They [the sages] said to Choni the Circle-Drawer, "Pray for it to rain." He said to them, "Go and bring in the [clay] ovens for Passover so that they will not dissolve [in the rain that will come]." He prayed, but rain did not come. What did he do? He drew a circle, stood within it, and said before God, "Master of the Universe, Your children have looked to me as if I were a member of Your household. I hereby swear by Your great name that I will not move from here until You show compassion for Your children." It began to drizzle. He said, "Not for such

did I ask, but for rains [that will fill] cisterns, ditches, and caves [for drinking water]." It began to rain violently. He said, "Not for such did I ask, but for rains of favor, blessing, and good-will." It rained as it should, [but continued] until Israelites came out from Jerusalem up to the Temple Mount because of the rain. They came and said to him [Choni], "Just as you prayed for them to fall, so pray that they should cease." He answered them, "Go and see if the Stone of Claimants<sup>390</sup> is obliterated." Simeon Ben Shetach sent for him [Choni, and said,] "If you were not Choni, I would decree a ban against you. But what can I do to you? For you act outrageously before God, but [God] does your will like a son who acts outrageously before his father, but he does his will. Concerning you Scripture says, (Proverbs 23:25) *Your father and mother will rejoice; she who bore you will exult.*

I. If they were fasting and rain came down for them before sunrise, they do not complete [their fast]. After sunrise, they complete [their fast]. R. Eliezer says: Before noon, they do not complete [their fast]. After noon, they complete [their fast]. A precedent: They decreed a fast in Lydia and rain fell before noon. R. Tarfon said to them: Go, eat and drink, and make a festival! They went and ate, drank, and made a festival. When it became twilight, they recited the Great Hallel.<sup>391</sup>

II. **Gemara:** The procedure of these aforementioned fasts [applies to] the first rainfall.

A. A contradiction was raised [with the following Baraita]: [If rain is delayed during the

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<sup>390</sup>Rashi explains that this is a stone in Jerusalem in which lost objects could be claimed as is explained in Bava Metzia 28b.

<sup>391</sup>Psalm 136.

time of] the first rainfall and the second rainfall, they pray; the third, they fast.<sup>392</sup>

1. R. Judah said: This is what is meant [in the Mishnah], the procedure of these aforementioned fasts, as from when [does it apply]? When the time of the first, second, and third rainfalls has passed and rain has not fallen,<sup>393</sup> but if rains fell during the first rainfall, and they planted and the crops did not sprout, or also if they sprouted but then became abnormal and changed, they sound the alarm over them immediately.

2. R. Nachman said: Specifically when they have changed, but if they have dried up, no.

a. This [teaching of R. Nachman's] is too obvious! "If [the crops] have changed" is what is in the Mishnah.

b. No, [R. Nachman's teaching] is needed [in a case in which] there are stalks. You might have [mistakenly] said that the growth of stalks was significant, thus he teaches us [that the growth of stalks is irrelevant to the quality of the crops].<sup>394</sup>

B. And so if rain ceased for a period of forty days between rains, etc.

1. What is an affliction of drought?

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<sup>392</sup>That is to say, it appears from this statement that one prays with regard to the first rainfall and fasts with regard to the third. How could it be, then, that the Mishnah states that all of the aforementioned fasts apply to the first rainfall? The Gemara will go on to specify what is meant by "first rainfall."

<sup>393</sup>Rashi explains that the first rainfall is divided into three parts, and taken together, they constitute what the mishnah calls the first rainfall, and not, as might be thought, just the first part of the first rainfall. See 6a.

<sup>394</sup>Rashi explains that, after the crops have already changed for the worse, one sees that their stalks still grow. One might think that one should merely continue to pray for their recovery, so R. Nachman teaches it is not so.

2. R. Judah said in the name of Rab: An affliction which may lead to drought.

3. R. Nachman said: River to river [19b] is a drought.<sup>395</sup> Province to province is a famine.

4. R. Chanina said: If a *se'ah* [of grain sells for] a *sela'* [of money] and is available, it is a drought. For four [*se'ahs* for one *sela'*] but food is not available, it is a famine.

5. R. Jochanan said: They only taught this with respect to a time when money was cheap and produce expensive, but when money was expensive and produce cheap, they sounded the alarm immediately. For R. Jochanan said: I remember well when four *se'ahs* cost one *sela'*, but there were people in Tiberias bloated from famine because there were no coins.

III. [If rain] fell for crops but did not fall for trees, [for trees but not for crops, for both of them but not for cisterns, ditches, and caves, we sound the alarm over them immediately].

A. It is understandable [that there is a case of rain] falling for crops but not for trees, for so you find when rain falls gently and does not fall strongly. [It is also understandable that there is a case of rain] falling for trees and not for crops, for so you find when rain falls strongly and does not fall gently. [It is also understandable that there is a case of rain] falling for both of these [crops and trees] but not for cisterns, ditches, and caves, for so you find when rain falls both strongly and gently, but a good deal [of rain] did not come. But how can it be taught in a Baraita that rain falls for cisterns, ditches, and caves but not for these [crops and trees]?

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<sup>395</sup>Rashi clarifies that when food needs to be transported from place to place via rivers, such constitutes a drought.

B. When the rain comes down in torrents.<sup>396</sup>

C. It was taught in a Baraita: They sound the alarm for trees close to Passover. For cisterns, ditches, and caves [they sound the alarm] even close to Sukkot.<sup>397</sup> And concerning all of them, if there is a lack of drinking water, they sound the alarm immediately.

1. And what is meant by "immediately"?

2. [Starting with the following] Monday, Thursday, and Monday.

3. And with regards to all of them, [these possible calamities,] we only sound the alarm in the affected area, and as for *askara*, [a contagious, deadly disease, we sound the alarm] at a time when there is a death.<sup>398</sup> When no one has died from it, we do not sound the alarm. And we sound the alarm concerning locusts no matter what [regardless of how many there are].<sup>399</sup>

R. Simeon Ben Eleazar says: Also with regard to grasshoppers.

D. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: They sound the alarm concerning trees during the working years of the seven year Sabbatical cycle,<sup>400</sup> and [they sound the alarm] concerning cisterns, ditches, and caves even on the seventh year.<sup>401</sup> R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel says: Also

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<sup>396</sup>Rashi explains that the rain comes down too strongly for it to benefit either crops or trees.

<sup>397</sup>Rashi adds that they sound the alarm for cisterns, ditches, and caves even during the days of Passover.

<sup>398</sup>The Meiri will relate this note on *askara* to other, similar diseases.

<sup>399</sup>Rashi explains that locusts and such devour crops, and even if one sees only a few of them, more will certainly come in the future.

<sup>400</sup>Literally, "on the remainder of the seven."

<sup>401</sup>Rashi explains that drinking water is needed despite the Sabbatical cycle, and the benefit to the ground by such rain is incidental.



concerning trees on the seventh year because they are sustenance for the poor.

E. It was taught elsewhere in a [similar] Baraita: They sound the alarm concerning trees during the working years of the seven year Sabbatical cycle, and [they sound the alarm] concerning cisterns, ditches, and caves even on the seventh year. R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel says: Also concerning trees and wild growth they sound the alarm on the seventh year because they are sustenance for the poor.

F. It was taught in Baraita: R. Eleazar Ben Perata said: Since the day of the destruction of the Temple, rain only comes with difficulty forevermore.<sup>402</sup> There are years that rain is abundant and there are years where rain is diminished. There are years when rain comes in its season and there are years when rain does not come in its season.

1. A year in which rain comes in its season, what is it like? Like a servant to whom his master pays him on the first day of the week. Consequently, the dough is baked [in time for the Sabbath] as it should be and eaten as it should be.

2. A year in which rain does not come in its season, what is it like? Like a servant to whom his master pays on the day before the Sabbath. Consequently, the dough is not baked as it should be and not eaten as it should be.

3. A year in which rain is abundant, what is it like? Like a servant to whom his master pays him all at once. The millstones' grinding [wastes] the same amount from a *kor* as they do from a *kav*, and as result, the [kneading of] the dough consumes as much as from a *kor* as

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<sup>402</sup>Rashi explains the word, "with difficulty" or "shriveled," *tzimukin*, is like that of Hosea 9:14, *Give them a womb that miscarries and shriveled breasts.*

from a *kav*.<sup>403</sup>

4. A year in which rain is diminished, what is it like? Like a servant to whom his master pays him bit by bit. The millstones' grinding [wastes] as much as a *kor* from [the accumulation of waste from each and every] *kav*, and as a result, the [kneading of] the dough consumes as much as a *kor* from [the accumulation of waste from each and every] *kav*.

5. Another interpretation: A year in which rain is abundant, what is it like? Like a person who kneads clay. If he has abundant water, the water is not used up the clay is kneaded well. If he has diminished water, the water is used up and the clay is not kneaded well.

G. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: Once it happened that all of Israel went up for a pilgrimage festival to Jerusalem, [Passover, Shavuot, or Sukkot,] and there was no drinking water. Nakdimon Ben Gurion went to the place of a certain lord. He said to him, "Lend me twelve wells full of water for the pilgrims, and I will give you [back] twelve wells full of water."<sup>404</sup> And if I do not give you [back your wells full of water], I will pay you twelve talents of silver [which is an enormous sum of money]." And he set a time [for the wells to revert back to their former owner]. When the time came, rain had not fallen [and the wells were empty]. In the morning, [the lord] sent him [Nakdimon, the following message], "Give me either the water or the money that I [now] own that is in your possession." He [Nakdimon] sent a message to him, "I

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<sup>403</sup>Rashi explains that flour sticks to the millstones, so there is some waste in grinding flour. If it is grinded all at once, however, the waste is considerably less than if one grinded, cleaned off the millstone, and grinded again. A *kor* is a hundred times larger than a *kav*. The case is similar to rainfall. If the rain comes as it should, there is a minimum of wasted water. If it comes bit by bit, there is more waste.

<sup>404</sup>As Rashi explains, he was counting on rain to come in the mean time and refill the wells so that the lord would not suffer any loss.

still have time. All day is mine." [That is, the payment was due at the end of the day.] At noon, the lord sent him the message, "Give me either the water or the money that you owe me." He sent him back the message, "I still have time, for it is still day." In the afternoon, he sent him the message, "Give me either the water or the money that you owe me." He sent him back the message, "I still have time, for it is still day!" The lord mocked him and said to him, "All year long it has not rained, [20a] and now it will rain?" He went into the bathhouse [to add to the mockery] in joy. While the lord was in the bathhouse in joy, Nakdimon entered the Temple in sorrow. He wrapped himself [in his cloak] and stood in prayer. He said, "Master of the Universe, it is well known to You that I did not act for my own honor nor for the honor of my father's house, but I acted for Your honor so that there would be water available for the pilgrims." Immediately, the heavens darkened with clouds and rain came down until the twelve wells were filled and overflowing. When the lord came out of the bathhouse, Nakdimon Ben Gurion came out of the Temple, and the two met each other. [Nakdimon] said to him, "Give me the money for the extra water that I have in your possession!" He [the lord] answered him, "I know that the Holy One Blessed Be He upset the world only for your sake, but still I have a claim against you so that I can get my money from you. For the sun had already set, and the rains fell into my property." [Nakdimon] returned and entered the Temple. He wrapped himself [in his cloak] and stood in prayer. He said, "Master of the Universe, make it known that You have loved ones in Your world." Immediately, the clouds scattered and the sun shone. Then the lord said to him, "If the sun had not pierced through, I would have a claim against you so that I could get my money from you."

1. It was taught in a Baraita: His name was not [really] Nakdimon but rather Boni,

and why did they call him Nakdimon? Because the sun pierced [Hebrew: *nikdirah*] through.

2. For three people did the sun stay eastward in its path [Hebrew: *nikdimah*, also related to the name, Nakdimon]: Moses, Joshua, and Nakdimon Ben Gurion. Nakdimon Ben Gurion is understandable from [the above cited] tradition. Joshua also [is understandable], that it is written, (Joshua 10:13) *And the sun stood still, and the moon halted*, etc. But as for Moses, how do we know this?

a. R. Eleazar said: It comes from the use of the word, "I begin" [Hebrew: *achel*]. It is written in here [in connection with Moses], (Deut. 2:25) *This day I begin to put the fear [and dread of you upon the peoples everywhere under heaven]*. And it is written there, [in reference to Joshua, on whose behalf the sun stood still,] (Joshua 3:7) *This day, for the first time, I begin to exalt you.*<sup>405</sup>

b. R. Samuel Bar Nachmani said: It comes from the use of the word, "put" [Hebrew: *tet*]. It is written here [in connection with Moses], (Deut. 2:25) *This day I begin to put the fear [and dread of you upon the peoples everywhere under heaven]*. And it is written there, [in reference to Joshua, on whose behalf the sun stood still,] (Joshua 10:12-13) *On the day the Lord put the Amorites [into the power of the Israelites... Joshua addressed the Lord..., Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon]*.

c. R. Jochanan said: It comes from the verse itself, for it is written, (Deut. 2:25) *[This day I begin to put the fear and dread of you upon the peoples everywhere under heaven] so that they shall tremble and quake because of you whenever they hear you*

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<sup>405</sup> A *gezera shava*. As Rashi explains, the connection of the two phrases used for both Moses and Joshua implies that what happened for Joshua in the war that he fought also happened for Moses in a war that he led.

mentioned.<sup>406</sup> When did they tremble and quake? At the moment that the sun stayed east for Moses.

IV. And so with a city upon which rain has not fallen, [as it is written, (Amos 4:7) / *would make it rain on one town and not another; one field would be rained upon while another on which it did not rain would wither*], etc.

A. R. Judah said in the name of Rab: Both of them [the cities, the one upon which rain fell and the one upon which rain did not fall in Amos 4:7], are cursed.<sup>407</sup>

B. (Lamentations 1:17) *Jerusalem has become an unclean menstruous woman among them*. R. Judah said in the name of Rab: [The verse, which appears negative, also implies] a blessing. Just as an unclean, menstruous woman becomes permissible [to touch by her husband after her period is over], so too Jerusalem will be restored.

C. (Lamentations 1:1) [*She that was great among the nations*] *is become like a widow*. R. Judah said in the name of Rab: [The verse, which appears negative, also implies] a blessing. Like a widow, but not actually a widow. Rather, she is like a wife whose husband has gone to a land beyond the sea, and it is his intention to return to her.

D. (Malachi 2:9) *And I, in turn, have made you despicable and vile*. R. Judah said: [The verse, which appears negative, also implies] a blessing. For [because we are despised,] they [the ruling powers] do not appoint us to be customs officers at rivers or police officers.

E. (I Kings 14:15) *The Lord will strike Israel until it sways like a reed in water*. [This

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<sup>406</sup>Rather than resort to the technique of *gezera shava*, the verse itself, which mentions the whole span of heaven, implies that the sun stood still. See Rashi on Deut. 2:25.

<sup>407</sup>Rashi explains that both the city that is not rained upon is cursed with drought and the city that is rained upon is rained upon too forcefully, destroying crops.

verse is spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite against Israel.] R. Judah said in the name of Rab: [The verse, which appears negative, also implies] a blessing. For R. Samuel Bar Nachmani said in the name of R. Jochanan: What is meant by what is written, (Proverbs 27:6) *Wounds by a loved one are faithful, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful*? Better is the curse which Ahijah the Shilonite pronounced against Israel [which was his own kingdom,] than the blessing with which Balaam the Wicked blessed Israel.<sup>408</sup> Ahijah the Shilonite cursed them by [comparison to] a reed. He said to Israel, *The Lord will strike Israel until it sways like a reed in water*. A reed stands in a watery place, has stalks that grow back, has many roots, and does not move from its place even if all the winds of the world come and blow upon it, for it bends back and forth with the wind and when the winds die down, it resumes its place. But Balaam the Wicked blessed them by [comparison to] a cedar tree, as it is said, (Numbers 24:6) *Like cedars [beside the water]*.<sup>409</sup> A cedar does not stand in the water [but only beside it], its trunk does not grow back, it does not have many roots, and though all of the winds may blow upon it and it may not move from its place, a south wind<sup>410</sup> may blow upon it and uproot it and overturn it onto its face.

1. Not only that, but the reed merited [be chosen] for pens to be taken from it to write scrolls of Torah, Prophets, and Writings.

2. Our sages [further] taught in a Baraita: Let a person be yielding like a reed and not hard like a cedar. A precedent: R. Eleazar Ben R. Simeon was coming from Midgal Gedor,

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<sup>408</sup>See Numbers 24.

<sup>409</sup>Rashi explains that the phrase in parentheses, "beside the water," was not spoken by Balaam at all, but rather by an angel, adding to Balaam's words, thus making the following parable more consistent.

<sup>410</sup>Rashi comments that a south wind was very strong, as is mentioned in Bava Batra 25b.

from the house of his master, riding on a donkey, traveling by a river, was very happy, and he became arrogant that he studied a lot of Torah. [20b] He happened upon a certain man<sup>411</sup> who was extremely ugly. He [the ugly man] greeted him, "Peace to you, Master!" But he did not return [his greeting]. He said to him, "A good for nothing! How ugly this man is! Perhaps all of the people in your city are as ugly as you!" He [the man] said to him [R. Eleazar], "I do not know. Go and tell the Craftsman who made me and say, 'How ugly is this vessel that You have made.'" Then, he [R. Eleazar] realized he had sinned. He came down from off of his donkey, prostrated himself before him, and said to him, "I am mortified. Forgive me." He said to him, "I will not forgive you until you go to the Craftsman who made me and say, 'How ugly is this vessel that You have made.'" He [R. Eleazar] traveled behind him until he arrived at his city. The people of the city came out and greeted him [R. Eleazar], saying, "Peace to you, Master! Master! Teacher! Teacher!" He [the man] said to them, "Who are you calling, Master, Master?" They answered him, "This one who is traveling behind you." He said to them, "If this is a Master, let there not be many more like him in Israel." They asked him, "Why do you say so?" He told them, "Such-and-such did he do to me [explaining the whole incident]." They said to him, "Nevertheless, forgive him, for he is a great man in Torah." He said, "For your sakes, I forgive him, so long as he is not accustomed to behaving so." Immediately, R. Eleazar Ben R. Simeon entered [the synagogue] and expounded, "A person should always be yielding like a reed and not hard like a cedar, and therefore the reed merited for pens to be taken from it in order to write scrolls of Torah, *tefillin*, and *mezuzot*."

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<sup>411</sup>Rashi adds that some believe this man to be Elijah the Prophet, who came to reprove R. Eleazar who was not usually prone to arrogance.

### The Meiri

The first section of the mishnah of this chapter deals with emergency fasts concerning rainfall which are distinguished from the aforementioned fasts in that individuals do not fast and they take place immediately, that is, on the next following Monday, Thursday, and Monday. The procedure of thirteen fasts still holds, but the stage by stage protocol does not apply. The fasts in the previous chapters deal only with the onset of the rainy season, and fasting is brought on gradually because it is not unusual for the first rainfall to be delayed somewhat. The emergency fasts when rains do come but the crops are damaged in some way (an unusual occurrence), however, call for an immediate response by the community. The Ravad holds that the stringencies of emergency fasts are the same as the second stage in the aforementioned fasts (see 12b).<sup>412</sup>

The Mishnah lists what qualifies as an emergency, that is, crops that have taken a sharp turn for the worse but are not beyond all resuscitation, a forty day gap (or more) between rainfalls, rainfall that excludes a necessary part of the environment (broken down into vegetation, trees, and cisterns, ditches, or caves (which hold drinking water)). Further, if no rain were to fall on a certain city but would fall on surrounding habitations, this would indicate Providence. The surrounding cities must thus be on alert and should send produce to their afflicted neighbor. The sages say that the surrounding cities should fast but not sound the alarm, while R. Akiba claims the reverse since one does not fast except for one's own community. The Meiri declares that the law follows the sages' opinion.

The Meiri then reviews certain legal details with regard to these emergencies. With regard to crops, the Meiri stresses that the community only

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<sup>412</sup>The Mishnah reads: They may [only] eat and drink while it is still [the] day [before, until dusk], and they are forbidden to work, bathe, anoint, wear sandals, and have sexual relations, and they lock up the bathhouses.



fasts over crops for which there is hope of resuscitation. The community does not fast for the recovery of crops which are completely ruined, even if at first they appear to grow back somewhat. The point is that they cannot turn back nature but rather should incorporate their fasting into nature's cycle.

The Meiri then highlights that part of the Gemara that defines "drought" and "famine," the latter being more severe. A drought is such that rivers are available to bring in produce from neighboring habitations or that food is present but very expensive. A famine, however, is such that there are no rivers to transport food but rather the food must be brought by beasts (a less efficient method) or that food is lacking, even if it is inexpensive.

With regard to fasting for the proper rainfall for trees, the Gemara states that the community should begin fasting for such "close to Passover," which the Meiri defines as the first of the Hebrew month of Nisan when the trees bud. One fasts until rain comes or the season passes. As for cisterns, ditches, and caves, one begins fasting for them to be filled starting with the first of Tishrei. If drinking water is lacking, however, and these water-containers have dried up, the community may fast during any time of the year, even during the heat of the dry season.

All of these emergencies, the Meiri stresses, are local phenomena. The community affected is one of the local province and not the country as a whole. The immediacy of the response begins with the next cycle of Monday, Thursday, and Monday.

The Gemara includes, along with the Mishnah's list of emergencies, other calamities that warrant immediate response by the community. Specifically, diseases, of which *askara* is representative, are worthy of fasting when someone in the community dies of the pestilence. Specifically, as defined in Bava Kamma 80b, this refers to dry, itching affections versus moist ones (that are not as dangerous). Similarly, an attack of locusts or grasshoppers, no matter how many are cited, warrant community-wide fasting, for any amount can

signal the beginning of a plague. While Maimonides excludes grasshoppers in accordance with one opinion in the Gemara, the Ravad groups all such crop-eating insects together, claiming that contemporary authorities no longer can distinguish between a "good" grasshopper and a "bad" one.

Finally, the last topic taken up in the section is that of crops and trees during the Sabbatical year. The Meiri, making reference to the laws in Leviticus 25:1-7, explains that every seven years the Land of Israel must lie fallow, and Jews may only benefit from crops from the sixth year until such has been cleared away. Similarly, wild growth while the Torah permits eating wild growth from trees, etc. during the Sabbatical year, the sages forbid such produce because "imposters" were growing crops and then passing them off as wild growth (as is explained in Pesachim 51b). Nevertheless, certain wild growth is still permitted, such as growth which is known to be from uncultivated land, land that is known to be lying fallow, vineyards, etc.. Further, one may fast for drinking water during the Sabbatical year. As the Gemara explains, one may fast for wild growth and trees during the Sabbatical year because they help sustain the poor during that time.

Ta'anit Section 14 (20b-22a)

I. And so a city that has plague or a collapsed building, etc.

A. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: [When the sages said,] a collapsed building, they were referring to a sound structure, not a tottering one, and a structure not ready to fall, not a structure ready to fall.

1. But "a sound structure" is the same as "a structure not ready to fall," and "a tottering one" is the same as, "a structure ready to fall."

2. No, [the double phrasing] is needed [for buildings] that fall from excessive height and those that are positioned by a river.<sup>413</sup>

B. For so it was in Nehardea there was a tottering wall that neither Rab nor Samuel would pass under even though it stood in the same place for thirteen years. One day, they happened upon R. Adda Bar Ahaba there [at the tottering wall]. Samuel said to Rab, "Come, sir, let us go around it." He [Rab] answered him, "This is not necessary now, for R. Adda Bar Ahaba is with us, for his spirit is meritorious and I am not afraid [of the building falling while he is with us]."

1. R. Huna had wine stored in a tottering building, and he wanted to remove it. He brought in R. Adda Bar Ahaba into there [the tottering building] and kept him in a discussion of traditional learning until he had removed it. After he [R. Adda Bar Ahaba] went out, the building collapsed. R. Adda Bar Ahaba realized [that his holy merit had been used for this purpose] and became angry. He thought like R. Jannai had once taught: Never should a person

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<sup>413</sup>As Rashi comments, these are apparently sound structures that are nevertheless ready to fall because of the river washing away the building's foundation, etc., thus making the added specificity necessary.

stand in a place of danger and say, "A miracle will happen for me," lest a miracle does not happen him. And if you are able to say, "A miracle will happen for him," [one may respond that] his merits are diminished.

a. R. Hanan said: [This is] what is meant by what is written, (Genesis 32:11) *I am diminished by all of the kindnesses that You have so steadfastly [shown Your servant].*

b. What were the deeds of R. Adda Bar Ahaba [that made him so meritorious]? It is said that his students asked (R. Zera, and some say,) R. Adda Bar Ahaba, "What has given you such a long life?" He answered them, "All of my days, I never became angry in my house, I never walked in front of someone who was greater than I was in wisdom, I never pondered [Torah] in filthy alleys, I never walked four paces without Torah or *tefillin*, I never slept in the House of Study (neither a sound sleep nor a nap), I never rejoiced at the downfall of my colleague, and I never called my colleague by his nickname (and some say, I never called my colleague by his surname)."

2. Raba said to Rafram Bar Papa, "Let the Master tell us some of the deeds that R. Huna performed." He said to him, "Of his childhood I cannot recall, but of his old age I can. On every cloudy day,<sup>414</sup> they would bring him out in a golden carriage, and he would examine the entire city, and every tottering wall he would have demolished. If it was possible for the owner, he would rebuild it, and if it was not possible for the owner, he [R. Huna] would build it from his own [money]. And on every afternoon on the eve of the Sabbath, he would send a servant to the market, and he would buy all of the surplus vegetables in the farmers' possession and cast them

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<sup>414</sup>Rashi clarifies that a cloudy day could be windy and could topple a wall on someone.

into the river.<sup>415</sup>

a. But let him rather give them to the poor!

b. In time it would have come in their minds to rely upon him, and they would not buy themselves.<sup>416</sup>

c. But let him throw them to animals!

d. He was of the opinion that one does not feed animals with food for human beings.

e. But let him not buy them at all!

f. As a consequence they would fail [to bring enough produce] in the future.

3. "When he had a type of medicine, he would fill a water jug with it and hang it at the entrance of the house and say, 'All who are in need, let him come and take some!' (And there are those who say, he had studied Sibetha,<sup>417</sup> and so he would set out a jug of water and suspend it and say, 'Anyone who is in need, let him come and not fall into danger.') When he would prepare bread, he would open his door and say, 'Anyone who is in need, let him come and eat!'"

4. Raba said: All of these things I am able to fulfill, except for this one, which I

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<sup>415</sup>Rashi explains that he would buy the surplus because farmers would not be able to sell it off the next day and would thus sustain a loss. They would then become accustomed to bringing less on the eve of the Sabbath.

<sup>416</sup>Rashi explains that if they came to rely upon him and say, "We do not need to buy anything," and then one day he might not buy the vegetables and they would not have anything.

<sup>417</sup>Rashi explains that this was a demon who attacked people who ate without washing their hands.

cannot do [21a] because there are so many troops in Machuza.<sup>418</sup>

C. Ilfa and R. Jochanan were [pursuing a career of] studying Torah, and they were greatly pressed for money. They said, "Let's get up and go engage in some business so that the verse is fulfilled through us, (Deut. 15:4) *There shall be no needy among you.*" They went and sat [unknowingly] under a tottering wall. While they were preparing their meal, two ministering angels came by. R. Jochanan heard one say to the other, "Let us knock over the wall on top of them and kill them, for they have left behind life in the World-To-Come and engaged in temporal life." He [the other angel] said to him [his companion], "Leave them be, for their is one among them whose time has come [for some great deed]." R. Jochanan heard, but Ilfa did not hear. R. Jochanan said to Ilfa, "Did the Master hear anything?" He answered him, "No." He said, "In that I heard and Ilfa did not hear, I can conclude that it is my time who has come." R. Jochanan said to him, "I will return [to the Academy], that the verse may be fulfilled through me, (Deut. 15:11) *For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land.*" R. Jochanan returned, and Ilfa did not return. When Ilfa did come back [after having pursued a business career], they had coronated R. Jochanan [as head of the Academy].<sup>419</sup> They [the members of the Academy] said to him [Ilfa], "If the Master had stayed and studied Torah, the Master [R. Jochanan] would not have been appointed [but rather you]."<sup>420</sup> He [Ilfa] went and suspended himself on the mast of a ship. He said, "If there is someone who can ask me [a question] from the [collection of] Baraitot of R.

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<sup>418</sup>Rashi explains that there are too many poor people for him to feed in his town.

<sup>419</sup>Rashi explains that "coronated" is elevated language for being appointed Head of the Academy, and they gave him a great deal of money in that position.

<sup>420</sup>Rashi elaborates that Ilfa was actually more learned than R. Jochanan and would have been appointed Head of the Academy if he had not pursued a business career.

Chiyya and R. Hoshaiah, and I can not explain it from the Mishnah, I will fall from the mast of this ship and drown myself.”<sup>421</sup> A certain old man came along and cited the Baraita: If one says [in his will], “Give my children a *shekel* a week,” but they are fit to give them a *sela*’ [twice the value of a *shekel*], they give them a *shekel*.<sup>422</sup> But if he said, “Give them only a *shekel*,” they only give them a *shekel*. If he said, “If they [his children] die, let others inherit [my estate] in their place,” whether he said give them [a *shekel*] or whether he said give them only [a *shekel*], they only give them a *shekel*. He [Ilfa] said to him, “This follows R. Meir who said: It is a divine commandment to fulfill the words of the dead.”

D. They said of Nachum of Gam Zu<sup>423</sup> that he was blind in both his eyes, both of his hands were cut off, both of his legs were amputated, and his entire body was full of boils. He was lying [in a bed] in a tottering building, and the legs of his bed were resting in pails of water so that the ants would not climb up onto him. One time, with his bed inside this tottering house, this disciples wanted to remove his bed [from inside] and afterwards to remove all of the furniture. He said to them, “My children, remove the furniture and then remove my bed, for I am confident for your sake that while I am in the house, the house will not collapse.” They removed the furniture and afterwards removed his bed, and then the house collapsed. His disciples said to him, “Teacher, since you are a perfectly righteous man, why have [these calamities] come upon you?” He said to them, “I brought it on myself, for one time, I was traveling on a road to my father-in-

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<sup>421</sup>Rashi comments that Ilfa was trying to prove that, despite his business career, he was still the more learned one.

<sup>422</sup>As Rashi explains, they are in need of more money than that. For instance, if the man had many children and they do not have enough to adequately prepare for the Sabbath.

<sup>423</sup>The Hebrew phrase, *gam zu*, meaning, “also this,” or “this, too.”

law's house. I had with me three loads on donkeys: one of food, one of drink, and one of different types of delicacies. A certain poor person came and halted me by the road and said, 'Teacher, give me some food!' I said to him, 'Wait until I have unloaded [something] from the donkey.' I did not have enough time [to unload some food] before his soul expired. I went down and fell on his face and said, 'Let my eyes which had no mercy on your eyes go blind, my hand which had no mercy on your hands be cut off, my legs which had no mercy on your legs be amputated,' and my mind did not cool down until I said, 'Let all of my body be filled with boils.'" They [his disciples] said to him, "Oy! That we have to see you like this!" And he said, "Oy! If you had not had to see me like this!" And why did they call him, Nachum of Gam Zu? That for everything that would happen to him, he would say, "This, too, [Hebrew: *gam zu*] is for good."

E. One time, the people of Israel wanted to send a gift to the House of Caesar. They said, "Who shall go? Nachum of Gam Zu should go, for it is well-known that miracles [happen around him]." They sent him with a chest full of precious stones and pearls in his possession [to give to the Emperor]. He went, and he lodged at a certain inn. At night, those staying at the inn arose and took the contents of the chest and filled it with dirt. (In the morning, when he saw it, he said, "This too is for good.")<sup>424</sup> When he arrived there [at the Emperor's palace], they unbound the chest and saw that it was full of dirt. The king wanted to kill them all. He [the Emperor] said, "The Jews are laughing at me!" He [Nachum] said, "This too is for good." Elijah then came and appeared to him [the Emperor] as one of them [the Romans] and said to him, "Perhaps this dirt is the dirt of Abraham their father. For when he would throw dirt, it would turn

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<sup>424</sup>This remark is parenthetical because it appears to be a false ending to the story. As the story continues, this remark seems out of place.



into swords, [and when he would throw] stubble, it would turn into arrows, as it is written, (Isaiah 41:2) *He has rendered his swords like dust, his bows like wind-blown straw.*" There was one country that they [the Romans] were not able to conquer, so they tested [the dirt in battle], and they conquered it. They brought him [Nachum] to the treasure house and filled his chest with precious stones and pearls sent him off with great honor. When he came to that certain inn, they said to him, "What did you bring with you that they acted with such honor toward you?" He answered them, "I arrive with what I brought from here." They destroyed their inn and brought [the dirt] to the palace of the Emperor. They said to him, "That dirt that was brought to you was ours." They [the Romans] tested it and did not find it [to function miraculously as the previous dirt had done], and they executed the residents of the inn.

II. What [counts as] plague? A city in which can be found five hundred foot soldiers, [and out of them three die in three consecutive days, this is a plague. Less than this is not plague].

A. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita [a more elaborate version]: A city in which can be found fifteen hundred foot soldiers, such as Kefar-Acco, and out of them nine die in three consecutive days, this is a plague. [If they died] in one day or in four days, this is not a plague. And a city in which can be found five hundred foot soldiers, such as Kefar-Amiko, and out of them three die in three consecutive days, this is a plague. [21b] In one day or in four days, this is not a plague.

B. Derokereth, a city in which can be found five hundred foot soldiers, out of them there were three dead in one day. R. Nachman Bar R. Chisda decreed a fast.

1. R. Nachman Bar Isaac said, According to whose [view is this consistent]?

2. According to R. Meir's, who said: If [an ox] spread out [the number of times]

it gored [over three days], he [the owner] is liable. If [an ox] all together gored [several times in one day], should it not be all the more so [that the owner is liable]?<sup>425</sup>

3. R. Nachman Bar R. Chisda said to R. Nachman Bar Isaac, "Let the Master rise up and take up a post near us."<sup>426</sup> He answered him, "I have learned from a Baraita that R. Jose says: It is not the place that does a person honor but the person who does the place honor, for so we find with regard to Mount Sinai, that during the time that God's Presence dwelt on it, the Torah says, (Exodus 34:3) *Neither shall the flocks nor the herds graze at the foot of this mountain*. When God's Presence departed from it, the Torah says, (Exodus 19: 13) *When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain*."<sup>427</sup> And so do we find with the Tent of Meeting what was in the wilderness, that every time it was set up, the Torah says, (Numbers 5:2) *Instruct the Israelites to remove from camp anyone with an eruption [or a discharge and anyone defiled by a corpse]*. When they rolled up the hangings [of the Tent to move on], those with an eruption or a discharge were permitted to enter that space [where the Tent had been]." He [R. Nachman Bar R. Chisda] said to him [R. Nachman Bar Isaac], "I will

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<sup>425</sup>Rashi explains that in Bava Kamma 24a, R. Meir gives his opinion of the ox that is a habitual gorer. R. Judah believes that an ox is decreed a habitual gorer, and therefore let the owner be forewarned that he is liable for all damage the ox causes, if he gores three times in three days, paralleling our Mishnah. R. Meir, however, believes an ox can be considered a habitual gorer if he gores three times in one day.

<sup>426</sup>Rashi explains that R. Nachman Bar Isaac served as a rabbi in a place where the people were not so distinguished, and R. Nachman Bar R. Chisda asked him to take up a post nearer him and his company.

<sup>427</sup>Rashi explains that it was God's Presence, and not the mountain itself, that brought honor to the place. With the departing of God's Presence and it resting onto the Tabernacle, Mount Sinai's sanctity departed as well. Rashi also wants to point out that God's Presence did not depart with the sounding of the shofar after the giving of the Ten Commandments but rather after the giving of the second set of Tablets on the day now designated as Yom Kippur.

rise [and move] to your place.” He answered him, “It is better that a coin worth a hundred *dinars* [a scholar] who is the son of a coin worth fifty *dinars* [not a scholar] should go to the coin that is worth a hundred *dinars* [a scholar] who is the son of a coin worth a hundred *dinars* [a scholar] and not the other way around.”<sup>428</sup>

C. There was once a plague in Sura, but in Rab’s neighborhood, the plague did not break out. They [the people] reasoned that it was due to Rab’s exceedingly great merits, but it was revealed to them in a dream that Rab’s merits were in fact too great to warrant [being needed] for such a minor matter.<sup>429</sup> Rather, [that neighborhood was protected] due to a certain man who lent out his shovel and spade for burials.<sup>430</sup>

D. There was once a fire in Derokereth, but in R. Huna’s neighborhood, the fire did not break out. It was thought that it was due to R. Huna’s exceedingly great merits, but it was revealed to them in a dream that R. Huna’s merits were in fact too great to warrant [being needed] for such a minor matter. Rather, [the neighborhood was protected] due to a certain woman who would heat up her oven and make it available for her neighborhood.<sup>431</sup>

E. They once said to R. Judah, “Locusts have come.” He decreed a fast. They said to him, “They have not as yet destroyed anything.” He answered them, “Did they come with

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<sup>428</sup>Rashi comments that R. Nachman Bar R. Chisda’s lineage is greater than R. Nachman Bar Isaac’s and therefore it would be unseemly for him to come to R. Nachman Bar Isaac’s place.

<sup>429</sup>Rashi comments that such a miracle was too small for it to occur through such a great rabbi.

<sup>430</sup>Rashi adds that this kind of reward is measure for measure, in that, because the righteous man helped bury the dead, they did not need to bury anyone during the plague.

<sup>431</sup>Rashi adds that because she let people be warmed by the fire in her oven, measure for measure, the fire did not reach her neighborhood.

provisions?"

F. They once said to R. Judah, "There is an affliction among the pigs." He decreed a fast.

1. Shall we say that R. Judah thought this was an affliction that could spread from one species to other species?

2. No. Pigs are exceptional, that their intestines are like those of human beings.

G. They once said to Samuel, "There is a plague in Be Chozael!" He decreed a fast. They said to him, "But it is far from here!" He answered them, "There is no passage here that it should halt?"<sup>432</sup>

H. They once said to R. Nachman, "There is a plague in the Land of Israel." He decreed a fast. He explained to them, "If the Mistress [the Land of Israel] is stricken, than her Maidservant [the Diaspora] all the more so."

1. The reason [R. Nachman gave] was that of a Mistress to a Maidservant, but if it was a Maidservant to a Maidservant [two different countries in the Diaspora], he would not have [decreed a fast].

2. But they said to Samuel, "There is a plague in Be Chozael!" He decreed a fast.

3. That case is exceptional because there are caravans [which the disease] can accompany and then it can come with them.

I. Greetings from the Heavenly Academy would come to Abba the blood-letter every day, and [they would come] to Abaye every Sabbath eve, and [they would come] to Raba every the eve of Yom Kippur.

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<sup>432</sup>As Rashi understands his answer in relation to a forthcoming passage in the Gemara, there were caravans back and forth, and thus the disease could reach them despite the distance.

1. It used to bother Abaye that Abba the blood-letter [would get greetings from Heaven more often than he would receive them]. They said to him, "You are not able to do what he does." And what were the deeds of Abba the blood-letter? When he would perform an operation, he would separate the men and women, and he had a garment which went with a cup [for blood-letting]. And it [the garment] had a slit at the shoulder. When a woman would come to him, he would dress her [in the garment and perform the operation through the slit] so he would not gaze upon her [nakedness]. And he had a private place in which [his patients] could put coins of money, and whoever had would put it in, and whoever did not was not humiliated. If it happened that a young rabbi would consult with him, he would accept no money from him. Moreover, when he [the young rabbi] would leave, he [Abba] would give him some coins and say to him, "Go and get healthy!" One day Abaye sent a pair of rabbis to test him. [Abba] sat them down, fed them, gave them something to drink, and folded for them blankets for the night. [22a] In the morning, they rolled them up and took them [the blankets]. They got up, took them to the market, and found him [Abba]. They said to him [as if to sell them], 'Put a price, sir, on how much these are worth.' He said to them, "Such-and-such." They said to him, "Maybe they are worth more?" He said to them, "That is what I paid for them." They said to him, "These are yours, and we took them from you." They continued, "Please, of what did you suspect us [when you discovered them missing]?" He said to them, "I said, 'The rabbis need to redeem captives, but they were too ashamed to tell me.'" They said to him, "Now, let the Master take them back." He said to them, "From that moment [when I discovered them missing], I erased them from my mind, [attributing them] to charity."

2. It used to bother Raba that Abba [would get greetings from Heaven more often

they he would receive them]. They said to him, "It should be enough for you that this entire city is protected [due to your merit]."

J. R. Beroka Choza'ah would often be found in the market of Bei Lapat. Elijah the Prophet could [also] often be found [there] with him. He [R. Beroka] asked him [Elijah], "Is there anyone here in the market who will attain World-To-Come?" He answered him, "No." After a while, he saw a certain man who was wearing black shoes and did not have a thread of blue on the corners of his garment.<sup>433</sup> He [Elijah] said to him, "This one will attain the World-To-Come." He [R. Beroka] hurried after him. He said to him, "What do you do?" He [the strange man] said to him [R. Beroka], "Go now and come back tomorrow." The next day he said to him, "What do you do?" He answered him, "I am a jail guard, and I imprison the men separately from the women. I place my bed between the two groups so that they do not succumb to the power of that which is forbidden. When I see a daughter of Israel whom the Gentiles are eyeing, I risk my life and save her. One day, there was an betrothed maiden with us [in the prison] whom the Gentiles were eyeing. I took the dregs of [red] wine and spilled them on her dress, and they said, 'She is menstruating.'" He [R. Beroka] said to him, "What is the reason that you do not have fringes [on the corners of your garments] and that you are wearing black shoes?" He answered him, "I come and go among the Gentiles, and they do not know that I am a Jew. When they issue a decree [against Jewish practices], I inform the rabbis, and they pray for compassion and nullify the decree." He asked him, "And what is the reason, when I said to you what you do, you said to me, 'Go now and come back tomorrow'?" He answered him, "At that time, a decree had just

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<sup>433</sup>Translated according to Rashi. Black shoes and a lack of fringes showed that he was not dressed as a Jew.

been issued, and I said, 'First I will go to tell the rabbis so that they can pray for compassion over the matter.'"

K. After a while, two people came by. He [Elijah] said to him, "These two also will be in the World-To-Come." He [R. Beroka] went to where they were and said to them, "What do you do?" They said to him, "We are jesters. We bring humor to those who are sad. Also, if we see two people between whom an argument has come, we try hard to make peace between them."

### The Meiri

The Meiri feels that the main subject of significance of the Mishnah is the defining of what constitutes a plague over which the community must fast, leaving the issue of the collapsed building for last. The issue that divides the sages from R. Akiba is whether or not a fast day is comparable to Yom Kippur, in which the community fasts but does not sound the alarm (this is the view of the sages), or to Rosh Hashanah, in which the community sounds the alarm but does not fast (this is the view of R. Akiba as described in the Palestinian Talmud 3:4). The Halacha, declares the Meiri, follows the sages.

As for the definition of a plague, the Mishnah proceeds elucidate a ratio of three dead in three consecutive days out of 500 men. The Meiri claims that this ratio of number of dead to population of men holds true regardless of the size of the city with the three consecutive days being a constant. Maimonides adds that women and children are not counted among the "500 men," and the Palestinian Talmud adds that these must be working men and not old men (3:5).

At the end of his explanation of the Mishnah, the Meiri returns to the subject of the collapsed building, claiming that the intent of the Mishnah is to focus on (as is explained in a Baraita) perfectly sound buildings that collapse, and not tottering buildings, buildings whose walls are too high, or buildings whose foundations are built next to a river.

From here, the Meiri addresses issues raised in the Gemara, some completely tangential to the lore that is retold in the course of the exposition, and some more closely linked to the Gemara's main themes.

With regard to a collapsed building, the Meiri teaches that it is forbidden to place oneself in danger unnecessarily, such as walking near a tottering building, no matter how long the building has been standing. Further, one should not rely on miracles to save oneself from danger.

As the Gemara goes on to tell of the attributes of those who have had miracles performed on their behalf, the Meiri lists some of these admirable characteristics. These people are *talmidei chochamim*, wise students of Torah. While all should seek to be humble and keep far from brazenness, the Meiri claims, the truly superior also try to refrain from anger. The truly pious are those who are modest and humble, especially before their superiors, who do not delight in the downfall of their colleagues or call their colleagues by familiar names, who do not walk some much as four paces without discussing the Torah, but they refrain from even thinking about Torah-learning in places of filth, who give generously and concern themselves with the matters of their larger community, and who delve into their own funds to take measures to ensure the safety of their community.

Along these lines, the Meiri makes implicit reference to the deed of R. Huna who would buy up the farmers' surplus on the Sabbath Eve and throw such surplus into the river. The Gemara takes issue with the fact that such food was wasted. The Meiri takes the position that, while it is commendable to give to the poor, especially on the eve of the Sabbath, there is a danger in giving too regularly and thus becoming some peoples sole means of support. His perspective is that one who gives in such a way does the poor no good in that they learn to depend upon the donor who one day might not be able to give. However, there are those who understand R. Huna's action of throwing food into the river to not be a waste of food in that, they hold, some would



come down and fetch the food from the river.

The Meiri proceeds to expound upon the incidental point that R. Huna did not, as well, give such surplus food to livestock for he holds with the principle that food fit for humans is unfit for animals. The Meiri claims, along with Rashi, that the issue is one concerning the dignity of human beings. While there certainly is some food that people and animals share, such as carobs and gourds, food prepared as meals for people should not be served to animals. One may feed animals left-overs or food that was originally intended for people if there is nothing else to feed the animals. While the Ravad holds strictly that animals should not eat bread and the amount of "people-food" an animal is fed should by all means limited, the Meiri holds that this misses the point. Each species should eat its own kind of food, yet some species, such as humans and livestock, share certain foods in common.

The Meiri then goes on to elucidate an incidental legal point brought up by the challenge of Ilfa to explain any commonly known Baraita from the perspective of the Mishnah. A matter of inheritance arises, which the Meiri reiterates. The Baraita states that, if a man left only a certain amount of money in his will for his children, the community has the power to increase that amount taken from the man's estate if such is needed to sustain children. If he specified that a certain amount was to be given and no more, than the community does not have the power to increase the amount. The Meiri explains that the community has the power to increase the amount taken from the man's estate because it can be assumed that the man's intention was to sustain his children. He holds this despite objections that could possibly be raised from Ketubot 48a, which states that a man cannot give his children more by declaring the community must bury him at the community's expense, for such a text still maintains that it was the dead man's wish to sustain his children. The power of the community is even maintained in light of Bava Batra 129b

which explains the procedure for a number of heirs, including others besides the man's children who are to inherit if his children cannot. There is some dispute, specifically by Maimonides, that these secondary inheritors are not of the same status; rather, they are the recipients of a "gift," not an inheritance. The Rif and the Ravad, however, support the contention that the dead man's dying requests are law and should be treated fully as such. The guiding Halacha is that the words of the dead are legally binding, no matter if the dying person was sick for a long or short time.

The Meiri moves on to other incidental legal points, such as the analogy of a plague to an ox is considered to be a habitual gorer (as defined in Bava Kamma 24a), as well as the idea that a place does not give a person any honor, but rather, it is the person that gives honor to a place. A prominent position, then, is earned on personal merit and not taken through moving one's station. The Meiri repeats the Scriptural proof for this ethical point from the Gemara.

Finally, the Meiri takes up the subject of plagues that come as divine visitations and should be responded to as such. Locusts, regardless of their number, are always treated seriously, and a plague in the Land of Israel is reason for all Diaspora communities to fast. Plagues in the Diaspora are reason for immediate neighbors to fast, but are not as serious as those in the Land of Israel. The Meiri also reiterates the point that disease among animals is not a reason for people to fast, with the peculiar exception of pigs. Rashi explains that this is due to the fact that the sages understood that pigs and human beings have similar intestinal problems. There are, however, several homilies that understand the "pigs" to refer to idolaters, specifically to Rome, such as in Leviticus Rabbah 13, etc.. The passage would then be understood as referring to a plague among other human beings who have debased themselves through corruption and idolatry.

The Meiri's concluding remark to this section refers to Abba the blood-

letter who, once he thought of something as given to charity, he would not take it back. The Meiri explains that, even though a promise to give something to the poor is not binding until it comes out of one's mouth, it is the practice of the especially promise to treat their thoughts as seriously in matters of charity.

I. On these we sound the alarm in every place: [wind-blasting, withering, *arbeh*-locusts, *chasil*-locusts, wild beasts, and a war-party we sound the alarm because it is an affliction which travels].

A. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: On these we sound the alarm in every place: wind-blasting, withering, *arbeh*-locusts, *chasil*-locusts, and on wild beasts. R. Akiba says: On wind-blasting and withering in any amount, and on *arbeh*-locusts and *chasil*-locusts even if in the Land of Israel only one winged creature appears, we sound the alarm.

B. Wild beasts, [and a war-party we sound the alarm because it is an affliction which travels].

1. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: We sound the alarm for wild beasts when one is sent [as a divine visitation]. If it is not sent, we do not sound the alarm. Which is sent [as a divine visitation] and which is not sent? If it appears in a city, it is sent. In a field, it is not sent. During the day, it is sent. During the night, it is not sent. If it saw two people and ran after them, it is sent. If it hid itself from them, it is not sent. If it killed two people and ate [only] one of them, it is sent. If it ate both of them, it is not sent. If it climbed up onto a roof and took a baby from its crib, it is sent.

2. But this text has contradictions! You say, if it appears in a city, it is sent, and there is no difference whether it is day or night, and then you come back and say, if it is day, it is sent, at night, it is not sent.

3. This is not a contradiction. Thus did it say: If it appears during a city during

the day, it is sent. In a city during the night, it is not sent. Also, if it appears in a field, even during the day, it is not sent. (As well as during the night in a field it is not sent.)

4. [There is another contradiction:] If it saw two people and ran after them, it is sent, but if it just stood still it is not sent. But then you come back and say, if it hid itself from them, it is not sent, [thus] if it just stood still, it is sent.

5. This is not a contradiction. Here, [in the case of it standing still and not being sent,] it is in a field near a marsh [in which it can easily escape], and here, [in the case of it standing still and being sent,] it is in a field that is not near a marsh.

6. [There is another contradiction:] If it kills two people at once and eats [only] one of them, it is sent. [If it ate] both of them, it is not sent. But did you not say, if it [just so much as] ran [after them that it was sent as a divine visitation]?

7. R. Papa said: That teaches [of an instance when] it is standing in a marsh.

8. [You said,] if it climbed up onto a roof and took a baby from its crib, it is sent. This is too obvious! [Animals do not behave that way.]

9. R. Pāpa said: [This refers to an infant that is in] hunters' shelters [in the wild].

#### C. And a war-party, etc.

1. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: As to the war-party of which they were speaking, it is unnecessary to say a war-party that does not come in peace, but rather, even if a war-party comes in peace [we sound the alarm]. You can find no better war-party that came in peace than that of Pharaoh Necho, and nevertheless, King Josiah had his down-fall through it, as it is said, [22b] (II Chronicles 35:21) [*Necho*] sent messengers to him, saying, "What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I do not march against you this day but against the kingdom that

wars with me, and it is God's will that I hurry. Refrain, then, from interfering with God who is with me, that He not destroy you."<sup>434</sup>

a. What is meant by, "God who is with me"?

b. R. Judah said in the name of Rab: This is idolatry. He [Josiah] said, "Since he [Pharaoh Necho] trusts in idolatry, I can [prevail] against him."

2. (II Chronicles 35:23) *Archers shot King Josiah, and the king said to his servants, "Get me away from here, for I am badly wounded."*

a. What is meant by, "I am badly wounded"?

b. R. Judah said in the name of Rab: It teaches they made his body [with arrows] like a sieve.

3. R. Samuel Bar Nachmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: Why was Josiah punished? Because he should have consulted with Jeremiah and he did not consult with him. What did he [Josiah] expound [without Jeremiah's aid]? (Leviticus 26:6) *No sword shall cross your land*. What is meant by "sword"? If one were to say, a war-party that does not come in peace, than it is [already] written [in that same verse], *I will grant peace in the land*. Rather, even [a war party] that comes in peace [should not cross through the Land of Israel]. But he [Josiah] did not know [because he did not consult with Jeremiah] that his generation was not worthy [of this verse being fulfilled].

4. As his [Josiah's] soul was coming to rest, Jeremiah saw that his lips were moving. He [Jeremiah] said, "Perhaps, God forbid, he is saying something improper because of

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<sup>434</sup>As Rashi explains, Pharaoh Necho was not marching against King Josiah, but King Josiah intercepted him on his way through the country. Pharaoh Necho thus sent King Josiah a message.

his pain." He leaned over and heard that he was accepting as justice God's judgement on his soul.

He said, (Lamentations 1:18) *The Lord is right, for I have disobeyed Him.* At that moment, he

[Jeremiah] expounded, (Lamentations 4:20) *The breath of our life, the Lord's anointed.*

II. A precedent: The elders came down from Jerusalem to their cities [and decreed a fast because it was seen in Ashkelon [grain enough] to fill the mouth of an oven [affected by] wind-blasting.]

A. They asked them: [Enough] to fill the oven with grain or [enough] to fill the oven with bread?

1. Come and hear [an answer]: [Enough] to fill the mouth of the oven.<sup>435</sup>

2. But you may still ask, [Enough to fill] the cover of the oven or perhaps a row of loaves that goes across the mouth of the oven.

3. [The question] stands [undecided].

B. And furthermore, they decreed a fast when two wolves ate [two children across the Jordan].

1. 'Ullā said in the name of R. Simeon Ben Jehozadak: A precedent, that two wolves ate two children, [digested them,] and excreted them.

2. And the incident came before the sages. They declared the [digested] flesh pure and the bones impure.

#### The Meiri

The Meiri begins his exposition of this section by explaining the ramifications of what "every place" means in the Mishnah. If the community is

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<sup>435</sup>Rashi comments that this answer indicates bread which would stop up the mouth of the oven as opposed to grain which spill out.

to sound the alarm in "every place" over these calamities, does that mean in every place that news of the calamity is heard or does that indicate the surrounding territories where the calamity has struck? Certainly, the scope of the Mishnah affects everywhere from Babylonia to Spain. It appears that the Meiri holds one sounds the alarm in any place where news of such arrives, so long as the calamity remains a current event, except for the case of a war-party. The Meiri claims that one sounds the alarm in any place where the "hate of the invaders" might spread. This is in opposition to the Ravad, who holds that there is no difference for a war-party, but the Meiri cites Joshua 17:11 in his defense, claiming that the text makes a distinction between cities with their dependencies and other regions. Only those villages, etc. dependent upon a certain region sound the alarm for that region, and so on from kingdom to kingdom. Otherwise, however, the Meiri holds that "every place" means the surrounding territories where a calamity has struck.

The Meiri then notices a subtle problem in the wording of the Mishnah. Previous to this Mishnah, if a disaster were to hit a city, that city would fast and sound the alarm, while the neighboring cities would fast but not sound the alarm. R. Akiba, however, held that the surrounding cities would do the reverse, that they would sound the alarm but not fast. As discussed in the previous section, the legal debate revolved around whether a fast day was more similar to Rosh Hashanah (which supported R. Akiba's position) or Yom Kippur (which supported the sages' position). The Halacha followed the sages. This Mishnah, however, lists calamities over which they would sound the alarm in every place, for these are afflictions that travel. That is, the first half of the Mishnah appears to follow R. Akiba's position on what surrounding cities should do. The precedents cited afterwards, however, mention fasting as the procedure, and do not mention sounding the alarm.

One solution the Meiri offers from other commentators' solutions is simply to break the Mishnah in two and claim that first half is the position



of R. Akiba and the second half is the position of the sages. The Meiri feels, however, that this is unnecessary since we should not split the traditional divisions of the Mishnah unless there is no alternative. The Meiri also feels that a better explanation can be provided. The Meiri calls attention to the fact that the sages' position is that in the affected city, they fast and sound the alarm. Because these are calamities that travel, it makes more sense to group them all as affected cities and not cities that neighbor a calamity (which would only fast and not sound the alarm). We can assume, then, that when the Mishnah states, "we sound the alarm" without any other qualifying phrase, it also indicates fasting as well. Thus, in the first half of the Mishnah, they sound the alarm in every place as well as fast, and in the second half, the Mishnah relates precedents that deal with such fasts. In this way, the Mishnah is consistent with those previous to it and consistently elucidates the sages' position.

Among the list of calamities that travel, wind-blasting of grain appears problematic, for the Gemara does not specify how much. The Meiri lists the various options. The amount of wind-blasted (and thus ruined) grain that calls for fasting must fill the mouth of an oven. This can mean a number of things. Rashi and other commentators make the distinction between filling the mouth of the oven with either grain or with bread (which indicates a smaller amount of grain), but they all disagree as to what these measurements actually are. The Meiri, however, claims that the Gemara is quite precise. If a measure of grain is indicated, it means all of the grain that it would take to fill the mouth of the oven until the upper lip of the mouth of the oven is filled. If it indicates bread, it means all of the bread that could be stacked in the area equal to the mouth of the oven. If such a measurement was supposed to equal the cover of the oven, such an area would be slightly smaller, as the cover fits inside the oven's mouth. The Gemara claims that the correct measurement exists as an enduring legal question.

The Meiri then reviews the rules for deciding whether or not an attack by a wild beast should be considered a divine visitation (and thus call for fasting) or not. If it appears in a city during the daytime, it is a divine visitation, but in a field by day or either in a city or in a field by night, it is a natural thing for an animal to do. If an animal appears by day in a field and pursues or otherwise does not flee from people, it is a divine visitation. If an animal appears by day in a field and but does not flee because it is near a forest (into which it can flee at any time), it is not a divine visitation. If it is in a forest itself and chases people, it is not a divine visitation. In any case, if it seizes two people but eats only one of them, this is a divine visitation, but if it takes both of them as prey to satiate its hunger, this is natural and not a divine visitation, especially if it is near its lair. Hunters who have set up camp in the wilderness and are attacked by an animal, even if the animal attacks them in their camp itself, this is not a divine visitation. This holds true even if it climbed up onto the roof or seized a child, etc.. The Palestinian Talmud (3:6) adds that even domesticated animals that attack people, such as an ass or an ox, can be considered as divine visitations.

The Meiri proceeds to the issue of a war-party. A war-party that comes to conquer or impose a tax, etc. is cause for fasting, but even if a war-party is passing through and thus comes in peace, the community should call a fast. Although it is a dispute between other nations, the war-party is still traveling through Israel's borders, and this goes against God's promise in Leviticus 26:6, that war should not so much as pass through the land. The Meiri adds that all war-parties, coming in peace or no, indicate trouble and hardship for those they with whom they come into contact.

Finally, a concluding legal point concerns the status of the purity of those who have been eaten by an animal and have been excreted. The sages claim that their flesh is considered pure, as it has been completely consumed,

but the bones still cause impurity. The Meiri adds that this indicates people who have been swallowed whole, but if the bones are well chewed, one can consider the bones to be consumed as well. He adds that different animals digest differently, however, and the flesh of most people is considered consumed the same day that the person is eaten, the case of a dog is different, for a dog takes three days to consume flesh. It thus takes three days for the flesh of a human being in the belly of a dog to lose the status of a corpse (see Shabbat 155b).

I. Concerning these do they sound the alarm [even] on Shabbat: [A city that is surrounded by Gentiles or a river, and a ship that is tossed about at sea. R. Jose says: For help, but not for crying out].

A. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: Regarding a city that is surrounded by Gentiles or a river, a ship that is tossed about at sea or an individual who is pursued by Gentiles or bandits or an evil spirit, for all of these an individual is permitted to afflict himself with fasting.

1. R. Jose says: An individual is not permitted to afflict himself with fasting lest he comes to depend on others [to support him], and others will not have compassion upon him.

2. R. Judah said in the name of Rab: What is the reason for R. Jose's opinion? That it is written, (Genesis 2:7) *And man become a living soul*. [In other words,] you should keep alive the soul that I have given you.

II. Simeon the Temanite says: Also concerning the plague, but the sages did not agree with him.

A. It was asked: The sages did not agree with him [that one should sound the alarm due to a plague] on the Sabbath but on a weekday they do agree with him or perhaps they do not agree with him [that they should sound the alarm] at all?

B. Come and hear [an answer]: It was taught in a Baraita: We sound the alarm concerning a plague on the Sabbath, and [therefore] one does not need to mention on a weekday.

R. Chanan Ben Pitom, the disciple of R. Akiba, said in the name of R. Akiba: We do not sound

the alarm concerning a plague in any case.<sup>436</sup>

### The Meiri

The Meiri explains that "sounding the alarm" on the Sabbath indicates increasing one's prayer and including the prayer, *Aneinu*, in the Amidah. "Sounding the alarm" on a weekday indicates blowing the shofar. R. Jose, however, qualifies the rule that for certain calamities they may sound the alarm by saying it must be for help and not for crying out in complaint to God. The Meiri gives two explanations for this distinction, the first being that sounding the alarm for help means each person prays for help individually, but they do not gather together to cry out in complaint. Alternatively, it could mean sounding the alarm to summon help for neighbors or from the community for emergency resources. The Halacha, according to the Meiri, follows the sages. A third explanation that the Meiri cites from Rashi but then dismisses is that they may actually sound the alarm with the shofar on the Sabbath, and R. Jose's qualification is that they may only blow the shofar to summon help from others, etc.. The Meiri holds the most consistent explanation is that sounding the alarm on the Sabbath always indicates an increase in prayer.

The Meiri then moves on to Simeon the Temanite who claims that the sound the alarm on the Sabbath in response to a plague, but that the sages did not agree with him. The Gemara then asks the question as to whether the sages did not agree that they sound the alarm in response to a plague on the Sabbath or that they should not sound the alarm in response to a plague at all. This question causes difficulty, for we have already learned in the Mishnah that they do sound the alarm in response to a plague on a weekday, so how could they consider the opposite here? The Meiri cites the Ravad's explanation that

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<sup>436</sup>The latter view appears to be the view that the sages followed, that, as Rashi explains, they do not sound the alarm even on a weekday.

this refers to neighboring communities who, according to R. Akiba, should sound the alarm but not fast. The response would be that, if one followed R. Akiba's rulings, that one does not sound the alarm on the Sabbath in a neighboring community to a catastrophe on the Sabbath. As the law does not follow R. Akiba, we do not even have to consider the question. Further, even if the law did follow R. Akiba, holding that R. Akiba would allow sounding the alarm on a fast day, this would cause internal contradictions to R. Akiba's own stance, for a plague can only be declared after three days of the correct ratio of dead found in the city, beginning with the cycle of the following Monday.

The Gemara explains that those who may fast and sound the alarm on the Sabbath include individuals who are being pursued, etc., so, the Meiri adds, an entire community may do so all the more so. While there is a prohibition against fasting on the Sabbath, groups of individuals may take such a fast upon themselves. This applies also to neighboring communities. The Gemara qualifies this power, however, by saying that the intent should be for the sake of heaven and should not ever endanger anyone's health through fasting. The Meiri reiterates this point, citing that the soul that God has given was meant to be maintained. The intention of fasting for the sake of heaven and not for self-affliction was already discussed on 11b.

I. On every calamity that should not come upon the community [they sound the alarm except for too much rain].

A. Our rabbis taught in a Mishnah: On every calamity that should not come upon the community they sound the alarm except for too much rain. What is the reason? R. Jochanan said: Because we do not pray [for the end of] too much goodness. And R. Jochanan said: From where do we learn that we do not pray [for the end of] too much goodness? [From the following verse,] as it is said, (Malachi 3:10) *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, [and let there be food in My House, and thus put Me to the test -- said the Lord of Hosts. I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you more than enough]*. What is meant by, "more than enough"? Rami Bar R. Yud said, Until your lips tire from saying, "Enough."

1. In the Diaspora [specifically, Babylonia], they do sound the alarm [over too much rain]. Also it has been taught in a Baraita: During a year in which there was too much rain, the members of the station sent [a message] to the members of the watch,<sup>437</sup> "Turn your eyes to your brothers in the Diaspora so that their houses do not become their graves."

2. They asked R. Eliezer: How much rain must come down before we pray that it not rain? He said to them: So that a person can stand at Keren Ofel<sup>438</sup> and splash his feet in the water.<sup>439</sup>

a. And it is taught in a Baraita: [Splash] his hands.

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<sup>437</sup>See Mishnah 15b.

<sup>438</sup>As Rashi explains, this was a particularly tall peak of rock.

<sup>439</sup>As Rashi clarifies, one should never pray for rain to cease.

b. I mean, his feet are like his hands.<sup>440</sup>

c. Rabbah Bar Bar Chana said: As for me, I saw from Keren Ofel an Arab who was riding on a camel with a spear out in his hand and he looked [as small as] a worm.

3. (Leviticus 26:4) *I will grant your rains in their season.* [That is to say, the ground] is not saturated and it is not dried out, but rather, in between., for any time that there is too much rain, it muddies up the land so it does not give out produce.

a. Another interpretation: [23a] *In their season.* [The rain would come] on Wednesday and Sabbath nights,<sup>441</sup> for such do we find in the days of Simeon Ben Shetach. Rain fell for them on Wednesday and Sabbath nights until they had wheat grains the size of kidneys, barely grains like olive pits, and lentils like golden coins, and they stored [samples of] them as an example for [future] generations to inform them how much sin causes [the diminishment of produce], as it is said, (Jeremiah 5:25) *It is your iniquities that have diverted these things, your sins that have withheld the bounty from you.*

b. And so do we find in the day of Herod when they were engaged in the building of the Holy Temple, that it would rain during the night and the next day the wind would blow and scatter the clouds and the sun would shine [in time for the people to go to work]. Then the people would go out to their labor, and they knew that they were engaged in the work of Heaven.

B. A precedent: They [the sages] said to Choni the Circle-Drawer, etc.

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<sup>440</sup>Rashi explains that he bends over, such as to get a drink, so his hands and feet are at the same level.

<sup>441</sup>Rashi states that these are nights in which people do not travel, so it is not an inconvenience.



1. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: One time, most of Adar passed by, and rain had not fallen. They [the sages] sent [a message] to Choni the Circle-Drawer, "Pray for it to rain." He prayed, but rain did not come. He drew a circle, stood within it, in the same way that Chabakkuk the Prophet had done, as it is said, (Chabakkuk 2:1) *I will stand on my watch, take up my station at the post, [and wait to see what He will say to me, what He will reply to my complaint]*. He said before God, "Master of the Universe, Your children have looked to me as if I were a member of Your household. I hereby swear by Your great name that I will not move from here until You show compassion for Your children." It began to drizzle. His disciples said to him, "Master, we have looked to you so that we shall not die. It seems to us that this rain only comes to release you from your vow." He said, "Not for such did I ask, but for rains [that will fill] cisterns, ditches, and caves [for drinking water]." It began to rain violently, so much so that each drop was the size of the mouth of a barrel, and the sages measured that each drop was not less than the measure of a *log*.<sup>442</sup> His disciples said to him, "Master, we have looked to you so that we shall not die. It seems to us that this rain comes only to destroy the world." He said, "Not for such did I ask, but for rains of favor, blessing, and good-will." It rained as it should, [but continued] until Israelites came out from Jerusalem up to the Temple Mount because of the rain. They said to him [Choni], "Master, just as you prayed for them to fall, so pray that they should cease." He said to them, "Such is the tradition that I have received that one should not pray for [the end of] too much goodness. Nevertheless, bring me a bull as an offering of confession [of sin]." They brought him a bull as an offering of confession. He laid his two hands

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<sup>442</sup>One liquid measure of a *log* equals the volume of six eggs, approximately 12-16 fl. oz.. See Steinsaltz, p. 287.

on it and said before God, "Master of the Universe, Your people Israel who You brought out of Egypt and not able to [exist] with too much goodness nor too much hardship. When You are angry at them, they cannot endure, , and when You bestow goodness upon them, they cannot endure. May it be Your will that the rains cease, and let there be relief in the world."

Immediately, the wind blew, the clouds were scattered, and the sun shone. The people then went out into the fields and gathered truffles and mushrooms. Simeon Ben Shetach sent for him [Choni, and said,] "If you were not Choni, I would decree a ban against you, that if these years were like the years of Elijah, that the keys to the rain were in his hands,<sup>443</sup> would not you have desecrated the name of Heaven?<sup>444</sup> But what can I do to you? For you act outrageously before God, but [God] does your will like a son who acts outrageously before his father, but he does his will. He says to him, "Father, take me and bathe me in warm water and rinse me in cold water. Give me nuts, almonds, peaches, and pomegranates, and his father gives [such] to him. Concerning you Scripture says, (Proverbs 23:25) *Your father and mother will rejoice; she who bore you will exult.*

2. Our rabbis have taught in a Baraita: What [message] did the members of the Chamber of Hewn Stone [that is, the Sanhedrin,] send to Choni the Circle-Drawer? (Job 22:28-30) *You will decree and it will be fulfilled, and light will shine upon your affairs. [When others sink low, you will say, "There is uplifting, for He saves the one with downcast eyes. He will deliver the guilty; He will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands"]]. You will decree -*

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<sup>443</sup>See I Kings 17.

<sup>444</sup>Rashi interprets this to mean that, had Choni, who swore to make it rain, and Elijah, who swore to withhold rain, lived in the same time, one of their oaths would have been forced to be invalid.

- You make a decree from below, and the Holy One Blessed Be He fulfills your word from above. *And light will shine upon your affairs* -- You have brought light to the generation that was in darkness with your prayer. *When others sink low, you will say, There shall be uplifting,* -- The generation that has sunk low you have lifted up through your prayer. *For He saves the one with downcast eyes* [Hebrew: *einayim*] -- You saved a sinful [Hebrew: *avono*] generation through your prayer.<sup>445</sup> *He will deliver the guilty* -- You delivered a guilty generation through your prayer. *He will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands* -- You delivered it through the deeds of your clean hands.

3. R. Jochanan said: This righteous man [Choni], all of his life he was troubled by the verse, (Psalms 126:1) *A song of ascents. When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we saw it as in a dream.* Is it possible to sleep for seventy years in a dream?<sup>446</sup> One day, he was traveling on a road, and he saw a certain man planting carob trees. He said to him, "How many years does it take [for these trees] to give [fruit]?" He answered him, "Seventy years." He said to him, "Is it obvious to you that you are going to live [another] seventy years?" The man answered him, "I found the world with carob trees, for my ancestors had planted them for me. So I also plant for my children." He [Choni] sat down and prepared his meal. Weariness overcame him, and he fell asleep. A formation of rock spread over him, covering him from sight, and he slept for seventy years. When he awoke, he saw that certain man gleaning fruit from those [trees]. He said to him, "Are you the man who planted them?" He answered him, "I am his

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<sup>445</sup>The Hebrew roots of these two words, "eyes" and "sin," are very similar.

<sup>446</sup>The Israelites were exiled to Babylonia after the destruction of the First Temple and were restored after seventy years.

grandson." He said to him, "I must conclude that I have slept seventy years. He looked and saw that his donkey had given birth to two generations. He went to his home and said to them, "Is the son of Choni the Circle-Drawer still alive?" They said, "His son is not. His grandson is." He said to them, "I am Choni the Circle-Drawer!" They did not believe him. He went to the House of Study. He heard the rabbis saying, "These traditions are as clear to us as in the years of Choni the Circle-Drawer, for when he would come into the House of Study, he was able to figure out any difficulty the rabbis had." He said to them, "I am he!" They did not believe him, and they did not act toward him with the honor that was due him. He was greatly upset, he prayed, and he died. Raba said: Thus we have the popular saying, "Companionship or death."

4. Abba Chilkiah was a grandson of Choni the Circle-Drawer, and when the world was in need of rain, the rabbis would send [a message] to his home, he prayed, and rain would come. One time, the world was in need of rain, and the rabbis sent two people to his home [to request him] to pray for rain. When they arrived at his home, they did not find him. When they went into the field, they found him hoeing. They gave him a greeting, [23b] but he did not show a sign of recognition in the evening. When he gathered wood, he put the wood and hoe on one shoulder and his cloak on the other shoulder. All the way home, he did not wear shoes. When he arrived at a stream, he put on his shoes. When he arrived at a place of thorns and thistles, he lifted his clothes [bearing his legs]. When he arrived to the town [where he lived], his wife greeted him adorned [with jewelry]. When he arrived to his house, his wife entered first, he entered after her, and then the rabbis entered. He sat down and prepared his meal, but he did not say to the rabbis, "Come and eat." He divided the meal for his children, for the older one, one portion, and for the younger one, two portions. He said to his wife, "I know that the rabbis [are

here] because of [the need for] rain. Come, let us go up to the roof and pray for compassion. It is possible that we will find favor with the Holy One Blessed Be He and He will send rain." They went up to the roof, and he stood in one corner and she stood in another corner. At first, clouds formed over the corner where his wife was standing [answering her prayer first]. When he came down, he said to them [the rabbis], "Why have you rabbis come?" They said to him, "The rabbis sent us to your home, sir, to ask you to pray for rain." He answered them, "Praised be God that you [now] have no need of Abba Chilkiah." They said to him, "We know that the rain came on account of the Master. But tell us, sir. There are deeds that are mysterious to us. What is the reason that, when we greeted the Master, you did not show any recognition?" He answered them, "I was hired for the day, and I said, 'I should not interrupt [my work for even a second].'" "And what is the reason the Master put the wood on one shoulder and the cloak on the other shoulder [rather than cushion the wood with the cloak]?" He answered them, "It was a borrowed cloak, and I did not borrow it for such a purpose." "What is the reason that all the way the Master did not wear shoes and when the Master arrived at a stream, he put on shoes?" He answered them, "All the way, I could see [where I was stepping]. In the water I could not see." "What is the reason that, when the Master arrived at a place of thorns and thistles, he lifted his clothes?" He answered them, "This [skin] grows back, and that does not grow back." "What is the reason that when the Master arrived at the town, his wife greeted him adorned [with jewelry]?" He answered them, "So I would not look at any other woman." "What is the reason she went in first, and then the Master went in after her, and then we entered?" He answered them, "Because I do not know you well [and did not want to leave you alone with my wife or alone in my house even for a second]." "What is the reason that, when the Master prepared the

meal, he did not say to us, 'Come and eat'?" "Because there was not enough food, and I said, 'Let me not be accounted by the rabbis for merit for nothing [by extending an invitation they would have to refuse].'" "What is the reason the Master gave to the older child one portion of food and to the younger child two portions?" He answered them, "This one [the older] is at home [and has more opportunity to eat], and that one [the younger] sits in school." "And what is the reason the clouds first formed over the corner in which she was standing then the clouds of the Master [formed]?" "Because she stays at home and gives food to the poor which they immediately enjoy, but I give money which they do not immediately enjoy." (Or also, there were thugs in our neighborhood, and I prayed that they should die, and she prayed that they should return in repentance, and they returned.)

5. Chanan the Hidden was a grandson of Choni the Circle-Drawer. When the world was in need of rain, the rabbis would send children to his home and they would take him by the hem of his cloak and say to him, "Father, father, give us rain." He would say before God, "Master of the Universe, act for the sake of these that do not know the difference between a Father who can give rain and a father who cannot." And why did they call him, Chanan the Hidden? Because he would conceal himself [out of modesty, even] in the bathroom.<sup>447</sup>

6. R. Zerika said to R. Safra: Come and see the difference between the mighty sages of the Land of Israel and the pious sages of Babylonia. In Babylonia, when the world was in need of rain, men such as R. Huna and R. Chisda would say, "Let us gather together and pray

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<sup>447</sup>Rashi has a different text in which the words, "in the bathroom" are missing. Rashi interprets this to mean that he would hide himself while he prayed so that no one would know that the rain came on his account. This version is in consonance with the previous story of Abba Chilkiah who did not want to be discovered praying.

for compassion. It is possible that the Holy One Blessed Be He will show favor [on us], and there will be rain.” The mighty sages of the Land of Israel, such as R. Jonah, the father of R. Mani, when the world was in need of rain, he would go into his house and say to them, “Give me my sack, and I will go and I will bring [home] some grain for a *zuz*.” When he would go outside, he would go and stand in a low-lying place, as it is written, (Psalms 130:1) *Out of the depths I call to You, O Lord*. And in that concealed place he would dress in sack cloth and pray. And rain would come. When he came home, they would say to him, “Did the Master bring some grain?” He would answer them, “I said, ‘Since rain has come, now there is relief in the world [and the price will go down].’”

a. Moreover, as for R. Mani, his son, the members of the House of the Patriarch would trouble him. He would prostrate himself on the grave of his father and say to him, “Father! Father! These people are troubling me.” One day, they were passing by there, and the legs of their horses became paralyzed until they accepted upon themselves not to trouble him any more.

b. Moreover, with regard to R. Mani, he would attend the lectures of R. Isaac Ben Eliashab. He said to him, “The rich members of my father-in-law’s family are troubling me.” He answered, “Let them become poor.” They became poor. He said, “Now they press me [for money].” He answered, “Let them become rich.” They became rich. He said, “My wife is no longer acceptable to me.” He answered, “What is her name?” [He said,] “Channah.” [He answered,] “Let Channah become beautiful.” And she became beautiful. He [R. Mani] said to him [R. Isaac Ben Eliashab], “Now she is overbearing.” He answered, “Let Channah return to her ugliness.” And Channah returned to being ugly.

c. There were two disciples who attended the lectures of R. Isaac Ben Elieashab. They said to him, "Would the Master pray that we become very wise?" He said to them, "[This power] was with me, and I cast it away."

7. R. Jose Bar Abin would attend the lectures of R. Jose of Yokereth. He left him [that is, his lectures] for those of R. Ashi. [24a] One day, he [R. Jose Bar Abin] heard him [R. Ashi] recite: Samuel taught: If one who takes a fish from the sea on the Sabbath, when a spot the size of a *sela'* dries on it, he is liable.<sup>448</sup> He [R. Jose Bar Abin] said: Let the Master teach [that the spot must be] between its fins. He [R. Ashi] answered him [R. Jose Bar Abin]: Does not the Master think like R. Jose Bar Abin who taught such? He answered him: I am he. He said to him: Did you not attend the lectures of R. Jose of Yokereth? He [R. Jose Bar Abin] answered him: Yes. He [R. Ashi] said to him: And why did the Master leave him and come here? He answered him: He is a man who shows no kindness to his son and daughter. As for me, how is he to show kindness to me?

a. What is [the story of] his son? One day, some workers were hired in the field [for work] in the field. Evening came, and no food was brought to them. They said to his [R. Jose of Yokereth's] son, "We are hungry." They were sitting under a fig tree. He [the son] said, "Fig tree! Fig tree! Bring out your fruit and feed the workers of my father." [The tree] produced fruit and they ate. After a while, his father came. He said to them, "Do not be upset [that it took me] until evening [to bring food]. I was occupied with a *mitzvah* until now. They

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<sup>448</sup>Rashi clarifies that the violation of the Sabbath here can either be "slaughtering" or "trapping," both of which are chief categories of labor. Rashi holds that taking a fish from the water qualifies as "slaughtering," (Shabbat 73a), for he might have caught the fish and left them in the water during the day and taken them out later.



said to him, "May the Compassionate One satisfy you the way your son satisfied us." He inquired of them, "From where [did he feed you]?" They told him that such-and-such did he do. He said to him, "My son, you bothered your Maker for a fig tree to produce its fruit when it was not its time. May the one [who did so] be gathered up not in his time."

b. What is [the story of] his daughter? His daughter was beautiful. One day, he saw a man who was boring a hole in a fence so he could watch her. He said to him, "What is this?" He answered him, "Rabbi, if I have not merited to marry her, can I not [at least] merit to see her?" He said to her, "My daughter, you are causing sorrow to people. Return to your state of dust and no longer be a stumbling block for others."

c. He had a certain donkey. When people would hire the donkey, each day at evening, they would send it back with the payment on its back and it would come to the home of its master. If there was too much or too little [money], it would not move. One day, a pair of sandals were left [forgotten] on it, and it would not go until they had taken them from it and then it returned.

8. [It is told of] R. Eleazar of Birtach that when the distributors of charity saw him they would hide from him, for all that he had he would give them. One day, he was going up to the market to buy a wedding dress for his daughter. The distributors of charity saw him and hid from him. He ran after them [having already caught sight of them]. He said to them, "I implore you, in what are you engaged?" They answered him, "With an orphan boy and an orphan girl."<sup>449</sup> He said to them, "By the Temple! They take precedence over my daughter." He took all that he had with him and gave it to them. He was left with one *zuz*. He spent it on wheat, brought it [to

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<sup>449</sup>Rashi explains that they were pairing the two for marriage.

his home], and tossed it into the granary. His wife came home. She [his wife] said to his daughter, "What did your father bring [you for your wedding dress]?" She answered her, "All that he brought [home], he tossed into the granary." She went to open the door of the granary. She saw that the granary was so full of wheat it was coming out of the hinges of the door so she could not open the door. His daughter went to the House of Study [to tell him of the miracle]. She said to him, "Come and see what the One who loves you did for you." He answered her, "By the Temple! It is sanctified [food] for you [and will be donated as such], and you will derive no benefit from it except as a poor person of Israel."<sup>450</sup>

C. R. Judah the Patriarch decreed a fast. He prayed, but rain did not come. He said, "What a difference there is between Samuel the Ramathite<sup>451</sup> and Judah Ben Gamaliel! Woe to the generation to whom this has happened! Woe to he to whom this happens in his lifetime!" He became humble, and rain came.

1. The House of the Patriarch decreed a fast, and they did not inform R. Jochanan or Resh Laskish. In the morning, they told them. Resh Lakish said to R. Jochanan, "But we should have accepted this fast upon ourselves on the day before." He answered him, "We are drawn after them [in the obligation of the community]."

2. The House of the Patriarch decreed a fast, but no rain came. Oshaiah, the youngest of his colleagues, taught the following Baraita: (Numbers 15:24) *If this [failure to observe a commandment] was done unwittingly, hidden from the eyes of the community, [the whole community shall present one bull of the herd as a burnt offering of pleasing odor to the*

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<sup>450</sup>Rashi explains that it is forbidden to benefit from a miracle.

<sup>451</sup>Rashi explains that Samuel prayed and was graced with rain (I Samuel 12).

*Lord].* A parable: This is like a bride who is still in the house of her father. While her eyes are still bright, there is no need to check [the health of] her body. If her eyes are dim, all of her body needs to be examined.<sup>452</sup> His [the Patriarch's] servants came and wrapped a scarf around his neck and tortured him. The people of that place said to them, "Leave him be. So, too, does he harass us. Because we see that all he does is for the sake of Heaven, we do not say anything to him and we leave him be. You, too, leave him be."

3. Rabbi decreed a fast, but no rain came. Ilfa, some say, R. Ilfi, went down before [the Ark]. He said, "Who makes the wind blow," and the wind blew. "And brings down rain," and rain fell. He [Rabbi] said to him [Ilfa], "What do you do?" He answered him, "I live in a hard-pressed village in which there is no wine for Kiddush or Havdalah. I take pains to bring wine for Kiddush and Havdalah, and thus help them fulfill their obligation."

4. Rab happened upon a certain place [in which there was a drought]. He decreed a fast, but rain did not come. The prayer leader went down before [the Ark]. He said, "Who makes the wind blow," and the wind blew. "And brings down rain," and rain fell. He [Rab] said to him, "What do you do?" He answered him, "I teach children, and I teach Scripture to the children of the poor the same as the children of the rich, and anyone who is unable [to pay], I do not take [a fee] from him. [Further,] I have fish ponds, and anyone who rebels, I bribe him [with a fish] from it. We prepare it for him and appease him until he comes and learns."

5. R. Nachman decreed a fast. He prayed, but rain did not come. He said, "Take

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<sup>452</sup>Rashi explains the parable as such: The "eyes" are the House of the Patriarch which represents the people. So long as they are beyond reproach, there is no need to examine the community. Oshaiah's comment is a rebuke to the House of the Patriarch that the drought has come as a punishment to them.

[me,] Nachman and cast him from the wall to the ground!" He was humble, and rain came.

6. Rabbah decreed a fast. He prayed, but rain did not come. They said to him, "But when R. Judah would decree a fast, rain would come." He said to them, "What can I do? Is it because of study? We are superior to them, for in the years of R. Judah, all they studied [24b] was in the Order Nezikin, and we study all six Orders. And when R. Judah reached the passage in 'Ukkazin, the woman who preserves vegetables in a pot,<sup>453</sup> and some say, olives that are preserved with their leaves are pure,<sup>454</sup> he would say, "Here, I look to the discussions of Rab and Samuel,"<sup>455</sup> but we study 'Ukkazin in thirteen schools. If R. Judah would remove one shoe,<sup>456</sup> rain would come, but we have cried out all day and no Providence [responds] to us. Is it because of [my] deeds? If there is someone who has seen an [unseemly act] of mine, let him speak! But what can the leaders of a generation do when their generation does not appear favorably?"

a. R. Judah saw two certain people who were playing with food.<sup>457</sup> He said, "[I may] learn from this that there is plenty in the world." He cast his gaze, and there was a famine. The rabbis said to R. Kahana, son of R. Nechunia, who attended him [R. Judah], "Master who attends to him, arrange for him to go out through the entrance near the market." He [R.

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<sup>453</sup>Tohorot 2:1. This is not in the tractate 'Ukkazin, so the second option appears more likely. This tractate deals with the purity of foods and the ability of the stems of vegetables to confer uncleanness.

<sup>454</sup>'Ukkazin 11:1.

<sup>455</sup>Rashi explains that these passages were not clear to him, so he looked to the insights of these sages for help.

<sup>456</sup>Rashi explains that this is a sign of humiliation; see below.

<sup>457</sup>Rashi comments that they were playing catch with a loaf of bread.

Kahana] did so, and he [R. Judah] went out to the market. He [R. Judah] saw a crowd. He asked, "What is this?" They answered him, "They are standing to buy a bucket of dates [because of the extent of the famine]." He said, "[I may] learn from this that there is a famine in the world." He said to his attendant, "Remove my shoes." He removed one shoe, and rain came. When he reached to remove the other shoe, Elijah came and said to him, "The Holy One Blessed Be He said, 'If you remove the other one, I will destroy the world.'"

b. R. Mari the son of the daughter of Samuel said: I was standing on the bank of the Papa river. I saw angels who appeared as sailors who were bringing sand and loading onto boats, and it became fine flour.. All the world came to buy it [during the above-cited famine]. He [R. Judah] said, "Do not buy from them, for it is the work of a miracle."<sup>458</sup> The next day, boats of wheat arrived from Perezina.

D. Raba happened to be in Hagrunia. He decreed a fast, but no rain came. He said to them, "Let everyone maintain their fast throughout the night." The next day he said to them, "Is there anyone who saw anything in a dream? Let him speak!" R. Eleazar of Hagrunia said to them, "In mine, I was made to read in my dream, 'Good greetings to a good Master who is abundant in good and bestows beneficence from His goodness to His people.'" He [Raba] said, "Learn from this it is a favorable time for prayer." They prayed, and rain came.

1. There was a certain man who was liable for lashes in the court of Raba because he cohabited with a Cuthite woman. Raba lashed him, [and in the course of the punishment,] he died. The matter was heard of in the palace of King Shapur [of Persia], and he wanted to punish

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<sup>458</sup>As Rashi clarifies, it is best not to benefit from miracles and rather to distance oneself from them.

Raba. Ifra Hormuz, the mother of King Shapur, said to him, "Do not become involved in the matters of the Jews, for whatever they ask of their Master, He gives them." He said to her, "What is it [that they ask]?" [She answered,] "They pray and rain comes." He said to her, "That is because it is during the rainy season. But let them pray now during the [dry] season of Tammuz and let rain come!" She sent [a message] to Raba: "Concentrate and pray for there to be rain." He prayed, but rain did not come. He said before God, "Master of the Universe, (Psalms 44:2) *We have heard, O God, our fathers have told us the deeds You performed in their time, in days of old.* But with our [own] eyes we have not seen [such deeds]." Rain came until the gutters of Tzippori overflowed into the Tigris.

2. His [Raba's] father came and appeared to him in a dream and said to him, "Who is this who bothers heaven so much?" He [further] said, "Change the place where you sleep." He changed the place where he slept, and the next day he found his bed had been slashed with knives.<sup>459</sup>

E. R. Papa decreed a fast, but no rain came. He felt weak [during his fast], and he consumed a spoonful of grain. He prayed and rain did not come. R. Nachman Bar Ushpazarti said to him [mockingly], "If the Master consumes another spoonful of grain, rain will come." He was ashamed and humbled, and rain came.

F. R. Chanina Ben Dosa was traveling on a road when rain came. He said before God, "Master of the Universe, all of the world is at ease and Chanina is in distress." The rain ceased. When he reached his house, he said before God, "Master of the Universe, all of the world is in

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<sup>459</sup>Rashi explains that demons came to kill him on account of his changing the course of nature.

distress and Chanina is at ease." Rain came.

1. R. Joseph said: What benefit is the prayer of the High Priest with regard to Chanina Ben Dosa? For it was taught in a Mishna,<sup>460</sup> He [the High Priest on Yom Kippur] would pray a short prayer in the outer chamber [of the Temple]. What is it he would pray? Raba Bar Adda and Rabin Bar Adda both said in the name of R. Judah: May it be Your will before You, Lord our God, that this year be rainy and hot.

a. Of what benefit is it being hot? On the contrary, it is harmful.

b. Rather [the prayer went as follows], If it is hot, let it be rainy and full of dew.

2. [Resuming the prayer:] And let the prayers of travelers [who pray for changes in the weather] not come before You.

3. R. Acha the son of Raba in the name of R. Judah concluded [the prayer]: May one of the government of the House of Judah not come to an end, and may Your people Israel not ever need each other for sustenance nor another people.

4. R. Jūdah said in the name of Rab: Each and every day, a heavenly voice would come out and say, "All of the world is sustained because of Chanina, my son, and Chanina, my son, is satisfied with a measure of carob from the eve of a Sabbath to the next."

5. His [R. Chanina's] wife was accustomed to heat the oven with the approach of each Sabbath and toss in sticks [25a] because of the shame [that they had no bread]. She had a certain embarrassing neighbor. She [the neighbor] said, "Now, I know that they have absolutely nothing. What is all of this [that I see smoke coming from their oven]?" She went and knocked

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<sup>460</sup>Yoma 53b.

on the door. She [R. Chanina's wife] felt ashamed and went into the inner room. A miracle happened for her that she [the neighbor] saw an oven full of bread and a kneading trough full of dough. She said, "Lady, lady! Bring a baker's shovel, for your bread is burning!" She [R. Chanina's wife] answered, "So it is for that reason that I went into [the inner room]." It was taught in a Baraita: So it was that she went into [the inner room] to bring a baker's shovel because she was used to miracles.

6. His wife once said to him [R. Chanina Ben Dosa], "For how long are we to go on and suffer so much [in poverty]?" He answered her, "What shall we do?" [She responded,] "Pray that you be given something [of substance]." He prayed, and something like a palm of a hand came out and gave him one leg of a golden table. [He later said,] "I saw in a dream that in the future the righteous sit at a golden table with three legs, but you sit at a table with two legs." She said to him, "Are you content that all the world will feast at a complete table and we [will eat] at a defective table?" She continued, "What shall we do? Pray that it be taken back from you." He prayed, and it was taken back. It was taught in a Baraita: The latter miracle was greater than the former, for it has been taught that what is given is given and it is never taken back.

7. Once Friday evening just before the Sabbath, he [R. Chanina Ben Dosa] saw his daughter upset. He said to her, "My daughter, why are you upset?" She answered him, "My vessel of vinegar got mixed up with the vessel of oil, and I kindled the light for Shabbat [with the wrong fuel]." He said to her, "My daughter, what should it matter to you? The One who said to the oil that it should light may say to the vinegar that it should light." It was taught in a Baraita: It burned and continued all day long until they took from it the light for Havdalah.

8. R. Chanina Ben Dosa had goats. They said to him, "They are causing damage."



He answered, "If they are causing damage, let them be eaten by bears. But if not, let each one at evening bring a bear on its horns." That evening, each one brought a bear on its horns.

9. He had a certain neighbor who was building a house, and the beams did not reach across. She came before him and said, "I am building my house, and the beams do not reach." He said to her, "What is your name?" She said, "Aiku." He said, "Aiku, let your beams reach across." It was taught in a Baraita: They went out until they stood out a cubit on each side.

a. Some say, pieces were made [that attached themselves to the end of the beams].<sup>461</sup>

b. Polemo taught in a Baraita: I say that I saw that house, and its beams stood out a cubit on each side. They said to me, "This is the house that R. Chanina Ben Dosa covered with beams through his prayer."

10. [In response to the story of the goats:] But from where did R. Chanina Ben Dosa get goats? He was poor. And further, the sages say that we are not to raise small livestock in the Land of Israel.

a. R. Pinchas relayed an incident: A certain man came by the entrance to his [R. Chanina Ben Dosa's] house and left chickens there, and R. Chanina Ben Dosa's wife found them. He said to her, "Do not eat from their eggs." The eggs and number of chickens increased so much that they became a bother to them, so they sold them and bought with the money some goats. It happened once that the man who had lost his chickens came by, and he said to his companion, "Here is where I left my chickens." R. Chanina heard him and said to him, "Do you

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<sup>461</sup>That is, rather than the beams lengthening themselves, Rashi explains that pieces miraculously attached themselves to either side.

have some kind of identifying sign?" He said, "Yes," and he revealed to him the sign and then took the goats. These were the very goats that brought bears on their horns.

11. R. Eleazar Ben Padath was extremely poor. He had surgery,<sup>462</sup> but he did not have a thing to eat [afterwards]. He took a clove of garlic and put it in his mouth. He became weak and fell asleep. The rabbis came to ask after him. They saw him crying and laughing, and a ray of light came from his forehead. When he woke up, they said to him, "Why were you crying and laughing?" He answered them, "The Holy One Blessed Be He was sitting with me, and I said to Him, 'For how much longer am I going to suffer in this world?' He answered me, 'Eleazar, my son, would it satisfy you for Me to turn the world back to the beginning so perhaps you will be born in a time of plenty?' I said to Him, 'All that, and [only] perhaps [will I be born in a time of plenty]?' I said to Him, 'Have I lived out the larger part of my life or will I live [even more]?' He said to me, 'You have lived out [the larger part of your life].' I said before Him, 'If so, I do not want [to be born at another time].' He answered me, 'With this I will reward you that you said that you do not want such. I will give you in the World-To-Come thirteen rivers of scented, clear oil like the Euphrates and the Tigris for you to enjoy.' I said to Him, 'That and no more?' He said to me, 'And what should I give to your fellow?' I said to Him, 'I ask for the portion of someone who has no share [in the World-To-Come].'<sup>463</sup> He then hit my forehead with His fingers and said to me, 'Eleazar, my son, my arrows have struck you.'<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>462</sup>Rashi explains that this was blood-letting.

<sup>463</sup>This follows Rashi. Alternatively, it could read, "Am I asking from someone who lacks something?"

<sup>464</sup>Rashi explains that this was what caused the light to come from his forehead, a sign of God's pleasure.

G. R. Chama Bar Chanina decreed a fast, but no rain came. They said to him, "But when R. Joshua Ben Levi decreed a fast, rain came!" He said to them, "This is me, and that is the son Levi!" They said to him, "Let him come [here to pray with you]. We will focus on prayer. Maybe the hearts of the people will break and rain will come." [R. Joshua Ben Levi came, and] they prayed, but rain did not come. He said to them, "Are you agreed that rain should come for the sake of us all?"<sup>465</sup> They said, "Yes." He said, "Heaven! Heaven! Cover your face!" The sky did not become covered [with clouds]. He said, "How arrogant is the face of the sky." [Clouds] covered [the sky], and rain came.

H. Levi decreed a fast, but no rain came. He said before God, "Master of the Universe, You have ascended and remain on high, and You have not compassion on Your children." Rain came, but he came crippled.

1. R. Eleazar said: Never should one talk rebelliously toward Heaven, for so did a great man speak rebelliously toward Heaven, and he became crippled. Who was he? Levi.

2. Was this the cause? Was not Levi prostrating in front of Rabi and he became crippled?

3. Both [God's punishment and the injury] were the cause [of his lameness].

I. R. Chiyya Bar Luliani heard the clouds saying, "Let us go and give water to Amon and Moab." He said before God, "Master of the universe, when You gave the Torah to Your people Israel, you went back through all the nations of the world, and they would not accept it. And now You give them rain? Let them pour out here." They poured out at that very spot.

1. R. Chiyya Bar Luliani expounded: What is [the meaning of] what is written,

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<sup>465</sup>Rashi explains that this means that the entire community should pray as one.

(Psalms 92:13) *The righteous shall bloom like a date-palm; they thrive like a cedar in Lebanon?*

If it is said, "date-palm," why does it say, "cedar"? And if it said, "cedar," why does it say, "date-palm?" [The reason both are necessary is that] if it were to say, "date-palm" and not say, "cedar," one could say that just as a date-palm [25b] does not grow back its trunk, so also a righteous person, God forbid, does not grow back his trunk. Therefore it says, "cedar." If it were to say, "cedar," and not say, "date-palm," one could say that just as a cedar does not produce fruit, so also a righteous person, God forbid, does not produce fruit. Thus it says, "date-palm."

2. But does a cedar grow back its trunk? For it was taught in a Baraita: One who takes a tree from his fellow to cut it down [for wood], he must leave at least one handsbreadth from the ground up [in order for the tree to grow back], and one who cuts a sycamore tree, two hands breadths, a virgin sycamore, [that is, one that has never been cut before,] three hands breadths, reeds and vines, from a knot upwards, [but as for] date-palms and cedars, one may dig underneath and uproot [them], for their trunks do not grow back.

3. [In response:] Here, with what are we engaged? With other types of cedars [whose trunks do grow back], according to Rabbah Bar Hunah, for Rabbah Bar Huna said: There are ten types of cedars, as it is said, (Isaiah 41:19) *I will plant cedars in the wilderness, acacias and myrtles [and oleasters; I will set cypresses in the desert, box trees and elms as well]*.<sup>466</sup>

J. Our rabbis taught an incident in a Baraita: R. Eliezer decreed thirteen fasts on the community, but rain did not fall. During the last [fast], the community began to leave. He said to them, "Are you preparing graves for yourselves?" All of the community burst out in weeping, and

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<sup>466</sup>Rashi explains that there are seven types of trees here classified as "cedars," plus three more in Rosh Hashanah 23a.

rain came down.

1. Another incident: R. Eliezer went down before the Ark and recited twenty-four blessings, but he was not answered [with rain]. R. Akiba went down after him and said, "Our Father, our King, we have no king but You. Our Father, our King, for Your sake have compassion upon us." Rain came down.

2. There were murmurings [against R. Eliezer]. A heavenly voice came out and said, "Not because this one is greater than that one [was R. Akiba's prayer answered], but rather this one goes beyond the call of duty, and that one does not go beyond the call of duty."<sup>467</sup>

II. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: Until when may rain come down that the community ceases fasting? Enough to fill [the hole left] by the blade of a plow; these are the words of R. Meir. But the sages say: In dry soil, one handsbreadth, intermediate soil, two hands breadths, plowed soil, three hands breadths.

A. It was taught in a Baraita: R. Simeon Ben Eleazar said: You do not ever have a handsbreadth [of water come down] from above without the deep coming up three hands breadths to meet it.

1. But was it not taught in a Baraita [that the deep rises] two hands breadths?

2. There is no contradiction. In the former case, it refers to tilled soil, in the latter case, untilled soil.<sup>468</sup>

B. R. Eleazar said: When the water libation [along with the wine libation] is poured out

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<sup>467</sup>The expression literally reads, "goes beyond the ethics." Another possible reading is to be unnecessarily forgiving.

<sup>468</sup>This explanation is according to Rashi who claims that water in tilled soil penetrates deeper and thus attracts more water to rise from the deep.

on the Festival [of Sukkot], one deep says to another, "Pour out your waters. I hear the sound of two friends." As it is said, (Psalms 42:8) *When deep calls to deep in the sound of Your cataracts, all Your breakers and billows have swept over me.*

C. Rabbah said: As for me, I have seen [the angel] Ridya who looks like a three-year-old heifer with parted lips and who stands between the lower deep and the upper deep. To the upper deep he says, "Pour out your waters." To the lower deep he says, "Gush your waters." As it is said, (Song of Songs 2:12) *The libations have appeared in the land, the festival of singing has come; the song of the bull is heard in our land.*<sup>469</sup>

#### The Meiri

The mishnah of this section begins with the position that the community should not pray for the end of too much rain, which the Meiri takes to mean from the Gemara that one should not pray for the end of too much goodness. Even if some harm comes from the source of the goodness, so long as it, such as rain, is beneficial over-all, it should be allowed to continue.

The mishnah of this section also begins with the phrase that the calamities "should not come upon the community," which the Meiri understands to mean that they should not come upon a community that is not prepared for such. An alternative meaning of this phrase, which the Meiri rejects, is that the calamity should not come upon the community without the community fasting.

In the course of narrative about Choni, the Meiri examines Choni's words, noting that his reference to the clay Passover ovens that would disintegrate in a rain storm is a mark of confidence in the efficacy of his

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<sup>469</sup>The original verse reads: *The blossoms have appeared in the land, the time of singing has come; the song of the turtledove is heard in our land.* "Turtledove" is close to "bull" in Aramaic, and the "blossoms" are taken to mean the water libations that only come once a year. The "singing" is of Sukkot.

prayer. Further, Choni's allusion to the Stone of Claimants is taken to mean an exaggeration, that never would Choni pray for the end of a rain shower until the very tops of mountains were covered with water. The Palestinian Talmud (3:6) supports this reading, saying that just as it is impossible to blot out a mountain, so is it impossible to pray for the end of rain. It is this boasting and exaggeration for which Simeon Ben Shetach calls Choni to task, for he expresses the feeling that a righteous person should not be so arrogant.

This tradition that one should not pray for the end of rain, however, applies only to climates where rain cannot cause damage, such as mountains or dry, arid regions (such as the Land of Israel), but in Babylonia and similar places, it is acceptable to pray for the end of rain. The Meiri supports this view from the Gemara, citing the passage where those who work in the Temple are asked to think of their brethren in Babylonia and pray for the end of rain on their behalf that their homes not become graves through collapse or corrosion due to excessive rain.

There are incidental halachic points in the narratives in the Gemara, including the law that one should not use a borrowed object for a use other than the one for which it was borrowed and another point regarding the catching of fish on the Sabbath. Even if one captured the fish before the Sabbath and kept them in a trap in the water, if one takes out a fish for enough time so that a small area between its fins (that is, its vital part) becomes dry, one has violated the Sabbath through taking a life. Both Rashi and the Ravad understand the violation to be one of taking a life, and not necessarily trapping, which can be done before the Sabbath. Trapping is itself a violation of the Sabbath.

Closer to the theme of the tractate, the Meiri remarks that, wherever the Gemara states that the Patriarch fasted, this is to mean that a community fast was declared in the Land of Israel and no formal individual acceptance

was necessary. This is to be distinguished from individual fasts that one takes upon oneself.

The Gemara also mentions the prayer of the High Priest on Yom Kippur, the subject of which relates to rainfall. When the High Priest emerges from the Holy of Holies, he says a short prayer, which the Meiri summarizes as one that requests rain if the upcoming year is going to be hot, that the prayers of travelers (who pray for the convenience of their own travel arrangements with no thought of the effects on the region) be disregarded, that one of the government of the Patriarchate be preserved, and that Jews not become completely financially dependent on others, including other nations.

Two final halachic points the Meiri mentions are the cutting down of trees and the amount of rain that causes the end of a fast. With regard to the cutting down of trees, one should cut them so that they grow back, depending on the species. One should leave at least one handsbreadth of trunk upward from the ground in order to ensure its recover, two hands breadths for sycamores, etc., but one may completely uproot a cedar in that they do not grow back at all. Thus, leaving a stump would be of benefit to no one. The Meiri continues with this theme of measurements with regard to the amount of rainfall that ends a fast, for such a measurement varies according to the kind of soil being examined. Dry soil must have one handsbreadth of water in order to call an end to a fast, tilled soil must have three, and intermediate soil must have two. These measurements are immediately relevant to the mishnah of the next section.



I. If they were fasting and rain came down for them before sunrise, they do not complete their fast. After sunrise, they complete their fast. R. Eliezer says: Before noon, they do not complete their fast. After noon, they complete their fast.

A. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: If they were fasting and rain came down for them before sunrise, they do not complete their fast. After sunrise, they complete their fast. These are the words of R. Meir. R. Judah says: Before noon, they do not complete their fast. After noon, they complete their fast.<sup>470</sup> R. Jose says: Before the ninth hour, they do not complete their fast. After the ninth hour, they complete their fast, for so do we find with Ahab, King of Israel, who fasted from the ninth hour on, as it is said, (I Kings 21:29) "*Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself [before Me]*?"<sup>471</sup>

B. R. Judah the Patriarch decreed a fast, and rain came down for them after sunrise. He thought they should complete their fasting. R. Ammi said to him: Before and after noon is what we have learned [as the cut-off point] from the Mishnah.

C. Samuel the Little decreed a fast, and rain came before sunrise. The people thought that this indicated the community was praise-worthy. He said to them, "I will tell you a parable. What is this like? To a servant who seeks a gift from his Master. He [the Master] says to them, 'Give it to him so I will not have to hear his voice.'" Another time Samuel the Little decreed a fast, and rain came after sunset. The people thought that this indicated the community was praise-

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<sup>470</sup>This corresponds with R. Eliezer's position in the Mishnah. Rashi explains that noon was the first real meal-time of the day.

<sup>471</sup>Ahab humbled himself and fasted after being confronted with his crime against Naboth by Elijah. Apparently, R. Jose understands this to have occurred late in the day.

worthy. Samuel said to them, "This is not praise for the community. Rather, I will tell you a parable. What is this like? To a servant who seeks a gift from his Master, and he [the Master] says to them, 'Wait until he is distressed and suffering,' and only afterwards do they give him [the gift]." So what, according to Samuel the Little, is in praise of the community? One recites, "Who causes the wind to blow," and the wind blows. One recites, "Who causes the rain to fall," and rain comes.

II. A precedent: They decreed a fast in Lydia [and rain fell before noon. R. Tarfon said to them: Go, eat and drink, and make a festival! They went and ate, drank, and made a festival. When it became twilight, they recited the Great Hallel].

A. But let them recite the Hallel first [before they eat and drink]!

B. Abaye and Rabbah both say that they should only recite Hallel [26a] when satiated and with a full stomach.

C. Is this so? Did not R. Papa happen upon the synagogue in Abi-Cobar and decree a fast and rain came down for them before noon, and he recited the Hallel and afterwards they ate and drank?

D. That case is an exception, for the people of Machuza are drunkards.<sup>472</sup>

#### The Meiri

The final mishnah of this chapter names two times that serve as cut-off points for fasting, namely, sunrise or noon. If rain comes before the cut-off point, the community does not have to complete their fasting for the rest of the day. After the cut-off point, they do. Obviously, rain must fall in the sufficient amount detailed in the previous section. Those who hold with

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<sup>472</sup>Rashi explains that they may not have recited the Hallel if they started drinking.

sunrise as the cut-off point reason that this is the first meal-time for laborers and thus it constitutes a significant time for a part of the population with regard to fasting. The Meiri, however, holds that the law follows the second cut-off point, noon, for two reasons. First, once noon has passed, the majority of the day has passed as sanctified with fasting. Secondly, noon is the first major meal for the majority of the population, and the law should follow after the majority.

The mishnah also mentions a precedent in which Hallel was recited in response to the community's fast being answered with rain. The Meiri holds that one should eat and drink before reciting Hallel so that one can do so with a satiated spirit, as is mentioned in the Gemara. If, as the Gemara also mentions, there is a fear of drunkenness, the community should recite Hallel before the feasting begins.

Maimonides claims that the cut-off point, noon, for which the community either does or does not complete its fasting, applies also to the other calamities mentioned in this chapter. He excludes individuals' fasts from this cut-off point. The Ravad, however, claims that the cut-off point refers exclusively to rain, for the other calamities can pass but then come back, whereas there is no such danger with rainfall. The Ravad also differs in that the cut-off point also applies to individuals' fasts for rain.

The Meiri conclude this chapter by bringing some supplementary comments from the Palestinian Talmud (3:11), which explains that noon is a suitable cut-off point because it is then when people begin to feel afflicted in their fasting. Fasting up until noon is relatively easy, but beyond noon, one must strengthen oneself. The Palestinian Talmud adds that one should not fast for the first six hours of the Sabbath, for such would constitute fasting on the Sabbath, which is forbidden, and one would not want the majority of the day to be sanctified through fasting. The Ravad qualifies this statement, however, by claiming that if the people were engaged in rejoicing and prayer, and thus

they did not eat on the Sabbath or a holiday for the first six hours, such is acceptable. The Meiri claims that this is the custom of his day.

### END OF CHAPTER III

## Chapter IV

### The Meiri

The Meiri introduces this final chapter by explaining that, now that the laws of fast days and their liturgies have been explored, this chapter comes to conclude this subject, especially with regard to the priests raising their hands in blessing as part of the fast day liturgy as well as the procedure for Yom Kippur, Tisha B'Ab (the ninth of Ab), and "the four fasts," namely, the Tenth of Tebeth, the Fast of Esther, the Seventeenth of Tammuz, and the Fast of Gedalia. Through association, matters of the liturgical service for the members of the station (who are on duty at the same time their corresponding priests and Levites are serving their watch in the Temple) appear. Therefore, the main themes are:

1. An explanation of the raising of hands by the priests, including when and how many times, on a fast day.
2. The matters of the members of the watch and the members of the station, the content of their prayers, and the matter of the wood-offering.
3. The matter of the established fasts and their customs.

**I. Our Mishnah:**

A. At three times during the year, the priests raise their hands<sup>473</sup> four times during the day -- at *shacharit*, *musaf*, *mincha*,<sup>474</sup> and at the closing of the gates (*neilah*):<sup>475</sup> during fast days, during [the liturgical service of] the stations,<sup>476</sup> and during the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).

B. These are the stations, according to what is written, (Numbers 28:2)  
*Command the Israelite people and say to them: Be punctilious in presenting to Me at stated times the offerings of food due Me, [as offerings by fire of pleasing odor to Me].*  
And so how is one to offer his sacrifice without him standing by it? The early

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<sup>473</sup>The priests would raise their hands to bless the people, typically done only during *shacharit* and *musaf*. Here two more times during the day are indicated. See Elbogen, 62-66.

<sup>474</sup>That is, the morning service (*shacharit*), the additional service for the Sabbath, the first day of the month (*Rosh Chodesh*), and festivals (*musaf*), and the afternoon service (*mincha*).

<sup>475</sup>Albeck explains that this refers to an evening service specifically for fast days. The phrase, "closing of the gates" (*neilah*) refers to when the gates of the Temple would be closed. An alternative meaning Albeck also cites from the Palestinian Talmud (4:1), with which Rashi concurs, indicates that this refers to the closing of the gates of heaven, that is, sunset. See Hanoch Albeck, *Shisha Sidrei Mishnah* (Tel Aviv: The Bialik Institute, 1988), 341.

<sup>476</sup>See Chapter 2. As will be explained in the forthcoming passages, priests who served and worked in the Temple did so on a rotating basis. Twenty-four groups ("watches") would be on duty approximately twice a year for a week at a time. These priests would travel from their local area to come to the Temple for their watch. (Steinsaltz, 224-225.) While the priests of a certain locality came to the Temple to serve their watch, a corresponding group of non-priests from that same locality performed complementary functions. These non-priests, "members of the station," had two roles. Some would accompany the priests to Temple to supervise, and some would remain at home in their local region and perform special liturgical functions for that week. (Steinsaltz, 221.)

prophets<sup>477</sup> established twenty-four watches. Each and every watch that took their station [in the Temple] in Jerusalem consisted of priests, Levites, and Israelites. When the time came for a particular watch to go up [to work in the Temple], the priests and the Levites would go up to Jerusalem, and the Israelites of that watch would gather in their cities and read from the work of creation.<sup>478</sup>

C. The members of the station would fast four days out of seven, from Monday to Thursday. They would not fast on the eve of the Sabbath, [Friday,] because of honor due the Sabbath, and not on the first day of the week, [Sunday,] so that they would not go from rest and pleasure to toil and fasting and thus perish. On Sunday, [they would read,] (Genesis 1:1-5) *When God began* and (Gen. 1:6-8) *Let there be an expanse*. On Monday, (Gen. 1:6-8) *Let there be an expanse* and (Gen. 1:9-13) *Let the water below the sky be gathered*. On Tuesday, (Gen. 1:9-13) *Let the water below the sky be gathered* and (Gen. 1:14-19) *Let there be lights*. On Wednesday, (Gen. 1:14-19) *Let there be lights* and (Gen. 1:20-23) *Let the waters bring forth swarms*. On Thursday, (Gen. 1:20-23) *Let the waters bring forth swarms* and (Gen. 1:24-31) *Let the earth bring forth*. On Friday, (Gen. 1:24-31) *Let the earth bring forth* and (Gen. 2:1-3) *The heaven and the earth were finished*. If it was a large portion, two people read it.<sup>479</sup> A short portion, one person. [This refers to the reading] during *shacharit* and *musaf*. And at *mincha* they would enter [the synagogue] and recite it by heart, as they would recite the

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<sup>477</sup>Rashi explains that these early prophets are Samuel and David.

<sup>478</sup>Genesis 1 and 2:1-3.

<sup>479</sup>Albeck explains that "a large portion" meant more than three verses.

Shema.<sup>480</sup> On the eve of the Sabbath at *mincha* they would not enter [the synagogue] because of honor due to the Sabbath.

D. When Hallel is recited,<sup>481</sup> there is no [liturgical service by the members of the] station at *shacharit*. When there is an offering of *musaf*, there is no [liturgical service by the members of the station] at *neilah*. When there is a wood-offering,<sup>482</sup> there is no [liturgical service by the members of the station] at *mincha*. These are the words of R. Akiba. Ben Azzai said to him: Thus did R. Joshua teach: A day in which there was an offering of *musaf*, there is no [liturgical service by the members of the station] at *mincha*. On a day in which there is a wood-offering, there is no [liturgical service by the members of the station] at *neilah*. R. Akiba retracted and then taught in accordance with Ben Azzai.

E. The times of the wood-offering of the priests and the people are nine [by the following families]: (1) On the first of Nisan -- the family of Arach of Judah,<sup>483</sup> (2) on the twentieth of Tammuz -- the family of David of Judah,<sup>484</sup> (3) on the fifth of Ab -- the family

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<sup>480</sup>Deut. 6:4-9, 11:13-21, and Num. 15:37-41. See Elbogen, pp. 16-24.

<sup>481</sup>Psalms 113-118. See Elbogen, 105.

<sup>482</sup>In Nehemiah and Ezra, certain families are described as donating wood to the Temple. This will be explained in the next mishnah. Rashi comments that these families would donate wood even if there was plenty of wood in the Temple, apparently to uphold the family custom as mentioned in Scripture.

<sup>483</sup>Nehemiah 7:10.

<sup>484</sup>There does not appear to be a record of this in Scripture. Rashi comments that they are of the family of King of David.



of Parosh of Judah,<sup>485</sup> (4) on the seventh of that month [Ab] -- Jonadab of the Rechabites,<sup>486</sup> (5) on the tenth of that month [Ab] -- the family of Senaah of Benjamin,<sup>487</sup> (6) on the fifteenth of that month [Ab] -- the family of Zattu of Judah,<sup>488</sup> and with them are the priests, the Levites, all those who are uncertain of their tribe, the pestle-smugglers, and the fig-cutters,<sup>489</sup> (7) on the twentieth of that month [Ab] -- the family of Pachath Moab of Judah,<sup>490</sup> (8) on the twentieth of Elul -- the family of Adin of Judah,<sup>491</sup> (9) on the first of Tebeth -- the family of Parosh a second time. On the first of Tebeth there was no [liturgical service performed by] the station, for on it was Hallel,<sup>492</sup> the offering of *musaf*,<sup>493</sup> and the wood-offering.<sup>494</sup>

F. Five events occurred to our ancestors on the seventeenth of Tammuz, [a fast day,] and five [other things occurred] on the ninth of Ab. On the seventeenth of

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<sup>485</sup>Nehemiah 7:10.

<sup>486</sup>I Kings 10:15.

<sup>487</sup>Nehemiah 7:38.

<sup>488</sup>Nehemiah 7:13.

<sup>489</sup>The Gemara will explain who these people are. See 28a.

<sup>490</sup>Nehemiah 7:11.

<sup>491</sup>Nehemiah 7:20.

<sup>492</sup>Thus, according to Ben Azzai in a previous mishnah, there was no *shacharit*.

<sup>493</sup>There was a *musaf* offering because it was the beginning of the month, so there was not liturgical service at *mincha*.

<sup>494</sup>Thus there was no service at the closing of the gates.

Tammuz [26b] the tablets were broken,<sup>495</sup> the daily offering was terminated,<sup>496</sup> the city [of Jerusalem] was breached,<sup>497</sup> Apostomos burned the Torah, and he set up an idol in the sanctuary.<sup>498</sup> On the ninth of Ab, it was decreed upon our ancestors that they should not enter the Land of Israel,<sup>499</sup> the First and Second Temple were destroyed, Bethar was captured,<sup>500</sup> and the city [of Jerusalem] was plowed.

G. With the entry of Ab, happiness is diminished. During the week in which the ninth of Ab falls, it is forbidden to cut one's hair or to wash one's clothes,<sup>501</sup> but on Thursday these activities are permitted due to honor of the Sabbath.<sup>502</sup> On the eve of the ninth of Ab, one does not eat two cooked dishes; one does not eat meat nor drink wine. R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel says: One changes [one's usual practice].<sup>503</sup> R. Judah

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<sup>495</sup>Exodus 32:19.

<sup>496</sup>Albeck explains that the daily offering of the Second Temple was terminated with its destruction and the lack of sacrificial animals.

<sup>497</sup>Albeck explains this led to the destruction of the Second Temple.

<sup>498</sup>In the Palestinian Talmud (4:5) there is another version which states that an idol was set up, and this was the idol of Manasseh (II Kings 21:7).

<sup>499</sup>Numbers 14:29.

<sup>500</sup>Rashi explains that Bethar was a very large city of Israelites. In Gittin 57a the massacre is described.

<sup>501</sup>Albeck adds that it is forbidden until after the ninth of Ab.

<sup>502</sup>If the ninth of Ab is on Friday.

<sup>503</sup>Albeck explains that this is contrary to the previous statement, that if one is accustomed to eat two cooked meals, than one eats one, etc..

requires the turning over of the bed,<sup>504</sup> but the sages did not agree with him.

H. R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel said: There were no holidays for Israel comparable to the fifteenth of Ab and Yom Kippur, for on them the daughters of Jerusalem would go out in borrowed white garments (that one who had none would not be embarrassed; all of these garments required ritual immersion). And the daughters of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards. And what would they say? "Young man, lift up your eyes and look. What would you choose for yourself? Do not gaze upon beauty. Gaze upon family. (Proverbs 31:30) *Grace is deceptive, beauty is illusory; it is for her fear of the Lord that a woman is to be praised.* And Scripture continues, (Proverbs 31:31) *Extol her for the fruit of her hand, and let her work praise her in the gates.* So does Scripture say, (Song of Songs 3:11) *O maidens of Zion, go forth and gaze upon the King-to-whom-peace-belongs wearing the crown that His mother gave Him on His wedding day, on His day of bliss.*<sup>505</sup> *On His wedding day* -- this refers to the giving of the Torah. *On His day of bliss* -- this refers to the building of the Holy Temple, may it be built soon in our days. Amen.

II. At three times during the year, the priests raise their hands [four times during the day -- at *shacharit*, *musaf*, *mincha*, and at *neilah*: during fast days, during the liturgical service of the stations, and during Yom Kippur.]<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>504</sup>Albeck explains that this is a sign of mourning.

<sup>505</sup>The original text reads, "King Solomon." However, as Rashi explains, King Solomon's name is taken to mean, "the-King-to-whom-peace-belongs," indicating not Solomon but God.

<sup>506</sup>The Mishnah seems to imply that on all three occasions, fast days, the liturgical service of the station, and the Day of Atonement, there are all four prayer services, *shacharit*, *musaf*,

A. **Gemara:** Is there a *musaf* service on fast days and [in the liturgical service of] the stations? [No.] There appears to be a gap [in the text], and thus was it taught in the Mishnah: At three times during the year, the priests raise their hands every time they pray,<sup>507</sup> and among these times there is one occasion where they do so four times in one day, at *shacharit*, *musaf*, *mincha*, and at *neilah*. And what are these three times? Fast days, the liturgical service of the stations, and Yom Kippur.

B. R. Nachman said in the name of Rabbah Bar Abbuha: These are the words of R. Meir, but the sages say: At *shacharit* and *musaf* the priests raise their hands [to bless the people]; at *mincha* and at *neilah*, they do not raise their hands.

1. Who is meant by "sages"? It is R. Judah, for it was taught in a Baraita: At *shacharit*, *musaf*, *mincha*, and *neilah*, at all of them the priests raise their hands [to bless the people]; these are the words of R. Meir. R. Judah says: At *shacharit* and *musaf* the priests raise their hands [to bless the people]; at *mincha* and at *neilah* they do not raise their hands. R. Jose says: At *neilah* they do raise their hands, at *mincha* they do not.

2. Over what was their dispute? R. Meir thought that on each day the priests would not reach out their hands [to bless the people] at *mincha* because of [the possibility of] drunkenness.<sup>508</sup> Now [on these three occasions in which there is fasting] there is no drunkenness

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*mincha*, and *neilah*. The Gemara immediately questions this implication.

<sup>507</sup>Every time they pray, Rashi comments, means at every service, which would usually be *shacharit*, *mincha*, and *neilah*.

<sup>508</sup>Rashi explains that these prayers come in the afternoon, after the midday meal, and thus there is a possibility of the priests being intoxicated. Priests may not bless the people while drunk, as is derived from Leviticus 10:9.

[so they can bless the people at *mincha* as well]. R. Judah thought that at every day *shacharit* and *musaf* there was no drunkenness, so there was no ban [against priests from blessing the people lest they be intoxicated], while at every day *mincha* and *neilah* there was drunkenness, so there was a ban [against priests blessing the people, and thus we should follow the law that pertains to every day even though these happen to be fast days]. R. Jose thought that because *mincha* comes every day, our rabbis did place a ban [against priests from blessing the people lest they be intoxicated], but *neilah*, which does not occur every day,<sup>509</sup> our rabbis did not place a ban [against priests blessing the people].

3. R. Judah said in the name of Rab: The law follows R. Meir. R. Jochanan said: The people acted according to R. Meir. Raba said: The established custom is according to R. Meir.

a. According to the one who taught that the law follows R. Meir, we may expound this teaching in public. According to the one who taught that the established custom is according to R. Meir, we may not expound this teaching in public, but we may rely upon it for rulings. According to the one who taught that the people acted according to R. Meir, we may not rely upon it for rulings, but if someone acted in such a way, we do not make him go back [and do things differently].

b. But R. Nachman said: The law follows R. Jose.

4. And the law is according to R. Jose.

5. Currently, [if such is the law,] what is the reason for the practice of the priests

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<sup>509</sup>Rashi clarifies that *neilah*, the service at the closing of the gates, only occurs on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

reaching out their hands [to bless the people] during *mincha* of a fast day?

6. Because [*mincha*] is so close to sunset [nowadays] that it is just like *neilah*.

C. Yet all of the world [that is, all of the above-cited positions] agree that, in any case, drunkenness is forbidden for the raising of hands to take place. From where do we derive this?

1. R. Joshua Ben Levi said in the name of Bar Kappara: Why is the portion of Scripture on the priests' blessing<sup>510</sup> adjacent to the portion on the Nazirite?<sup>511</sup> To teach that just as the Nazirite is forbidden to drink wine, so is a priest who is blessing is forbidden to drink wine.

a. The father of R. Zera, and some say Oshaiah Ben Zabbda, challenged this analogy. If so, then just as the Nazirite is forbidden to eat the refuse of grapes, so also should a priest who is blessing. [As this is not the case, then the two are not analogous.]

b. R. Isaac responded: Scripture says, (Deut. 10:8) *To stand in attendance upon the Lord and to bless His name*. Just as one who stands in attendance upon God may eat the refuse of grapes, so also a priest who is blessing may eat the refuse of grapes. [27a]

c. If so, then just as one who stands in attendance cannot be blemished, so too a priest who is blessing cannot be blemished. [As this is not the case, than the two are not analogous.]

d. In that case, he is like the Nazirite [who can be blemished].

e. Why do you view these analogies [that the priest who is blessing is sometimes like a Nazirite and sometimes like one who stands in attendance at the Temple] with leniency? Rather, make the analogies with stringency [and forbid the priest who is blessing to eat

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<sup>510</sup>Numbers 6:1-21.

<sup>511</sup>Numbers 6:22-27.

the refuse of grapes like a Nazirite and forbid the priest to be blemished like one who ministers in the Temple].

f. We rely upon these [analogies] for rabbinic rulings and thus do so toward leniency.

### The Meiri

The Meiri begins his discourse by explaining the first mishnah, namely, how many times the priests are to raise their hands and on what occasions. He immediately takes up a dispute between Maimonides and the Ravad, and the Meiri naturally sides with his teacher, the Ravad. Namely, after clarifying that the raising of hands by the priests to bless the people only takes place during the day (and thus not during evening prayers), the dispute arises over what prayers take place during which days. The Meiri claims that the "fasts" indicated in our mishnah are public fasts, and on public fasts, an additional service at the end of the day is observed. He derives this from Megillah 22a which indicates that there is an additional prayer that is offered on certain fast days. The Meiri claims with the Ravad that this additional prayer is *neilah*, the prayer service at "the closing of the gates." (This contradicts Rashi who believes that this prayer is *Aneinu*, an insertion into the Amidah.) He later draws upon Pesachim 54b for additional support that a public fast always has a *neilah* service (as opposed to Tisha B'Ab which is different from a public fast in that it does not have a *neilah* service).

Maimonides (Hilchot Klei Hamikdash 6:4) and others, however, claim that there is an extra prayer inserted between *shacharit* and *mincha*, which he derives from the beginning of the passage in the Palestinian Talmud 4:1 which states that the members of the station fast and pray four times a day. Maimonides defines these "four times" as *shacharit*, *mincha*, *neilah*, and "another prayer service that they add between *shacharit* and *mincha*."

The Ravad, while commenting on the Ramban, disputes that there is such an extra service performed by the members of the station, and the closest thing that he can come up with that approximates such an idea is a *musaf* service, but such is binding on all Israel when such an occasion arises and certainly does not take place every day.

The Meiri then foreshadows some of issues that will arise later in other sections: 1) He defines the nature of the stations (see note 465) and explains that they would fast Monday through Thursday while on their watch and there would be a raising of hands to bless the people on these days. 2) However, there would be no fasting on Sunday or Friday, but there would be a *neilah* service on Sunday and Friday. Further, when there would be a *musaf* service, there would be no service by the members of the station at *neilah*, meaning that there would not be an extension of prayers at that time. 3) On the days in which there was raising of hands, the ceremony would only occur during *shacharit* and *neilah* (and during *musaf* if it occurred), but not during *mincha* for fear of drunkenness (any degree of which would invalidate the blessing).

The Meiri then repeats how the Gemara begins, clarifying and emending the text, that the mishnah means to teach that priests raise their hands to bless the people every time that they pray, and that on one occasion they do see even four times a day, namely, Yom Kippur. The law, however, does not follow this rule (such as the previously mentioned exceptions and as the Gemara will explain further).

The Meiri mentions that there are those who differ with him on the frequency of the *neilah* service. Some believe that on days when the members of the station do not fast, such as Sunday and Friday, there is no *neilah* service on these days. The Meiri stresses that there is a *neilah* service on these days as well as during any public fast during any of the series of fasts which the community accepts upon itself. However, the four fasts (the Tenth



of Tebeth, the Fast of Esther, the Seventeenth of Tammuz, and the Fast of Gedaliah) do not have an obligatory *neilah* service in that they are not pressing situations. (Yom Kippur counts as a pressing, emergency situation due to the issues of sin and repentance.) Rather, they are observed to commemorate specific instances of mourning. The Meiri mentions that, in following the opinion of R. Jochanan in Pesachim 54b, an optional *neilah* service may be observed on those days. The Meiri extends the observance of a *neilah* service to fasts that a community may take upon itself in his contemporary situation, following the opinion of some of the Geonim.

The Meiri also clarifies that the statement in this mishnah, that there is a raising of hands by the priests during *mincha*, is not the law that we are to follow, but rather, the law comes from later in the Gemara. There is a raising of hands on *shacharit* and *musaf*, as they occur before mealtime and thus there is no danger of drunkenness (which would invalidate the blessing), but *mincha* follows a major mealtime and thus falls into the danger of the priests being intoxicated. This prohibition is extended to fast days, even though there is no danger of intoxication. The Meiri explains that the every-day custom is followed, even on fast days. During the *neilah* service, however, there is a raising of hands, even though it is after meal-time. The reasoning is that the every-day custom that holds good for *mincha* does not apply to *neilah* because *neilah* is not an every-day service.

However, the custom of the day differs from what is decided by the law due to the fact that the current *neilah* service occurs at roughly the same time as *mincha*, and, therefore, it is possible to have a raising of hands at *mincha* under certain circumstances. The Meiri claims that there may be a raising of hands at *mincha* by the priests on any day in which there is no obligatory *neilah*, such as the four fasts. Any fast that does have an obligatory *neilah* service, however, precludes the possibility of a raising of

hands at *mincha*. As proof of this distinction, the Meiri brings Sotah 39b which includes a liturgical response by the people Israel during the priests' blessing. The Gemara there indicates a response for *mincha* of a fast day (from Jeremiah 14) and for *neilah* of Yom Kippur (from Psalm 128). The Meiri interprets this to mean that the response for *mincha* of a fast day applies to the four fasts and other such fasts where there is no *neilah* service (so there is a blessing by the priests at *mincha*) and not to the *mincha* service of Yom Kippur. Not only would the verses of Jeremiah be liturgically dissonant, but it would disrupt the consistency of the established system.

The Meiri acknowledges that there are those who differ with him on this issue and who claim that the priests raise their hands to bless the people on Yom Kippur. They refer to the Gemara of this passage which holds that R. Meir's position allows for such a possibility. The Meiri stresses that the end of the passage decides the law in favor of R. Jose and not R. Meir. In any case, the opposing view also holds that the raising of hands would take place at *mincha* for during that service it is certainly still day while there is a question about whether or not the *neilah* service is still day or if it is at twilight. Such a dispute is recorded in the Palestinian Talmud, Ta'anit 4:1. The Meiri rules that the *neilah* service is not at twilight and is certainly still day (so thus may the raising of hands take place). Nevertheless, Maimonides writes that if the priests did start the blessing at *mincha* of Yom Kippur, they should not be stopped but rather be allowed to finish since there is no fear that they will be intoxicated (Hilchot Tefilah 14:2).

All of these issues of raising hands by the priests, which revolve around the Temple service, also apply to the current practice with the prayer leaders.

The Meiri concludes this section by pointing out that the prohibition

against the priests from drinking alcohol when blessing the people comes from an analogy in the Gemara. The analogy is drawn for the sake of leniency, namely, that a priest who blesses the people is like a priest who ministers in the Temple in that he can eat the refuse of grapes but cannot drink wine when blessing the people, and a priest is like a Nazirite in that he can be blemished. (To draw comparisons stringently would have the priest be prohibited from being blemished, like the person who ministers in the Temple and also be prohibited from eating the refuse of grapes, like the Nazirite.) The Gemara claims that the rabbis may draw such lenient analogies but not stringent ones in cases of clear rabbinic rulings which have no direct basis from the Torah. As another example of this principle, the Meiri brings Shabbat 83b. The Gemara discusses there the subject of the uncleanness of an idol and clearly states that the uncleanness of an idol is only rabbinic law. Where there are both stringent and lenient analogies for a rabbinic law, the lenient ones are applied. This holds true for a subject that can be supported by the Torah but not based directly upon it, making it a purely rabbinic invention. Relying upon the Ravad's perspective, such rabbinic analogies do not fall within the purview of the thirteen methods of interpretation by which Scripture may be expounded (which would make such an analogy a biblically-based law).<sup>512</sup> The Meiri stresses that this is not a completely solid analogy with a biblical basis but rather an issue with biblical support but a rabbinic basis. The Meiri admits that the subject can be confusing in that some of the *mitzvot* are derived from the thirteen principles and appear to be rabbinic but in fact are biblical (such as some of the practices for the intermediate days of a festival or Rosh Chodesh).

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<sup>512</sup>For an exposition of R. Ishmael's thirteen rules of expounding Scripture, see M. Melziener, 126-127.

I. (**Our Mishnah:**) These are the stations, according to what is written, (Numbers 28:2) *Command the Israelite people [and say to them: Be punctilious in presenting to Me at stated times the offerings of food due Me, as offerings by fire of pleasing odor to Me].* [And so how is one to offer his sacrifice without him standing by it? The early prophets established twenty-four watches. Each and every watch that took their station in the Temple in Jerusalem consisted of priests, Levites, and Israelites. When the time came for a particular watch to go up to work in the Temple, the priests and the Levites would go up to Jerusalem, and the Israelites of that watch would gather in their cities and read from the work of creation].

A. What is meant [by saying, "these are the stations," and answering with a Scriptural verse instead of defining them outright]?<sup>513</sup>

1. This is what is meant: These are the stations, and what is the reason they established the stations? According to what is written, (Numbers 28:2) *Command the Israelite people and say to them: Be punctilious in presenting to Me at stated times the offerings of food due Me, as offerings by fire of pleasing odor to Me.* And so how is one to offer his sacrifice without him standing by it? The early prophets established twenty-four watches. Each and every watch that took their station in the Temple in Jerusalem consisted of priests, Levites, and Israelites. When the time came for a particular watch to go up to work in the Temple, the priests and the Levites would go up to Jerusalem.

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<sup>513</sup>Rashi explains that the question asking for the definition of the stations is followed by the reason they were established (from a citation from Scripture) and then by the procedures that actually form a definition.

2. Our rabbis taught in Baraita: There were twenty-four watches in the Land of Israel and twelve in Jericho.

a. Another twelve in Jericho is a great deal more [than the twenty-four mentioned in the Mishnah]<sup>514</sup>

b. Rather, twelve of them were in Jericho. [That is, half of the twenty-four.] When the time came for the watch to go up, half of the watch would go up from the Land of Israel to Jerusalem and half of the watch would go up to Jericho<sup>515</sup> in order that they would provide water and food for their fellows in Jerusalem.

B. R. Judah said in the name of Samuel: [The absence of any of the following,] priests, Levites, or Israelites, would prevent the sacrificial rite from taking place.<sup>516</sup>

1. In a Baraita it was taught by R. Simeon Ben Elazar: [The absence of any of the following,] priests, Levites, or musical instruments, would prevent the sacrificial rite from taking place.

2. Over what was their dispute? One Master [R. Judah in the name of Samuel] thought that song through singing was essential, while the other Master [R. Simeon Ben Elazar] thought that song through musical instruments was essential.

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<sup>514</sup>Rashi comments that this is an exclamation because another twelve would actually add up to thirty-six which is quite different from what the Mishnah teaches. Actually, these twelve will form half of the total.

<sup>515</sup>The text has been emended. One version reads, "from Jericho," while the correction reads, "to Jericho."

<sup>516</sup>Rashi comments that a lack of any of these would obstruct the legitimacy of a sacrifice. Thus, in Jerusalem at all times were priests, Levites, and Israelites, representing all those who must stand by the Temple service.

C. R. Chama Bar Guria said in the name of Rab: Moses established eight watches for Israel [from the families of the two sons of Aaron], four from Eleazar and four from Ithamar. Samuel came and raised them to sixteen. David came and raised them to twenty-four, as it is said, (I Chronicles 26:31) *They were investigated in the fortieth year of David's reign by clans of all their lines, and men of substance were found among them in Jazer-gilead.*

1. A challenge was raised [from an alternative version]: Moses established eight watches for Israel [from the families of the two sons of Aaron], four from Eleazar and four from Ithamar. David and Samuel came [together] and raised them to twenty-four, as it is said, (I Chronicles 9:22) *David and Samuel the seer established them in their office of trust.*

2. This is what was meant: From the establishment of David and Samuel the Ramathite were they raised to twenty-four [though they may not have done so together].<sup>517</sup>

3. It was taught in another Baraita: Moses established sixteen watches for Israel [from the families of the two sons of Aaron], eight from Eleazar and eight from Ithamar. When the children of Eleazar became more numerous than the children of Ithamar, they were divided and raised to twenty-four watches, as it is said, (I Chronicles 24:4) *The sons of Eleazar turned out to be more numerous by male heads than the sons of Ithamar,*<sup>518</sup> *so they divided the sons of Eleazar into sixteen chiefs of clans and the sons of Ithamar into eight clans.* And it further says, (I Chronicles 24:6) *With one clan more taken for Eleazar for each one taken of Ithamar.*

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<sup>517</sup>Rashi explains that it was thus as the original Baraita taught, that they both raised the number to twenty-four, but they raised them in chronological stages. Samuel raised them to sixteen, and David raised them to twenty-four.

<sup>518</sup>Rashi comments that the phrase "turned out to be" indicates that at first the respective populations seemed set, but later an increase became apparent.

a. What is learned by what it says further? [That is, why is the second verse necessary from the preceding passage?]

b. Because you might mistakenly think that just as the children of Eleazar increased, so did the children of Ithamar increase from the original four into eight. [Should one think so,] come and hear a response, (I Chronicles 24:6) *With one clan more taken for Eleazar for each one taken of Ithamar.*

4. This refutes the teaching of R. Chama Bar Guria.

5. R. Chama Bar Guria could answer you: This is a matter of [a dispute between two different] Tannaim. As for me, I hold the opinion of the one who taught that [Moses established] eight.<sup>519</sup>

D. Twenty-four watches came back from the exile [in Babylonia],<sup>520</sup> and they were: Jedaiah, Charim, Paschur, and Immer. The prophets that were among them rose up, [27b] divided them and raised them to twenty-four. They mixed up [lots] and put them in a basket.<sup>521</sup> Jedaiah came and drew out for himself and his company six. Charim came and drew out for himself and his company six. And so with Paschur. And so with Immer. Thus did the prophets establish among them, so that even if Jehoiarib [who served first before the Babylonian Exile], the head of the watches, should come up [from Babylonia and return to the Land of Israel thereafter],

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<sup>519</sup>Rashi explains that this simply means both opinions have the same authority, and R. Chama Bar Guria throws his lot in with one of them.

<sup>520</sup>Rashi comments that this takes place during the beginning of the Second Temple period where many Jews chose to remain in Babylonia. These families gained special worth in choosing to return to the Land of Israel.

<sup>521</sup>Rashi teaches that these four families each took on six watches for a total of twenty-four. They drew in the order that they had originally served during the First Temple.

he would not override Jedaiah from his place. Rather, Jedaiah would be principal, and Jehoiarib would be secondary to him.<sup>522</sup>

II. And the Israelites of that watch would gather in their cities and read from the work of creation.

A. On what are these words [that they should read from the work of creation] based?

1. R. Jacob Bar Acha said in the name of R. Asi: If it were not for the stations, heaven and earth would not endure, as it is said, (Genesis 15:8) [*Abraham said,*] "*O Lord God, how shall I know that I am to possess it [the Land of Israel]?*" Abraham was saying, "Master of the Universe, perhaps Israel will sin before You. Will you do to them like the generation of the Flood or the generation of the Dispersion?"<sup>523</sup> God answered him, "No." He continued before Him, "Master of the Universe, *how shall I know that I am to possess it?*" God answered him, (Genesis 15:9) *Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, [a three-year old ram, a turtledove, and a young bird].*"<sup>524</sup>

2. He continued before Him, "Master of the Universe, this is fine for a time when the Temple is standing. What is to become of them at a time when the Temple is not standing?" God answered him, "I have already established for them the order of sacrifices. When they read

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<sup>522</sup>Rashi explains that they established this to be the new order due to the merit of having come back from Babylonia and that this system would not be overridden by the previous order from the First Temple.

<sup>523</sup>See Genesis 6:1-7 and Genesis 11:1-9.

<sup>524</sup>Rashi explains that during the Flood, etc. people did not engage in sacrifices. When Israel began to perform sacrifices (as Noah did after the Flood), heaven and earth stabilized. Abraham is asking about a situation when Israel sins, by what merit should heaven and earth endure. The answer is the order of the Temple sacrifice.



of them before Me, I will account it to them as if they have sacrificed before Me and I will blot away all of their sins.”

B. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: The members of the watch [the Israelites who had gone up with the priests and Levites to Jerusalem to oversee the daily sacrifices of their people] would pray over the sacrifices of their fellows that they be received with favor, and the members of the station [the Israelites who remained in their region] would enter the synagogue and observe four fasts on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

1. On Monday [they would pray for the protection of] those who cross the sea.<sup>525</sup>

2. On Tuesday [they would pray for the protection of] those who cross deserts.<sup>526</sup>

3. On Wednesday [they would pray for protection against] the croup that it may not infect children.<sup>527</sup>

4. On Thursday [they would pray for the protection of] pregnant and nursing women. Pregnant women that they should not miscarry, and nursing women that they could nurse their children.<sup>528</sup>

5. And on the Eve of the Sabbath, they would not fast because of honor due to the

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<sup>525</sup>Rashi explains that the second day of creation talks of splitting the primeval waters, so this is an appropriate time for such a matter.

<sup>526</sup>Rashi continues that on the third day of creation that “dry land” was created, so it is fitting to pray for the protection of those who cross “dry land” from wild beasts.

<sup>527</sup>Rashi continues that on the fourth day of creation that “luminaries” (Hebrew: *miorot*) were created, which is similar to the word for “curse” (Hebrew: *mieirat*), and this disease is indeed a curse.

<sup>528</sup>Rashi explains that on the fifth day all sorts of “living creatures” were created, and the use of “life” in this instance is associated with new life.

Sabbath, all the more so [would they not fast] on the Sabbath itself.

6. On Sunday, what is the reason [that they would not fast]?

a. R. Jochanan said: Because of the Christians.<sup>529</sup>

b. R. Samuel Bar Nachmani said: Because it is the third day from when humanity was formed.<sup>530</sup>

c. Resh Lakish said: Because of the second soul. For Resh Lakish taught: A second soul is given to everyone on the Eve of the Sabbath, and on Saturday night, it is taken away, as it is said [with regard to the seventh day], (Exodus 31:17) *He ceased from work and was refreshed* (Hebrew: *vayinafash*). That is, when God rested, woe, the soul (Hebrew: *voy nefesh*) is gone!

III. On Sunday, [they would read,] (Genesis 1:1-5) *When God began* and (Gen. 1:6-8) *Let there be an expanse*.

A. It was taught in a Baraita: "When God began" [would be read by] two and "let there be an expanse" [would be read by] one.

1. It is okay that "let there be an expanse" should be read by one. It has three verses. But what is the reason that "when God began" should be read by two? It has five verses, and we are taught in a Mishnah: One who reads from the Torah may not read less than three

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<sup>529</sup>Rashi explains that this is a Christian holiday, and it would be an insult to them if Jews fasted on it.

<sup>530</sup>Rashi explains that human beings were made on Friday, and on the third day after any such traumatic event, people feel weak, as is proven by Genesis 34:25, *On the third day, when they were in pain, etc.*

verses.<sup>531</sup>

2. Rab said: He [the reader] repeats. And Samuel said: He divides.<sup>532</sup>

a. Rab said that he repeats, so what is the reason he did not say that he divides? He reasoned that any verse which Moses did not divide we may not divide.

b. And Samuel said that he divides. Can we divide? Did not R. Chanina, the Bible teacher, say, "How much trouble did I have at R. Chanina the elder's place, for he would not let me divide up verses except for children at school since it was for the sake of teaching them?"<sup>533</sup>

c. But Samuel [can respond]: In that case [of school children], what was the reason? Because otherwise was impossible. Here, [in the case of two readers for five verses] also, it is not otherwise possible.

d. And Samuel said that he divides. What is the reason he did not say that he repeats? Because of a decree pertaining to those who enter and a decree pertaining to those who leave.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>531</sup>Megillah 4:4, 23b.

<sup>532</sup>Rashi explains that according to Rab, the first reader reads the first three verses, and then the second one goes back and rereads the third verse and finishes with the second two. Samuel holds, however, that they divide the third verse in half, so that each reads two and a half verses.

<sup>533</sup>Rashi comments that R. Chanina the Bible teacher was a true expert and knew all of the chants and divisions of Scripture. If he had so much trouble getting permission to divide verses for the sake of children who otherwise would not be able to read, all the more so should such a thing be forbidden for an actual Torah reading.

<sup>534</sup>Rashi explains these decrees. People may enter the synagogue late or leave early. If someone comes in late and hears the second reader reading the last three verses of five, he may conclude that the first reader only read two. Likewise, if someone left early and only heard the

3. A challenge was issued [from the following Baraita]: They read a portion of six verses with two readers and of five with one. If [there are two readers for the portion with five verses], the first reads three verses and the second reads the [remaining] two from this portion and one from another portion. There are those who say that [he reads] three [from another portion] because we do not begin a portion with less than three verses.<sup>535</sup>

a. Let the one who said a reader should repeat [Rab], repeat. And let the one who said a reader should divide [Samuel], divide.<sup>536</sup>

b. That case is different [28] for there he [the reader] has room.<sup>537</sup>

B. If it was a large portion, two people read it. [A short portion, one person. This refers to the reading] during *shacharit* and *musaf*. And at *mincha* they would enter [the synagogue] and recite it by heart, as they would recite the Shema.

1. They asked: What is meant? At *shacharit* and at *musaf* they read from the scroll and at *mincha* they recite it by heart as they would recite the Shema or perhaps this is what is meant: At *shacharit* they read from the scroll, and at *musaf* and at *mincha* they recite it by heart

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first reader read the first three verses of five, he might conclude that the second reader read only two.

<sup>535</sup>Rashi explains that this Baraita refers to regular reading, not the reading of the members of the station of the prescribed verses of the work of creation.

<sup>536</sup>Rashi clarifies that if one holds with either of the above-cited opinions, reading from another portion is not necessary.

<sup>537</sup>Rashi explains that on a regular Torah reading, there is room for the reader to read from the following portion, which is more desirable than dividing or repeating verses. During the reading by the members of the station of the prescribed verses of the work of creation, they can read only from those specific verses mentioned in the Mishnah, and they have no room to read from another portion.

as they would recite the Shema?<sup>538</sup>

2. Come and hear [an answer], for it was taught in a Baraita: At *shacharit* and at *musaf* they would enter the synagogue, and they would read in the manner that they would read all year, [that is, from the scroll,] and at *mincha* an individual would recite it by heart.

a. R. Jose said: Can an individual recite words of Torah by heart on behalf of the community? [No.]

b. Rather, everyone entered [the synagogue] and recited [the Torah portion individually] by heart as they would recite the Shema.

#### The Meiri

The beginning of this mishnah, the Meiri claims, actually posits two questions. This interpretation is harmonious with Rashi who explains that the statement, "These are the stations," implies that a definition should follow, but instead a reason for their establishment is what follows. Thus, there are really two questions being asked. The first is: what are the stations? The second is: what is the reason for their establishment? The mishnah answers the second question first, citing the Scriptural verse that gives the reason for their establishment and explaining that a sacrifice on someone's behalf requires that person's presence (or, as was the case, a representative of that person). The person needed to stand by a sacrifice for different reasons, such as laying on hands and a confession for certain sacrifices, etc.. Any sacrifice that was made on behalf of the public required a public representative. The mishnah then returns and answers the first question, explaining that David and Samuel set up twenty-four watches of priests for shifts of duty in the Temple, and corresponding to these were stations of

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<sup>538</sup>That is, by moving the period ahead a few words, *musaf* could be included with the procedure for *mincha*. Both are grammatically acceptable readings.

Israelites who served as representatives of the nation. Each watch knew its appointed week of duty when it was supposed to come up to serve in the Temple, and each watch was divided into seven shifts (called "chief houses") that would serve on a particular day. The priests would perform the sacrificial rite, the Levites would provide music, and the Israelites would serve as representatives as well as enter the synagogues and perform a liturgical reading of the story of creation. The priests, Levites, and Israelites thus represented the entire body of Israel, each with their above-mentioned duties as is cited in the Palestinian Talmud (4:2). The Meiri mentions that there are some who believe that their were priests and Levites involved in the liturgical reading of the story of creation, but he does not believe that this is the case.

The Meiri narrates the procedure for the watches (of priests and Levites) and the stations (of Israelites), claiming that each person knew his appointed time to serve and would come from wherever he was in the country the week before to be sure he arrived on time. A question arises, however, in that it does not make sense that the Israelites could serve as representatives at the Temple and then travel all the way back to their respective towns to serve in the liturgical reading of the story of creation. The Meiri answers this question with the interpretation of the Ravad who claims that there were actually two types of stations, those that went up to Jerusalem and those that stayed behind. The ones that stayed behind in their cities were the elderly representatives of their community who could not make the journey to Jerusalem. This interpretation comes from the Tosefta (Ta'anit 3:3), which states that the elderly representatives who could not go to Jerusalem would enter the synagogues in their respective towns and read from the story of creation, ceasing from work for that week. Maimonides adds that this also held true of people who simply lived too far away from Jerusalem to make the journey (Hilchot Klei Hamikdash 6:2).

In the synagogue, they would read two portions a day, as detailed by the mishnah at hand (on Sunday, they would read, (Genesis 1:1-5) *When God began* and (Gen. 1:6-8) *Let there be an expanse, etc.*). Two people would read from the larger passage and one from the smaller, thus keeping the normal number of Torah readers to three. If there was an occasion for *musaf*, there would be four Torah readers with the fourth reading a portion having to do with the week and not creation. During *shacharit* and *musaf*, they would read the story of creation from the scrolls, but at *mincha* they would recite them by heart. Each individual would recite for him or herself, for there is a rule that no individual may recite a liturgy by heart on behalf of another. A possible exception to this rule is the High Priest on Yom Kippur, who would pray by heart on behalf of the nation. This is not entirely an exception, however, for on Yom Kippur, the members of the nation themselves are praying, and the High Priest is not praying in their stead.

The Meiri concludes his discourse on the mishnah by pointing out, once again, that there was a service by the members of the station even on days they would not fast, such as Friday and Sunday. The fact that there are Torah readings for these days proves that there was a service by the members of the station. He also adds that when the mishnah teaches that there was no *mincha* on Friday afternoon due to the honor of the Sabbath, what is meant is that there was a prayer service, but they did not recite the story of creation on that time in order to abbreviate the service.

The Meiri then focuses on several issues that are of interest in the Gemara. He points out that the members of the station that went up to Jerusalem actually divided into two groups themselves. Half of them went to Jerusalem to serve in the Temple and half of them went to nearby Jericho in order to supply food and drink to the first half. After three days, they would switch. He also points out that members of all three types in the

watch, priests, Levites, and Israelites, were needed to perform the sacrificial rite because they all have the power, according to Samuel, to "block" the sacrifice. The issue is the definition of the Hebrew word, "ma'achvim," which may mean "blocking" or "invalidating." The Ravad holds that, while the absence of one of these groups may not invalidate a sacrifice, it would in fact delay the offering of a sacrifice.

The Gemara also points out that the twenty-four watches were divided by Moses, Samuel, and David, respectively. Moses divided the families of Aaron's sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, into eight (four and four, see Deuteronomy 18:8), then Samuel raised their number to sixteen, and then David raised their number to twenty-four. David and Samuel each added eight from their own legal establishment, but it can be seen in Scripture that they acted separately. The proof comes from II Chronicles 26:31 which says that the adding took place in the fortieth year of the reign of King David, and in the fortieth year Samuel was already dead. Thus, David added the last eight himself.

The Gemara also gives different reasons as to why the members of the station would not fast on Friday and Sunday. The Mishnah, along with the Palestinian Talmud (4:3), claims that both days are purely a matter of showing honor to the Sabbath and not making a harsh transition from a day of fasting to a day of joy and vice versa. Another reason for not fasting on Sunday comes from not angering one's Gentile neighbors. While the word for Gentiles employed by the Gemara is the one commonly used for Christians, the Meiri points out that it actually indicates their Babylonian neighbors who they feared greatly and whose holiday was on Sunday, as indicated by Avodah Zara 7b. In that discussion, in which the rules of when one is allowed to buy and sell with idolaters near the idolaters' festival, Samuel states that one should avoid any transactions with such idolaters on Sunday because that is their regular holiday. Thus, the Meiri points out that there was an ancient festival of idolatry on Sunday, and the passage in this tractate does not



necessarily refer to Christians. In fact, in Jeremiah 4:16, the word commonly used for Christians at dispute in this passage is used for Babylonians:

*Watchers are coming from a distant land.* "Watchers," (Hebrew: *notzrim*) thus, according to the Meiri, indicates the ancient Babylonians and does not indicate Christians at all, clearing the Talmud of any anti-Christian polemic in his eyes.

Finally, the Meiri concludes this section by pointing out that there is a dispute in the Gemara as to how to read the selection for Sunday. The first and larger section, Genesis 1:1-5, only consists of five verses. It appears impossible that two people could read from only five verses because it is stated in Megillah 22a that no reader should read less than three verses. While several options are given in the Gemara, the Meiri favors repeating the middle verse by both readers. He does not agree that one can split this verse in half because one can only divide verses that were not traditionally divided that way for the sake of schoolchildren who could not otherwise learn. Nevertheless, the Meiri admits that the Gemara points out a problem with repeating the middle verse. Namely, there might be confusion with those who leave early and those who come late. Those who leave early might hear the first reader read three verses and assume that the second reader will read only two, and those who come late might hear the second reader read three verses and assume that the first reader read only two. Nevertheless, the Meiri favors repetition of the middle verse as the best of the possible options.

I. (**Our Mishnah:**) When Hallel is recited, there is no [liturgical service] by the members of the station [at *shacharit*. When there is an offering of *musaf*, there is no liturgical service by the members of the station at *neilah*. When there is a wood-offering, there is no liturgical service by the members of the station at *mincha*. These are the words of R. Akiba. Ben Azzai said to him: Thus did R. Joshua teach: A day in which there was an offering of *musaf*, there is no liturgical service by the members of the station at *mincha*. On a day in which there is a wood-offering, there is no liturgical service by the members of the station at *neilah*. R. Akiba retracted and then taught in accordance with Ben Azzai].

A. (**Gemara:**) What is the difference between this [the closing of the gates, *neilah*] and that [*mincha*]?<sup>539</sup>

B. These [the procedure for *mincha*] are words of Torah,<sup>540</sup> but those [the procedure for *neilah*] are the words of the rabbis.

#### The Meiri

The Meiri admits that commentary on this mishnah is difficult because two different versions of the text existed. One is as it appears here, and

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<sup>539</sup> This refers to the second to last statement of Ben Azzai's, that on a day in which there was a wood-offering, there was no liturgical service at the closing of the gates (*neilah*). R. Akiba held that on a day in which there was a wood-offering, there was no liturgical service at *mincha*. Ben Azzai's teaching is deemed to be correct, that a wood-offering cancels *neilah* but does not cancel *mincha*. Rashi explains that the question means: Why, when there is a wood-offering, is *neilah* canceled but *mincha* is not?

<sup>540</sup> Rashi comments that *mincha* is attributed to being founded by Isaac (Berachot 26b) and thus cannot be overridden by a rabbinic festival like the wood-offering. *Neilah*, however, is a rabbinic institution and can be overridden by another rabbinic institution.

another version (which the Meiri holds to be the principal text) has just the opposite. In this latter text, Ben Azzai teaches in the name of R. Joshua what in the former appears as R. Akiba's original position, and R. Akiba's original position appears as R. Joshua's teaching. In any case, the Meiri interprets both possible versions, along with the few lines of Gemara that could be made to apply to each case.

In both versions, certain liturgical additions cancel out the liturgical service of the members of the station. The Meiri holds, with the Ravad, that only the prayers and supplications are eliminated but not the reading of the story of creation. Rashi, however, holds that the reading of Scripture, too, is canceled out. The recitation of Hallel (Psalms 113-118), such as on Hanukkah, cancels out the service at *shacharit*. According to our version, an offering of *musaf*, such as on Rosh Chodesh, cancels out the service at *mincha* (and in the Meiri's version, it cancels out *neilah*) as well as the service by the members of the station that would correspond to *musaf* itself. Thus, *musaf* cancels out its own corresponding service by the station as well as a later one (in our version, *mincha*, in the Meiri's, *neilah*).

As for the wood-offering, the Meiri explains from the Palestinian Talmud (Shekalim 4:1, Ta'anit 4:4, as well as the next section in the Babylonian Talmud) that certain families, when returning from the Babylonian Exile, volunteered to donate wood from their own property when the wood-pile for the altar was empty. Because of their merit, the days upon which each family donated wood became that family's holiday, and it involved the members of Jerusalem who would come out to greet and celebrate with them. On these holidays, these families would donate wood to the Temple, even if the wood-pile was full. The Meiri also says that Rashi has another reason for the establishment of the wood-offering, but that comment is not present in our version of the Babylonian Talmud. In any case, according to the Meiri's

version, the *musaf* offering cancels out the service at *neilah* while the wood-offering cancels out the service at *mincha*. The Gemara ambiguously states that the difference between "these" is that one is biblically-based while the other is rabbinic. The Meiri interprets this for his version to mean that *musaf*, which is biblically-based, overrides *neilah*, which is rabbinic, while the wood-offering, which is rabbinic, requires reinforcement in observance in that it overrides *mincha*, which is biblically-based.

The Meiri then interprets the opposite version, which is presented here, along the same lines that Rashi presents. Namely, *musaf* overrides its own service by the station as well as that of *mincha*, both of which are biblically-based, while the wood-offering overrides the service by the station for *neilah*, both of which are rabbinic. The Gemara thus differentiates that the first two (*musaf* and *mincha*) are biblical and the second two (the wood-offering and *neilah*) are rabbinic. In this version, there is no issue of reinforcing a rabbinic institution over a biblical one at all.

The Meiri then returns to the subject of whether or not the Torah reading is canceled, which some interpreters hold. Further, some others hold that only the service by the station in Jerusalem is canceled, while the ones held in the towns around the country still continue. The Meiri holds with the Ravad that the reading of Torah, that is, the story of creation, takes place even in Jerusalem, and it is only the lengthening of prayers by the members of the station that is canceled. A description of this lengthening can be found in Megillah 26a, which illustrates the taking of the Ark into the town square on days such as a fast day.

The Meiri concludes this section by stating that the holiday of the wood-offering was a holiday only for those specific families, and it was not observed by the rest of the nation. It was not observed by members of the station in other circumstances. The Ravad brings proof of this from earlier

in the tractate (12a), which states, "R. Eliezer Ben Zadok said: I am of the children of Sena'ah of Benjamin, and one time Tisha B'Ab coincided with Shabbat, and we postponed it until after Shabbat. We fasted and we did not complete our fast because [the tenth of Ab] is our [family] holiday." The proof comes from this last statement, that the day of the wood-offering was their family holiday, and thus it was no one else's.

I. (**Our Mishnah:**) The times of the wood-offering of the priests and the people [are nine].

A. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: Why do the times of the wood-offering of the priests and the people need to be stated?

B. They responded: When the exiles came up [from Babylonia], they did not find any wood in the wood-chamber, so these [families] arose and donated from their own property. Thus the prophets among them established that even if the wood-chamber were to be full of wood, these [families] would donate from their own property, as it is said, (Nehemiah 10:35) *We have cast lots [among] the priests, Levites, and the people, to bring the wood-offering to the House of our God by clans annually at set times in order to provide fuel for the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the Teaching.*

II. [On the fifteenth of that month, Ab -- the family of Zattu of Judah,<sup>541</sup>] and with them are the priests, the Levites, all those who are uncertain of their tribe, the pestle-smugglers, and the fig-cutters.

A. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: Who were the "pestle-smugglers" and the "fig-cutters"? They said: Once, the sovereign power issued a decree over Israel they should not bring wood for the altar nor bring an offering of first-fruits to Jerusalem.<sup>542</sup> They [the government] stationed guards on the roads in the same way that Jeroboam Ben Nebat had done so that Israel could not

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<sup>541</sup>Nehemiah 7:13.

<sup>542</sup>As Rashi explains from the Mishnah, the first-fruits of all produce were to be dedicated to the Temple, so a farmer would designate such produce as it grew in his field.

go up to Jerusalem on pilgrimage.<sup>543</sup> What did the worthy and sin-fearing ones of that generation do? They brought baskets of the first-fruits and covered them with dried figs. They took them and carried a pestle on their shoulders. When they arrived at the place of the guards, they asked them, "Where are you going?" They answered them, "To make two cakes of pressed figs with the pestle on our shoulders in the mortar up ahead of us." When they had passed by them, they decorated the baskets and brought them to Jerusalem.<sup>544</sup>

B. It was taught in a Baraita: This is exactly what the family of Salami Netofah did. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: What was it that the family of Salami Netofah did? Once, the sovereign power issued a decree over Israel that they should not bring wood to the altar. They [the government] stationed guards on the roads in the same way that Jeroboam Ben Nebat had done so that Israel could not go up to Jerusalem on pilgrimage. What did the sin-fearing ones of that generation do? They brought their logs, made them into ladders, put them on their shoulders, and went to them [the guards]. When they arrived at their place, they [the guards] asked them, "Where are you going?" They answered them, "To get pigeons from the dovecote up ahead of us with the ladders that are on our shoulders." When they had passed by them, they broke them [the ladders] apart and brought them up to Jerusalem. Of those who act like them, Scripture says, (Proverbs 10:7) *The name of the righteous is invoked in blessing.* But of Jeroboam Ben Nebat and his company it continues, *But the fame of the wicked rots.*

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<sup>543</sup>See II Kings 12:25-33.

<sup>544</sup>See Bikkurim 3:3.

III. [On the twentieth of Tammuz -- the family of David of Judah...<sup>545</sup>] On the twentieth of that month [Ab] -- the family of Pachath Moab of Judah.<sup>546</sup> [On the twentieth of Elul -- the family of Adin of Judah.<sup>547</sup> On the first of Tebeth -- the family of Parosh a second time.]

A. It was taught in a Baraita: The family of Pachath Moab of Judah is the same as the family of David of Judah.<sup>548</sup> These are the words of R. Meir. R. Jose says: They are the same as Joab Ben Zeraiah.<sup>549</sup>

B. On the twentieth of Elul -- the family of Adin of Judah.

1. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: The family of Adin of Judah was the same as the family of David of Judah.<sup>550</sup> These are the words of R. Judah.

2. R. Jose says: They are the same as Joab Ben Zeraiah.<sup>551</sup>

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<sup>545</sup>There does not appear to be a record of this in Scripture. Rashi comments that they are of the family of King of David.

<sup>546</sup>Nehemiah 7:11.

<sup>547</sup>Nehemiah 7:20.

<sup>548</sup>Rashi explains that Pachath means "governor," and King David was indeed a ruler descended from Ruth of Moab.

<sup>549</sup>Rashi explains that Joab's mother was David's sister (I Chronicles 2:6) and thus was likewise a descendant of Ruth of Moab.

<sup>550</sup>Rashi teaches from II Samuel 23:8 that David is called Adino the Eznite. The similarity shows that this family is actually also David. Rashi elaborates that when David engaged in Torah study, he was gentle (Hebrew: *adin*), but when he went to war, he was hard like wood.

<sup>551</sup>Rashi points out that this is contradictory. Not only is it an alternate opinion to the words of R. Judah, but R. Jose previously said that the family of Pachath Moab was also the same as the family of Joab Ben Zeraiah. This could mean that both families were actually the family of Joab Ben Zeraiah or that this is contradictory testimony as to the position of R. Jose.



C. On the first of Tebeth -- the family of Parosh a second time.

1. According to whose words does our mishnah [that is, this particular line] conform?

2. Not R. Meir, nor R. Judah, nor R. Jose.

a. If it is in accordance with R. Meir, than let it teach that the family of David of Judah came a second time.<sup>552</sup>

b. If it is in accordance with R. Judah, than let it teach that the family of David of Judah came a second time.<sup>553</sup>

c. If it is in accordance with R. Jose, than let it teach that the family of Joab Ben Zeraiah came a second time.<sup>554</sup>

3. It is actually in accordance with R. Jose, but there are two different traditions from the Tannaim that contradict each other as to R. Jose's position.<sup>555</sup>

IV. On the first of Tebeth there was no [liturgical service performed by] the station, for

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<sup>552</sup>Rashi explains that, according to R. Meir, two families actually indicated the family of David of Judah, meaning that his family would have donated twice. As only the family of Parosh donated a second time, this cannot be.

<sup>553</sup>Likewise, R. Judah holds that two families actually indicated the family of David of Judah (although he disagrees with R. Meir as to who those families were). As only the family of Parosh donated a second time, this, too, cannot be.

<sup>554</sup>R. Jose holds that both the families of Pachath Moab and Adin of Judah were the same as the family of Joab Ben Zeraiah. This means that his family would have donated twice. As only the family of Parosh donated a second time, this cannot be.

<sup>555</sup>See note 539.

on it was Hallel,<sup>556</sup> the offering of *musaf*,<sup>557</sup> and the wood-offering.<sup>558</sup>

A. Mar Kashisha the son of R. Chisda said to R. Ashi: [28b] What is different about Hallel that it overrides its [corresponding liturgical service by the members of the station], and what is different about *musaf* that it does not override its [corresponding liturgical service by the members of the station]?<sup>559</sup>

1. R. Ashi answered him: Now, if it suspends [a service] to which it does not correspond [during the time of day, namely, *mincha*], does it not also cancel the service to which it does correspond?

2. He [Mar Kashisha] said to him [R. Ashi]: This is what I meant to say to you. It

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<sup>556</sup>Thus, according to Ben Azzai in a previous mishnah, there was no *shacharit*.

<sup>557</sup>There was a *musaf* offering because it was the beginning of the month, so there was not liturgical service at *mincha*.

<sup>558</sup>Thus there was no service at the closing of the gates (*neilah*).

<sup>559</sup>The following passage refers to a previous section of the Mishnah before it addresses the one at hand. It refers back to the following: When Hallel is recited, there is no [liturgical service by the members of the] station at *shacharit*. When there is an offering of *musaf*, there is no [liturgical service by the members of the station] at *neilah*. When there is a wood-offering, there is no [liturgical service by the members of the station] at *mincha*. These are the words of R. Akiba. Ben Azzai said to him: Thus did R. Joshua teach: A day in which there was an offering of *musaf*, there is no [liturgical service by the members of the station] at *mincha*. On a day in which there is a wood-offering, there is no [liturgical service by the members of the station] at *neilah*. R. Akiba retracted and then taught in accordance with Ben Azzai. Rashi explains that it may at first appear from this passage that, according to Ben Azzai's teaching, the *musaf* service does not cancel the corresponding liturgical service by the members of the station held at its own time but rather cancels the service held later in the day, at *mincha*. Hallel, however, cancels the service at its own time and not at some later time. The Mishnah makes no mention of a service by the station at the time of *musaf*, but the Gemara assumes there is.

should only cancel what corresponds to it.<sup>560</sup>

3. He [R. Ashi] said to him [Mar Kashisha]: R. Jose [a Tanna] taught as you hold, for it was taught in a Baraita: R. Jose says: Any day on which there is *musaf* there is a service by the station.<sup>561</sup>

a. Which service by the station [takes place on a day in which there is *musaf*]? If you say the service corresponding to *shacharit*, the Tanna Kamma [R. Akiba's original position] also [agrees]. Rather, what about the service corresponding to *musaf*? But does it not also cancel its own corresponding service? Rather, what about the service corresponding to *mincha*? But does not the wood-offering cancel that out?<sup>562</sup> Rather, is it not *neilah* [over which R. Akiba and R. Jose dispute]? Learn thus.

b. It should only cancel what corresponds to it. Learn thus.<sup>563</sup>

B. But let the mishnah also teach that [there was no liturgical service performed] by the

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<sup>560</sup>Thus, according to R. Ashi's interpretation of Ben Azzai's teaching, Hallel cancels the corresponding service by the station at *shacharit*, *musaf* cancels the corresponding services at both *musaf* and *mincha*, and the wood-offering cancels the service at *neilah*. Rashi explains that Mar Kashisha holds that *musaf* should only cancel the corresponding service at *musaf* and not also at *mincha*.

<sup>561</sup>Rashi explains that R. Jose here is differing with R. Akiba's original position, which was that *musaf* canceled out the service by the station at *neilah*. Thus, there is no dispute about *shacharit*, the service corresponding to *musaf*, or *mincha* when there is a wood-offering. R. Jose holds that there is a service at *neilah* while R. Akiba's original position claims there is not.

<sup>562</sup>Thus far, R. Akiba's original position and R. Jose agree.

<sup>563</sup>Thus, R. Jose has a third opinion, differing from both R. Akiba's original opinion and that of Ben Azzai's: Hallel cancels the service at *shacharit*, *musaf* cancels the service at *musaf*, the wood-offering cancels the service at *mincha*, and there is a service at *neilah*. Thus the three liturgical events (Hallel, *musaf*, and the wood-offering) only cancel out the liturgical services to which they correspond and leaves the fourth service, that which corresponds to *neilah*, intact.

station on the first of Nisan on which there is Hallel, *musaf*, and a wood-offering [like the first of Tebeth]<sup>564</sup>.

1. Raba said: This indicates that the Hallel that is recited at the New Moon [the first of the month] is not of biblical origin.<sup>565</sup>

2. For R. Jochanan said in the name of R. Simeon Ben Jehozadak: During eighteen days of the year [in the Land of Israel], an individual recites Hallel completely, and they are: the eight days of the Festival [of Sukkot], the eight days of Hanukkah, the first day of Passover, and on Shavuot.<sup>566</sup> And in the Diaspora, there are twenty-one days, and they are: the nine days of the Festival [of Sukkot], the eight days of Hanukkah, the first two days of Passover, and the two festival days of Shavuot.

a. Rab happened to be in Babylonia. He saw there that they recited Hallel on the New Moon. He thought to stop them. When he saw that they skipped some parts, he concluded that they must have a custom from their ancestors.

b. It was taught in a Baraita: An individual should not begin [to recite Hallel on Rosh Chodesh] but if he begins, he must complete it.

#### The Meiri

The Meiri treats this section as two separate passages, but for the sake

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<sup>564</sup>As Rashi clarifies, there was Hallel and *musaf* because it was the first of the month, and there was a wood-offering by the family of Arach of Judah.

<sup>565</sup>Rashi explains that, as the Gemara will clarify, it is an established custom but not of biblical origin. Hallel is recited on the first of Tebeth, however, because of Hanukkah, which has more authority, for the prophets of that generation established that one should recite Hallel on it as a reminder of redemption.

<sup>566</sup>The text is emended to eliminate "the first day" with regard to Shavuot, because in the Land of Israel, there was only one day.

of brevity they are treated as one here. He begins by explaining that this mishnah lists the times of the holidays for specific families who merited giving a wood-offering to the Temple. They were mainly priestly families, but they also had regular Israelites mixed in (thus it says, "of the priests and the people"). Nine holidays are listed for eight families, meaning that one family donated twice (the family of Parosh). The Meiri also notes that, included with the family of Zattu of Judah came the "pestle-smugglers" and the "fig-cutters" as well as those who were in doubt as to their tribal lineage. The Meiri retells the stories of how each group got their peculiar names, explaining that the fig-cutters performed their smuggling during the First Temple period while the pestle-smugglers acted during the Second Temple Period. He also points out that the pestle-smugglers brought wood to the Temple in Jerusalem after the fifteenth of Ab, the time of wood-cutting was finished as will be seen in a following section, but this does not mean they cut the wood at this time. Rather, they brought previously cut wood to the Temple for an offering.

The Meiri examines the passage on the first of Tebeth as a separate mishnah, and he focuses on the issue of whether or not one may say a benediction over a practice that is just a custom and not decreed directly from the Torah or derived by the rabbis. The starting point for this discussion comes from the Gemara which compares why Hallel is said on the first of Tebeth and why Hallel is said on the first of Nisan. Hallel is recited on the first of Tebeth because it is Hanukkah, and a rabbinic ordinance decrees that Hallel should be recited with a benediction. As for the first of Nisan, Hallel is recited then due to a custom that an abbreviated Hallel be recited for Rosh Chodesh. The Gemara relates how Rab discovered the existence of this custom while in Babylonia. The Meiri asks if one should recite a benediction over this custom.

The first passage he considers comes from Sukkah 44b, where there is a

custom of waving a willow branch outside of the Temple (Hoshanah Rabbah), but no benediction is recited. Although this would seem to indicate that perhaps one should thus not recite a benediction for other customs, the Meiri draws a distinction between that case and the case of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh. In that case, the custom was transient. The recitation of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, however, is an established custom observed by everyone, and therefore, one should recite a benedictions. The fact that it is an abbreviated Hallel, as Rab discovered, does not give it the pretense that one is performing an obligatory practice with the force of law. If such were the case, the Hallel would be complete, as on a festival such as the first day of Passover. The Hallel of Rosh Chodesh, however, resembles the abbreviated version found on the intermediate days of Passover. One might object to this comparison, stating that the intermediate days of Passover have more holiday restrictions with the force of law, such as a limitation on certain kinds of work, etc., but the Meiri holds that they are similar on the point of the recitation of Hallel.

Although the Meiri states that one recites an abbreviated Hallel on Rosh Chodesh and one says a benediction over it, he recommends one say the benediction in such a way that one praises God who commands us to "recite" the Hallel (and not, as another version has it, to "complete"). That is, some believe that one only praises God, who commands us "to recite" (Hebrew: *likro*) Hallel for an incomplete Hallel and "to complete" (Hebrew: *ligmor*) Hallel for a full Hallel recitation. Though the verb *ligmor* is construed by some to also mean "recite" as well as "complete," the Meiri states that this is not so, that, according to Berachot 9b, *ligmor* means only "complete" and not "recite" at all. Rather, the distinction in the benediction over a full versus an abbreviated Hallel is a recent one, and confusion can be avoided by saying the benediction over the abbreviated Hallel at Rosh Chodesh with *likro*. Further,

this benediction should be said as a community recitation and not as an individual one. If the individual, however, does begin with a benediction, the Meiri holds that he concludes with one. Others feel that the individual should not begin with a benediction, but if he does, he should not conclude with one either. In any case, an individual should only be reciting Hallel if he witnessed or benefited from a miracle personally. On Rosh Chodesh, the Hallel at question is unambiguously to be recited as a community with the appropriate benediction.

**I (Our Mishnah:)** Five events occurred to our ancestors on the seventeenth of Tammuz, [a fast day, and five other things occurred on the ninth of Ab. On the seventeenth of Tammuz the tablets were broken, the daily offering was terminated, the city of Jerusalem was breached, Apostomos burned the Torah, and he set up an idol in the sanctuary].

A. From where do we know that the tablets were broken?

1. It was taught in a Baraita: On the sixth of the month [of Sivan] the Ten Commandments were given to Israel.
2. R. Jose says: On the seventh.
3. The one who says the sixth claims that on the sixth they were given and on the seventh Moses went up. The one who says the seventh [R. Jose] claims that on the seventh they were given and on the seventh Moses went up, as it is written, (Exodus 24:16) *On the seventh day God called to Moses.*<sup>567</sup>
4. [The Baraita continues:] And it is written, (Exodus 24:18) *Moses went inside the cloud and ascended the mountain; and Moses remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights.* The [remaining] twenty-four days of Sivan and the seventeen days of Tammuz complete the forty day period. On seventeenth of Tammuz, he [Moses] came down, came forward, and broke the tablets, as it is written, (Exodus 32:19) *As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf [and the dancing, he became enraged;] he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.*

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<sup>567</sup>As Rashi explains, the point is that all agree Moses went up on the seventh of Sivan.



B. We know the daily offering was terminated from tradition.

C. Was the city of Jerusalem breached on the seventeenth? For it is written, (Jeremiah 52:6) *By the ninth day of the fourth month, [from Nisan, Tammuz,] the famine had become acute in the city.* And then it is written immediately afterwards, (Jer. 52:7) *Then the wall of the city was breached.*

1. Raba said: This is not a contradiction. Here [in Jeremiah] it refers to the First Temple, and here [in the Mishnah] it refers to the Second Temple.

2. For it is taught in a Baraita: During the First Temple period, the city of Jerusalem was breached on the ninth of Tammuz, and during the Second Temple Period, on the seventeenth.

D. We know that Apostomos burned the Torah from tradition.

E. From where do we know that he set up an idol in the sanctuary?

1. It is written, (Daniel 12:11) *From the time the daily offering was terminated and an appalling abomination was set up [it will be a thousand two hundred ninety days].*<sup>568</sup>

2. But was there just one [idol set up]? For it is written, (Daniel 9:27) *At the corner of the altar will be appalling abominations.*<sup>569</sup>

3. Raba said: There were two [idols]. One fell on its fellow and broke off its hand, and found on it was written, [29a] "You desired to destroy the Temple. I have made you pay Him with your hand."

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<sup>568</sup>Rashi comments that these events occurred on the same day. We know from previous discussion that the daily offering was terminated on the seventeenth of Tammuz, and so on that day, too, was an "appalling abomination" set up.

<sup>569</sup>Plural.

II. On the ninth of Ab, it was decreed upon our ancestors that they should not enter the Land of Israel, [the First and Second Temple were destroyed, Bethar was captured, and the city of Jerusalem was plowed].

A. [On the ninth of Ab, it was decreed upon our ancestors that they should not enter the Land of Israel.] From where do we know this?

1. As it is written, (Exodus 40:17) *In the first month of the second year, on the first of the month, the Tabernacle was set up.*<sup>570</sup>

a. And a Master said: During the first year, Moses made the Tabernacle. During the second year, Moses set up the Tabernacle and sent out the spies, as it is written, (Numbers 10:11) *In the second year, on the twentieth day of the second month, the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle of the Pact.*

b. And it is written, (Num. 10:33) *They marched from the mountain of the Lord a distance of three days.*<sup>571</sup>

2. R. Chama Bar Chanina said: On that very day, they turned away from God,<sup>572</sup> as it is written, (Num. 11:4) *The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous craving and then the Israelites wept [and said, "If only we had meat to eat!"]* And it is written, (Num. 11:18-20) *[The Lord will give you meat to eat...] a whole month.*<sup>573</sup> These add up to the twenty-second of Sivan.

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<sup>570</sup>Following Rashi's calculation, this marks the beginning of the historical narrative. The starting point from which we calculate is the twentieth of the second month, namely, Iyar.

<sup>571</sup>This takes us to the twenty-third of Iyar.

<sup>572</sup>Rashi explains that this is a pun on the phrase, "from the mountain" (Hebrew: *mihar*), which can also mean, "hurried away" (Hebrew: *maheir*).

<sup>573</sup>Rashi explains that "a whole month" equals twenty-nine days.

3. And it is written, (Num. 12:15) *So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days.* These add up to the twenty-ninth of Sivan.

4. And it is written, (Num. 13:2) *Send men [to scout the land of Canaan].*

a. And it was taught in a Baraita: On the twenty-ninth day of Sivan, Moses sent spies.

b. And it is written, (Num. 13:25) *At the end of forty days they returned from scouting the land.*

5. But there are only thirty-nine days [from the twenty-ninth of Sivan until the onset of the ninth of Ab in evening.<sup>574</sup>]

a. Abaye answered: That month of Tammuz [between Sivan and Ab] was a full month [of thirty days and not twenty-nine], as it is written, (Lamentations 1:15) *He has proclaimed a set time against me to crush my young men.*

b. And it is written, (Num. 14:1) *The whole community broke into loud cries, and the people wept that night.*

c. Rabbah said in the name of R. Jochanan: That night was the eve of Tisha B'Ab [the ninth of Ab]. The Holy One Blessed Be He said to them, "You weep for no reason, so I will establish for you weeping for generations."

B. The First Temple was destroyed [on Tisha B'Ab].

1. As it is written, (II Kings 25:8-9) *On the seventh day of the fifth month -- that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon -- Nebuzaradan, the chief of the*

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<sup>574</sup>Following Rashi's calculation: The twenty-ninth and thirtieth of Sivan (2 days) plus the twenty-nine days of Tammuz plus the first eight days of Ab (until the eve of the ninth) is only thirty-nine days. Forty days would be one day too long.

*guards, an officer of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the House of the Lord.*

2. And it is written, (Jeremiah 52:12) *On the tenth day of the fifth month -- that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon -- Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards, came to represent the king of Babylon in Jerusalem. [He burned the House of the Lord.]*

3. It was taught in a Baraita: It is impossible to say [he burned the Temple] on the seventh when it already says it happened on the tenth. And it is impossible to say [he burned the Temple] on the tenth when it already says it happened on the seventh. How can this be?

4. On the seventh, the foreigners entered the sanctuary and ate and blasphemed on the seventh, eighth, and ninth. When it was close to dark, they set it [the Temple] on fire, and it burned continuously all day long [through the tenth], as it is written, (Jer. 6:4) *Alas for us! For day is declining, the shadows of evening grow long.*

a. R. Jochanan used to say: If I had been in that generation, I would have only established [the day of mourning] to be on the tenth [and not the ninth] because most of the Temple was burned on it.

b. But our rabbis say: The beginning of the retribution is preferable [for commemoration, and not the end].

C. And the Second [Temple was destroyed]. From where do we learn this?

1. It was taught in a Baraita: Merit becomes associated with a day of merit, and punishment becomes associated with a day of punishment.<sup>575</sup>

2. They said: Just as the first Holy Temple was destroyed [on Tisha B'Ab], that

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<sup>575</sup>As Rashi explains, Tisha B'Ab had become associated as a day of calamity.

day was the eve of Tisha B' Ab, and it was the day after the Sabbath [Sunday], and it was a year after the Sabbatical year. It was the watch of Jehoiarib, and the Levites were singing songs and standing on their platform. What song were they singing? (Psalm 94:23) *He will make their evil recoil upon them, annihilate them through their own wickedness; [the Lord our God will annihilate them.]*<sup>576</sup> They did not have a time to sing, *The Lord our God will annihilate them*, when the foreigners came and conquered them. And so it was with the Second Temple.

D. Bethar [was captured]. This is known from tradition.

E. And the city of Jerusalem was plowed.<sup>577</sup>

1. It was taught in a Baraita: When Turnus Rufus the wicked destroyed the Temple, a decree was issued concerning R. Gamaliel that he be sentenced to death. A certain officer came and stood in the House of Study and said, "The one with the large nose has been requested! The one with the large nose has been requested!"<sup>578</sup> R. Gamaliel heard and went and hid from them [the guards]. He [the officer] went to him in secret and said, "If I save you, will you bring me to the World-To-Come?" He answered him, "Yes." He said to him, "Swear to me." He swore to him. He [the officer] went up to the roof, fell down, and died. For there was a tradition [among the Romans] that if a decree is issued and one of them [the officers] dies, they

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<sup>576</sup>Rashi comments that this song of God's vengeance is usually the song for Wednesday, but, as explained in Arachin 12a, when they began to sing the song for Sunday, this song came from their mouths instead.

<sup>577</sup>Rashi teaches that this is in accordance with Micah 3:12, *Zion shall be plowed as a field*.

<sup>578</sup>Rashi comments that the officer came to warn R. Gamaliel that he was to be killed.

cancel their decree.<sup>579</sup> A Heavenly Voice came out and said, "This officer is prepared for the World-To-Come."

2. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: When the First Temple was destroyed, the young priests gathered bunches and bunches of their keys to the Temple. They ascended to the roof of the Temple [while it was burning], and they said before God, "Master of the universe, since we have not merited to be faithful caretakers, let these keys be handed over to You." And they threw them toward heaven, and something like a hand came out and received them from them. Then they jumped and fell into the fire. Of them, Isaiah the prophet laments, (22:1-2) *The Valley of Vision Pronouncement. What can have happened to you that you have gone, all of you, up on the roofs, O you who were full of tumult, you clamorous town, you city so joyous? Your slain are not slain of the sword nor the dead in battle.* Even of the Holy One Blessed Be He it is said, (Is. 22:5) *[For my Lord God of Hosts had a day of tumult and din and confusion] -- Kir raged in the Valley of Vision and Shoa on the hill.*<sup>580</sup>

#### The Meiri

The Meiri claims that this mishnah explains that, although the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Ab are mainly known for the dates they commemorate with regard to the destruction of the Temples, other calamities are commemorated on these days as well. These tragic events are known from Scripture and from tradition. The Meiri adds to the explanations in the

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<sup>579</sup>Rashi explains that if one of the advisors dies, it is a sign that issuing the decree was a bad thing.

<sup>580</sup>Rashi interprets the Hebrew definitions of "Kir" and "Shoa." "Kir" is taken to mean wailing (Chullin 139b) and "Shoa" is taken to mean crying (Jeremiah 8:18). The verses thus read, with God as the subject: *For my Lord God of Hosts had a day of tumult and din and confusion - wailing and raging in the Valley of Vision and crying on the hill.*

Gemara a few notes to highlight some potentially confusing points. For instance, he reiterates that on the seventeenth of Tammuz, it was the Second Temple's walls that were breached and not the first (of which it is written about in Jeremiah that they were breached on the ninth of Tammuz). The Meiri also adds that, according to some commentators, the idol that was set up was the idol of Manasseh in the First Temple, while others (Palestinian Talmud 4:5) claim it was of Apostomos. From the book of Daniel, it can be derived that this idol was set up on the same day the daily offering was terminated, namely, the seventeenth of Tammuz.

As for the ninth of Ab (Tisha B'Ab), the Meiri summarizes the calculations that determine that it was on this day that the generation of the wilderness was told they would not enter the Promised Land. Counting from the twentieth of Iyar, we add a three day journey, plus twenty-nine days of eating nothing but meat, plus the seven days that Miriam was shut out of the camp, plus the full month of thirty days that the scouts went out to spy on the land of Canaan, adds up to the ninth of Ab. The Gemara also reconciles two dates given in Scripture (II Kings 25:8-9 and Jeremiah 52:12) which both claim to be the days upon which the First Temple was destroyed. The Gemara narrates the process by which the Temple was destroyed with the foreigners entering the sanctuary on the seventh and setting fire to the Temple on the ninth. The Temple burned throughout all of the next day. The rabbis focus upon the first lighting of the Temple as a day of commemoration, for it is the day upon which divine punishment truly started. The Meiri concludes this section by noting that some days, such as the massacre at Bethar and the plowing of the city of Jerusalem, are simply accepted tradition.

I. (**Our Mishnah:**) With the entry of Ab, happiness is diminished.

A. R. Judah the son of R. Samuel Bar Shilath said in the name of Rab: Just as with the entry of Ab, happiness is diminished, so with the entry of Adar, happiness is increased. [29b]

B. R. Papa said: Therefore, a member of Israel who has litigation with a Gentile should avoid him during Ab, for it is bad luck, but he should make himself available during Adar when his luck is good.

C. (Jeremiah 29:11) *To give you a future with hope.* R. Judah the son of R. Samuel Bar Shilath said in the name of Rab: These are palm trees and linen garments.

D. (Genesis 27:27) [*And he blessed him,*] saying, "*Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that the Lord has blessed.*" R. Judah the son of R. Samuel Bar Shilath said in the name of Rab: Like the smell of a field of apples.

II. During the week in which the ninth of Ab falls, it is forbidden to cut one's hair or to wash one's clothes, [but on Thursday these activities are permitted due to honor of the Sabbath.]

A. R. Nachman said: This is only taught with regard to washing and then immediately wearing, but washing and putting away [for later]<sup>581</sup> is permitted. But R. Shesheth said: Even washing and putting away for later is forbidden. R. Shesheth [also] said: Know [from the following precedent] that the laundry-washers<sup>582</sup> of the house of Rab did nothing [on the week of

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<sup>581</sup>Rashi explains that this means putting away until after the ninth of Ab.

<sup>582</sup>Rashi explains this odd word is actually Arabic in origin, but he also has a second explanation that relates "laundry-washers" (Aramaic: *Katzrei*) to "those who shrink garments" (Hebrew: *katzar*).



the ninth of Ab].

1. A challenge was issued [against R. Nachman's position] by R. Hamnuna [from the Mishnah]: On Thursday these activities are permitted due to honor of the Sabbath. For what? If you should say to wash and wear, what does this have to do with honor of the Sabbath? It [the prohibition in the Mishnah] can only mean washing in order to put away, and on Thursday [there is an exception] in that it is permitted. But during the rest of the week [washing, even for putting away for later] is forbidden.<sup>583</sup>

2. Actually, [in defense of R. Nachman's position,] what is meant is washing for immediate wear. But when a person only has one garment, [he may wash on Thursday in honor of the Sabbath,] as R. Asi said in the name of R. Jochanan: When one who only has one garment is permitted to wash it on the intermediate days of the Festival.<sup>584</sup>

B. And it was also said by R. Benjamin in the name of R. Eleazar [in accordance with R. Nachman]: This Mishnah only teaches about washing and wearing, but [washing and] putting away [until after the ninth of Ab] is permitted.

1. [Another] objection was raised [from a Baraita]: It is forbidden to wash clothes before the ninth of Ab, even to put them away until after the ninth of Ab, and our bleaching and

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<sup>583</sup>Rashi comments that if the prohibition against washing clothes during the week of Tisha B'Ab only applied to washing for immediate wear, then the following statement in the Mishnah would make no sense, for washing on Thursday assumes putting these clothes away for the Sabbath. Thus, the exception allows putting away, so the general rule must be against washing and putting away.

<sup>584</sup>Rashi explains that if one only has one garment, one needs to wash it, because otherwise he will not be able to do so before the Sabbath. This assumes, as will be explained further, that the ninth of Ab falls on the eve of the Sabbath. The argument here comes from the intermediate days of the Festival of Sukkot or Passover, in which doing laundry is forbidden.

pressing process [in Babylonia]<sup>585</sup> is like their laundry-process [in the Land of Israel]. But garments of linen do not fall under the category of our laundry-process.

2. [The position of R. Nachman and R. Benjamin in the name of R. Eleazar] is refuted.

C. R. Isaac Bar Giyuri sent a message in the name of R. Jochanan: Even though they said [above] that garments of linen do not fall under the category of our laundry-process, it is still forbidden to wash them during the week in which the ninth of Ab falls.

1. Rab said: The Mishnah only taught [that it is forbidden to do laundry] before [the ninth of Ab during that week], but after it is permitted. But Samuel said: Even after it, too, is forbidden.

2. An objection was raised [against the position of Samuel from a Baraita]: During the week in which the ninth of Ab falls, it is forbidden to cut one's hair or wash one's clothes, but on Thursday it is permitted due to the honor of the Sabbath. How does this work? If [Tisha B'Ab] falls on Sunday, it is permitted to wash one's clothes all week long. On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, before it is forbidden and after it is permitted. If it falls on the eve of the Sabbath, [Friday,] It is permitted to wash one's clothes on Thursday due to the honor of the Sabbath [because otherwise one would not be able to wash one's clothes during the whole week before the Sabbath]. And if one did not wash one's clothes on Thursday of that week, one is permitted to wash them on Friday from the time of *mincha* [in the late afternoon] and onward.

a. Abaye, and some say R. Acha Bar Jacob, cursed anyone who would do so.

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<sup>585</sup>This definition is according to the Meiri.

b. [The Baraita continues on a tangent:] If [Tisha B'Ab] falls on Monday or Thursday [when the Torah is normally read], three people read from the Torah and one reads the Haftarah. On Tuesday or Wednesday, one reads from the Torah and one reads the Haftarah.

c. R. Jose says: Always three people read from the Torah and one reads the Haftarah.

3. [The position of Samuel] is refuted.

4. [Not necessarily,] for Samuel could respond to you: This is a matter of two different Tannaitic teachings, for it is [also] taught in a Baraita: If the ninth of Ab falls on the Sabbath or if the eve of the ninth of Ab falls on the Sabbath, one eats and drinks all that one needs, and one puts out on one's table even as much as a feast of King Solomon did in his day. And it is forbidden to cut one's hair and wash one's clothes from the first day of the month [Rosh Chodesh] until the fast [of Tisha B'Ab]. These are the words of R. Meir. R. Judah says: All month long it is forbidden [including after Tisha B'Ab]. R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel says: It is only forbidden during that week.

a. And [the same positions are related when] it is taught in another Baraita: Mourning is acted out [in that one does not cut one's hair or do laundry] from Rosh Chodesh until the fast [of Tisha B'Ab]. These are the words of R. Meir. R. Judah says: All month long it is forbidden [including after Tisha B'Ab]. R. Simon Ben Gamaliel says: it is only forbidden during that week.

b. R. Jochanan said: The three of them derive [their different positions] from the same verse of Scripture, as it is written, (Hosea 2:13) *And I will end all her rejoicing: her festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths[ -- all her festive seasons]*. The one who says from Rosh

Chodesh until the fast [of Tisha B'Ab, R. Meir, expounds] [30a] from "*her festivals*." The one who says all month long it is forbidden [expounds] from "*new moons*." And the one who says all that week long it is forbidden [expounds] from "*Sabbaths*."

5. Raba said: The law follows R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel [in some respects]. And Raba [also] said: The law follows R. Meir [in some respects].

a. And both [statements by Raba] are for leniency and are necessary.

b. For if we [only] learned that the law follows R. Meir, we would believe that [one could not cut one's hair or wash one's clothes] from the first of the month. Thus he teaches us: The law follows R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel [in that one is only forbidden to do so during the week in which Tisha B'Ab falls].

c. And if we [only] learned that the law follows R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel, we would believe that [one could not cut one's hair or wash one's clothes] even after [Tisha B'Ab]. Thus he teaches us: The law follows R. Meir [in that one is only forbidden to do so up until Tisha B'Ab].

#### The Meiri

The Meiri takes up the discussion of what constitutes diminishing happiness, which the mishnah explains as refraining from washing clothes and getting hair cuts. He cites from Yebamot 43a which states that diminishing happiness also includes restricting commerce, building and planting (which is reinterpreted to mean constructing a wedding chamber), and feasting, yet one is permitted to engage in betrothals. The reason for betrothals comes from the Palestinian Talmud (4:6) which states that one may betroth another even on the ninth of Ab lest another come and betroth the woman first. There is also another restriction which is not required but which the Meiri says one may

voluntarily take upon oneself which is not to eat meat, for happiness is equated with eating meat in Pesachim 109a. If one does take this restriction upon oneself, one may eat other kinds of cooked dishes. In any case, just as happiness is diminished in Ab, so is happiness increased in Adar, so that Jews bless both the good and the bad in their history at their respective times (as is taught in Berachot 54a, that one should always pray in a manner appropriate to the time of year).

The mishnah also states that one may wash one's clothes on Thursday for the honor due to the Sabbath, which the Meiri explains refers to a situation when the ninth of Ab is on a Friday. Thus, one may wash one's clothes and put them away until the Sabbath. The Meiri extrapolates from this to include permission to cut one's hair on Thursday as well. This case, of Tisha B'Ab falling on a Friday, occurred only at a time when eye-witnesses set the calendar by viewing the moon. In the Meiri's day and since then, the calendar is determined by mathematics so that Tisha B'Ab never will fall on a Friday.

There are numerous opinions about how and when one may do laundry before the ninth of Ab, and the Meiri teaches that one is only restricted from doing laundry during the week in which the ninth of Ab falls. Further, one may wash clothes the day after the holiday. However, when one is proscribed from doing laundry, this includes both washing to wear immediately and washing to put away for later. Another opinion that the Meiri cites comes from the Palestinian Talmud (4:6) which holds that when Tisha B'Ab falls on the Sabbath, both weeks are permitted for doing laundry.

The Meiri then focuses on the different kinds of laundry processes, as the Gemara differentiates between how laundry is done in the Land of Israel and how it is done in Babylonia. In the Land of Israel, the water, the Meiri teaches, has a bleaching effect, and clothes do not need to be pressed. However, these different processes do not happen all at once in the Diaspora, nor do all clothes require washing, bleaching, and pressing. As far as the

prohibition against laundry goes, the Meiri claims with the Ravad that washing clothes to put away for later is permitted in the Diaspora (for it constitutes toil, not happiness) but pressing and bleaching them are not permitted. This is the meaning of the Gemara's statement that our bleaching and pressing is to be equated with their laundry-process. Rashi, however, claims that linen garments that have been washed during the week before and need only be pressed may be pressed so long as they are put away until after the ninth of Ab. Rashi applies the statement that our bleaching and pressing process is like their laundry process to wool clothing. The Meiri rejects Rashi's opinion.

The Meiri also addresses the issue raised in the Gemara of this section as well as in Moed Katan (10b, 23a, and 18a) of what happens if someone only has one set of clothing. This person may do laundry, but if he or she has even just two garments, the prohibition applies.

Finally, the Meiri takes up an tangential legal point in this section that is also addressed in Megillah (31b) which states that, regardless of what day of the week on which Tisha B'Ab falls, three people read the Torah portion and one reads the Haftarah. The Meiri rejects the idea that on Tuesday or Wednesday, on which the Torah is not normally read, only one person reads from the Torah. The law, according to the Meiri, is that not less than three may read.

Ta'anit Section 25 (30a-30b)

I. On the eve of the ninth of Ab, one does not eat two cooked dishes; [one does not eat meat nor drink wine. R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel says: One changes one's usual practice].

A. R. Judah said: This was only taught concerning midday and onward [on the eve of Tisha B'Ab], but previous to midday, it is permissible [to eat two cooked dishes]. And R. Judah said: This was only taught concerning the last meal before the fast,<sup>586</sup> but any meal which is not the last meal before the fast, it is permissible [to eat two cooked dishes].

1. And both [statements of R. Judah] are for leniency and necessary.

2. For if we [only] learned that [it is permissible to eat two cooked dishes so long as they are not] the last meal before the fast, we would have thought [that such pertains] even previous to midday. Thus he teaches: From midday onwards.

3. And if we [only] learned that [the restriction applies only] from midday and onward, we would have thought that this applies to even a meal that is not the last meal before the fast. Thus he teaches: Only concerning the last meal before the fast.

4. There is a Baraita like the former ruling [and thus offers it support], and there is a Baraita like the latter ruling [and thus offers it support].

a. A Baraita like the latter ruling: When one eats a meal on the eve of Tisha B'Ab, if in the future [his intention is to] eat another meal, he is permitted to eat meat and drink wine. But if not, it is forbidden to eat meat and drink wine.<sup>587</sup>

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<sup>586</sup>Rashi comments that he will not eat anymore from that meal onwards.

<sup>587</sup>The Gemara assumes it is likewise for two cooked meals.

b. A Baraita like the former ruling: On the eve of the ninth of Ab, one does not eat two cooked dishes; one does not eat meat nor drink wine. R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel says: One changes one's usual practice. R. Judah says: How does one change one's usual practice? If he is accustomed to eating from two cooked dishes, he only eats from one. And if he is accustomed to eating with ten people, he eats with five.<sup>588</sup> If he is accustomed to drinking ten cups of wine, he drinks five cups. When do these teachings apply? From midday onward, but previous to midday, it is permissible [to eat as usual].

5. [The same lesson is taught] in another Baraita: On the eve of the ninth of Ab, one does not eat two cooked dishes; one does not eat meat nor drink wine. These are the words of R. Meir. But the sages say: One changes one's usual practice, and one lessens one's [consumption of] meat and wine. How does one lessen? If he is accustomed to eating a pound of meat, he eats half a pound. If he is accustomed to drinking a measure of wine, he drinks half that measure of wine. And if he is not accustomed to [consuming] anything at all, he is forbidden [from eating anything]. R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel says: If he is accustomed to eating radishes or salted food<sup>589</sup> after his meal, he has permission to do so.

6. It was taught in another Baraita: Any [meal] that is intended to be [the last meal] before Tisha B'Ab, it is forbidden to eat meat and to drink wine and to bathe. Any [meal] that is not intended to be [the last meal] before Tisha B'Ab, it is permissible to eat meat and wine, but it is forbidden to bathe. R. Ishmael said in the name of Jose who said in the name of his

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<sup>588</sup>Rashi explains that these people eat with him to honor him.

<sup>589</sup>Rashi explains this is salted fish or meat which is not nutritious at all and which is explained further on.



father: Any time in which it is permitted to eat [meat],<sup>590</sup> it is permitted to bathe.

B. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: All of the divine commandments which a mourner observes are observed on Tisha B'Ab. It is forbidden to eat, drink, anoint oneself [for pleasure], wear sandals, and have sexual relations.<sup>591</sup> And it is forbidden to read from the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, or to study Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, Halacha, and Aggada. One may read from a place one is not accustomed to reading, and one may study from a place one is not accustomed to study.<sup>592</sup> And one may read Lamentations, Job, and the disturbing parts of Jeremiah. School children must remain idle [and not go to school]. For it says, (Psalms 19:9) *The precepts of the Lord are just, rejoicing the heart*. R. Judah says: One may not read even from the parts one is not accustomed to reading nor study from the parts one is not accustomed to study, but one may read Job, Lamentations, and the disturbing parts of Jeremiah. School children must remain idle [and not go to school]. For it says, (Psalms 19:9) *The precepts of the Lord are just, rejoicing the heart*.

C. One does not eat meat nor drink wine.

1. It was taught in a Baraita: But one may eat salted meat and drink [new] wine from the vat.

2. How long [must meat sit in salt before it becomes] salted meat? R. Chanina

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<sup>590</sup>Rashi's version omits the word "meat" here. Thus, even during the latter half of the eve before Tisha B'Ab, one may still bathe.

<sup>591</sup>Rashi explains that although the prohibitions against eating and drinking are not the customs of a mourner, they are observed along with those that are the practices of a mourner: no anointing, wearing sandals, or sexual relations.

<sup>592</sup>Rashi explains that studying a new passage is troublesome.

Bar Kahana said in the name of R. Ishmael: Any time that it is not like a peace-offering.<sup>593</sup>

3. And how long can wine sit in a vat [before it becomes disqualified]? Any time while it is fermenting.

a. It was taught in a Baraita: Fermenting wine does not fall under the law of exposed liquids.<sup>594</sup>

b. And how long does it ferment?

c. Three days.

D. R. Judah said in the name of Rab: Thus was the custom of R. Judah the son of R. Il'ai. On the eve of Tisha B'Ab, they would bring him dry bread in salt, and he would sit [30b] between the oven and the stove.<sup>595</sup> And he would eat, and he would drink with it a jug of water, and he looked like someone whose dead was laid out before him.

E. It was taught there in a mishnah:<sup>596</sup> In a place where they are accustomed to work on Tisha B'Ab, they may work. In a place where they are accustomed not to work on Tisha B'Ab, they may not work. In all places, sages must cease [from work]. R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel says:

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<sup>593</sup>Rashi explains that the distinction here is between "meat" and "salted meat." Something remains standard meat according to the span of time one may eat from a peace-offering, as it is written, (Lev. 7:17) *What is then left of the meat of the sacrifice shall be consumed in fire on the third day*. We can derive from this that anything beyond the third day does not count as "meat," and meat must be salted for two days and a night to be counted as "salted meat."

<sup>594</sup>First, Rashi explains that new wine is not good for people to drink like old wine and can even be harmful. Secondly, the law of exposed liquids refers to the idea that any liquid that is exposed could be poisoned by a snake (See Terumoth 8:4), but fermenting wine, Rashi says, is not in danger of being poisoned by a snake because a snake flees from the fermentation.

<sup>595</sup>Rashi comments that this was the filthiest place in the house.

<sup>596</sup>Pesachim 4:5, 54b.

One should always regard oneself as a sage [in this respect].<sup>597</sup>

1. It was also taught in a Baraita: Thus did R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel say: One should always regard oneself as a sage with respect to humbling oneself.

2. It was taught in another Baraita: R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel says: With regard to anyone who eats and drinks on Tisha B'Ab, it is as if he eats and drinks on Yom Kippur. R. Akiba says: Anyone who does work on Tisha B'Ab will never see a sign of blessing.<sup>598</sup> And the sages say: Anyone who does work on Tisha B'Ab and does not mourn for Jerusalem will not see its rejoicing [when we are redeemed], as it is said, (Isaiah 66:10) *Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her! Join in her jubilation, all you who mourned over her.* From this verse they say that everyone who mourns over Jerusalem gains merit and may see its rejoicing [when we are redeemed], and those who do not mourn over Jerusalem will not see its rejoicing [when we are redeemed].

3. It was also taught in a Baraita thus: Of anyone who eats meat and drinks wine on Tisha B'Ab,<sup>599</sup> Scripture says, (Ezekiel 32:27) *And their iniquities will be on their bones.*

II. R. Judah requires the turning over of the bed, but the sages did not agree with him.

A. It was taught in a Baraita: They [the sages] said to R. Judah: According to your

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<sup>597</sup>Albeck adds that even if one from a city where the custom is not to do work but one is in a city where they may do work, one should not do any work, and this is not considered presumptuous.

<sup>598</sup>Rashi adds: From that work. That is, there will be no profit in it.

<sup>599</sup>Rashi explains that this refers to the last meal before fasting, that one should have desisted from eating meat and drinking wine by midday.

words, what are to become of pregnant women and nursing mothers?<sup>600</sup> He [R. Judah] said to them: Also I meant that only those who can [should overturn their beds and sleep on the ground]. It was also taught in a Baraita: Thus does R. Judah agree with the sages about those who cannot [sleep on the ground should not], the sages agree with R. Judah that those who can [should overturn their beds and sleep on the ground].

B. What is the dispute between them [that our mishnah says, "The sages did not agree with him"]?

1. [Whether or not one should overturn] the remaining beds [in the house or just one's own bed on which one sleeps].<sup>601</sup> As it is taught in a Baraita: When they said to turn over the bed, they meant that one does not turn over only one's own bed but one turns over all of the beds.

2. Raba said: The law is according to the first opinion of our mishnah [R. Judah], but the sages did not agree with his view [of turning over the beds] in any respect.

#### The Meiri

The Meiri first clarifies the mishnah before going on to a lengthy discussion. He explains that, according to the first, anonymous opinion, one should not eat two cooked dishes on the eve of the ninth of Ab, whether these are of fish and eggs or of fish and cheese, etc., and one should refrain from eating meat or drinking wine at all. R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel, however, holds that one need not refrain from these things at all but rather one should diminish one's usual habit by half (eating one cooked dish instead of two, etc.). R. Judah does not speak to the issue of eating meals on the eve of the

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<sup>600</sup>Rashi comments that these women cannot lie on the ground.

<sup>601</sup>This interpretation is according to Rashi.

ninth of Ab, but he does require that one "turn over one's bed" in the fashion of a mourner and sleep on the ground. He does not require this of pregnant women or nursing mothers or anyone else who cannot bend over as such, and the sages agreed with him on this point. They did not agree with him, however, on whether one needed to turn over all of the beds of one's home or only the bed that one sleeps on. The Meiri, after having reviewed all of these opinions, affirms only the opinion which says that the Tanna Kamma does not agree with R. Judah, that one cannot eat two cooked dishes and must refrain from meat and wine on the eve of Tisha B'Ab, and no one is required to turn over their bed and sleep on the floor at all. The discussion on turning over the bed, however, is useful in its application to regular mourning practices in that it explains why pregnant women and nursing mothers who are mourning are exempt from sleeping on the floor.

As the Meiri introduces the Gemara to this section, he highlights that the restrictions on eating on the eve of the ninth of Ab apply only to the last meal one takes before fasting and only if this meal takes place in the second half of the daylight hours. That is, if one eats in the morning or if one eats in the afternoon but has the intention to eat again, later, the restrictions do not apply at all. This holds true despite how much one's intention may change with chance. The Meiri notes that in his day, people are accustomed to eat whatever they want all day and then, with sunset, eat a little bit of bread and fruit as their "final meal." The Meiri feels that this is a bit artificial. The extremely pious, however, go to unnecessary extremes and do not eat meat at all during the day before the ninth of Ab. Some places even close the butcher's shop from the beginning of Ab until after the fast.

The Gemara mentions that certain foods, such as salted meat and not-completely-fermented wine, are permissible during the last meal because they are unusual enough to not count as regular meat and wine. Salted meat must

have sat and salt for two days and one night to be considered "salted meat" and not regular meat, and wine taken from the vat during the first three days of fermentation is permissible in that it is not usual wine. The Meiri adds that boiled wine is also permitted to be drunk, even if it has only had one heating.

The Meiri then moves on to the issue of defining what two cooked dishes are. Some claim that the mishnah refers to two types of cooked food, even if it is included in the same dish. Thus one can have several types of cooked fish dishes and something else, but one cannot have a mixture of more than two types of food in one pot. Some feel it can be the same kind of food, but if it is prepared in two different ways, it counts as two different cooked dishes. The Meiri defines two cooked dishes as any two dishes, even if they are of the same kind of food, and two types of food in one pot still only counts as one dish. Further, one may bring an uncooked version of the same type of food and not worry (such as fruit or cheese). The Meiri also distinguishes between fish and meat, although there are those who do not.

The Meiri states that when one begins one's concluding meal before the fast, other restrictions take hold: bathing and anointing for pleasure. The benefit of these actions extends into the following day and can thus be concluded earlier. However, removing one's sandals, etc., do not apply until the actual day begins. Thus, all things that are forbidden from the final meal pertain throughout all of the fast day (as well as apply to all public fasts). In the Gemara, R. Ishmael holds that all restrictions, including bathing and anointing, do not take hold until the actual onset of the day, but the Meiri rejects this view. Others, however, such as the Rif (R. Isaac Alfasi, 1013-1103 of Fez), hold with R. Ishmael's opinion. The Rif does not, however, give any reason for ignoring the Baraita upon which the Meiri bases his decision.

The Meiri then investigates the issue of how one may wash oneself on a

fast day. As described earlier, one may not wash oneself, even one's hands and feet or even in cold water if the purpose is for pleasure. One may, however, wash dirt off without worry. The Meiri is also aware of a custom to allow women to wash earlier than men (starting from the time of *mincha*) based upon the belief that the Messiah will be born on the ninth of Ab. In any case, later in the section, the Meiri continues the discussion of how people may wash. Pregnant and nursing women may wash themselves on the ninth of Ab. Anyone who is dirty may wash mud off, and even people whose custom it is to wash their hands before prayer may do so and may even say a benediction over it (although Maimonides, *Hilchot Tefilah* 7:5, disagrees). There is also indirect washing that may take place with a towel. One may soak the towel and then wash oneself by wiping with it, and one may clean any mess from one's eyes, etc.. Such is described in a few places, such as the Palestinian Talmud 1:6. All of these laws and customs have been discussed in the paraphrase of the Meiri previously.

Returning to an earlier place in the Meiri's commentary, he reiterates what one may and may not study on Tisha B'Ab, for studying Torah is a joyous activity and should thus be limited. One may not read from any kind of religious literature, even a place that is new and requires strain to understand, except for Job, Lamentations, and the disturbing parts of Jeremiah. However, the parts of Scripture that are a part of the prayer service, such as the Song at the Sea and the sections on sacrifices, may be read while in prayer. The purpose of these passages, the Meiri states, is to awaken oneself to prayer and not necessarily for joy. Thus, they are fitting for the day.

The Meiri also approves of the custom that one not wear tefillin during Tisha B'Ab and in other ways act like a mourner. A mourner may be obligated not to wear tefillin and to turn over his bed, etc., and on the ninth of Ab these are not legal obligations. Nevertheless, one's custom can follow these

actions. Ironically, if the first week on one's mourning period happens to fall on the week of Tisha B'Ab, the Meiri claims that a mourner may either cease his first week of mourning for the sake of the day or may simply put them off until later, for the ninth of Ab, in spirit, is like a day of mourning.

The Meiri then moves on to the section of the Gemara that discusses work. Although it clearly states that, in a place where one is accustomed to work on the ninth of Ab one may do so, work is frowned upon by the sages. Rather, one should consider oneself, in the case of humbling oneself, like a sage who is forbidden to work on the ninth of Ab regardless of where he finds himself. Further, greetings should cease on such a day, as discussed previously.

Although a great deal is permitted on Tisha B'Ab, the Meiri notes that it is praiseworthy to go to extra lengths to show that this is a day of catastrophe and mourning as did many of the zealous of Israel in days gone by. The Gemara gives the example of one who sat between the oven and the stove, eating only salty bread and drinking water, showing visible signs of mourning. Some would not eat any cooked dishes during the whole of the day before, and some would not eat meat during all of the week before or even from the beginning of the month. The Meiri continues in this vein, explaining other customs that people did to afflict themselves in extra piety, such as closing the bath houses from Rosh Chodesh during the week in which Tisha B'Ab falls, etc.. The Meiri claims that all of these customs are praiseworthy. He also cites some exceptions, such as mentioned previously in the Gemara with regard to doing laundry, that if one needed to do laundry with Tisha B'Ab falls on Shabbat, one may even do so on Friday from *mincha* onward or that some meals may be prepared for after the day, etc.. The Meiri does not find any of these activities fitting and should be avoided. When Tisha B'Ab does fall on Shabbat, one should eat and drink on the day as normal, for Shabbat elevates



the day in holiness. Today, however, Tisha B'Ab is postponed until the next day, as are the four fasts.

The Meiri then takes up an involved discussion over how one should perform Havdalah, the ceremony marking the end of the Sabbath and the transition from the holy to the mundane,<sup>602</sup> when Tisha B'Ab falls on a Sunday. Havdalah takes place in two parts. The first part takes place in an insertion into the Amidah during the evening prayers Saturday night. The second part, the Havdalah ritual involving the use of fire, wine, spices, and a prayer of "separation," takes place after the evening prayers. When one is making the transition from the Sabbath to the ninth of Ab, the appropriateness of some of these symbols comes into question. Some would have that one should perform the Havdalah ritual without the cup of wine (because one is fasting and there is no wine allowed at the final meal) but with the fire. The Meiri rejects this view, citing several sources. First, the Ravad protests this because the first part of Havdalah, in the evening prayers of the Amidah, fulfill the obligation of the ceremony, and it is only the presence of the cup of wine that justifies further ritual. Just as the prayers of the Amidah fulfill the obligation for the blessing over the wine when there is no cup, so too do they fulfill the obligation for fire, which is inappropriate. Other perspectives hold that one cannot say a blessing over fire in that, without a cup of wine, the entire group of rituals has been violated, and the other ceremonial blessings depend on the presence of the cup of wine. Still others feel that one performs Havdalah on Sunday night, after Tisha B'Ab is over, and one still does not use fire in the ritual. As one source puts it, how can we say a blessing over fire when we have just commemorated the burning of the Temple? Another view is that one should not perform Havdalah at all in such a case, and there is even the view that one performs Havdalah while it is still the

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<sup>602</sup>See Elbogen, 41-42.

Sabbath but a child should drink the wine instead of an adult. This last perspective hinges on a discussion in Berachot 22a which claims that the evening prayers may be said while it is still the Sabbath as well as the Grace After Meals, and in each one of these prayers, one may insert Havdalah. Therefore, one may perform Havdalah while it is still the Sabbath. The Meiri rejects this view, claiming that performing Havdalah is the equivalent to declaring the day mundane, which is impossible on the Sabbath and even more so when the next day is a day of mourning, and that Havdalah cannot be performed without wine.

The Meiri holds, then, that Havdalah must take place the following night, with the departure of the fast day. As for giving the cup of wine to a child at a time when Havdalah does not seem appropriate, the Meiri rejects this practice in all but one special case. If a circumcision must take place on a fast day (Shabbat 139a), then wine can be had by a child. Otherwise, the practice is not to be, such as it was rejected with regard to Yom Kippur (see Eruvin 40b).

The Meiri then goes into a discussion of the status of Havdalah when it takes place other than Saturday night. Some hold that one can perform a late Havdalah ceremony as compensation for what should have happened Saturday night and that this compensation can take place only on Sunday, and others feel that, if one is prevented from performing Havdalah on Saturday night for whatever reason, such as a fast day, one is exempt from the ceremony and no compensation is involved. In this case of being prevented from performing Havdalah, the proper time of the ceremony can be as late as Wednesday (see Pesachim 107a). In any case, the Meiri follows this latter view and holds that, when there is a fast day on Sunday, Havdalah should take place Sunday night, with the departure of the fast day. The appropriate rituals for such a Havdalah ceremony include wine but exclude fire as well as spices (whose sweetness does not comply with the mood of the time). Even though there is

the additional perspective (represented by Nachmanides) that one should also exclude wine as a sign of lament, the Meiri holds that wine is completely appropriate for the comfort and enrichment that comes with ending a fast day.

The Meiri also mentions that one should make a special insertion into the Amidah on the ninth of Ab, as explained in the Palestinian Talmud (2:2), that any individual should mention the reason for why he is fasting in the Standing Prayer. The wording of the insertion is given in the Palestinian Talmud (2:2), asking God to be merciful upon the destroyed city of Jerusalem, recalling that the city was destroyed in fire but will also be rebuilt in fire. The Palestinian Talmud continues by claiming that this insertion is made in the seventeenth benediction, regarding the "Temple Service," for all national petitions with regard to the future and added here, while all insertions thanking God for events that have already occurred are added into the eighteenth benediction, "Thanksgiving." Personal petitions are added into the sixteenth benediction, "Who listens to prayer." Nevertheless, the Meiri states that in his day, the insertion for the ninth of Ab is added into the fourteenth benediction, "Builder of Jerusalem."<sup>603</sup> The idea behind the current liturgy is that one makes a petition according to the theme of the petition and the theme of the benediction.

Finally, the Meiri explains that the over-arching idea of these practices is to remember Jerusalem and thus share in her deliverance. All of the prayers and customs are designed to awaken grief for Jerusalem and to recall the destruction of the Temple, as it says in Psalms (137:-5-6) *If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour.* However, the Meiri also writes that one cannot mourn excessively, for though the community should afflict itself, it cannot

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<sup>603</sup>See Elbogen, 47-52.

actually do so in just proportion to the disaster and survive. Choosing life takes precedence over grief. For proof of this, the Meiri cites Bava Batra 60b, which states that many people become ascetics after the destruction of the Second Temple, but R. Joshua told them that nothing from which they abstained could actually serve to commemorate the Temple's destruction. To adequately mourn the Temple, they would have to refrain from such basic needs as food and water. As it says there, it is impossible not to grieve, because the calamity has occurred, but to mourn exceedingly is also impossible because the community cannot endure such hardship. Rather, the sages decreed that all activities should continue but be diminished somewhat. When one is plastering a house, one leaves a little bit exposed as a commemoration of the Temple. When one makes a feast, one leaves some food out. And so on. Thus is also the explanation for why one should a groom should shatter a glass at a wedding and why some grooms would put ashes on their heads in place of tefillin (as it says in Isaiah 61:3, *To provide for the mourners of Zion -- to give them a turban instead of ashes*). In remembering Jerusalem in this way, the mourners will merit sharing in the city's redemption and rejoicing in a time to come, as is explained in the Gemara with the verse (Isaiah 66:10) *Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her! Join in her jubilation, all you who mourned for her.*

I. (Our Mishnah:) R. Simeon Ben Gamaliel said: There were no holidays for Israel comparable to the fifteenth of Ab and Yom Kippur, [for on them the daughters of Jerusalem would go out in borrowed white garments (that one who had none would not be embarrassed; all of these garments required ritual immersion). And the daughters of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards. And what would they say? "Young man, lift up your eyes and look. What would you choose for yourself? Do not gaze upon beauty. Gaze upon family. (Proverbs 31:30) *Grace is deceptive, beauty is illusory; it is for her fear of the Lord that a woman is to be praised.* And Scripture continues, (Proverbs 31:31) *Extol her for the fruit of her hand, and let her work praise her in the gates.* So does Scripture say, (Song of Songs 3:11) *O maidens of Zion, go forth and gaze upon the-King-to-whom-peace-belongs wearing the crown that His mother gave Him on His wedding day, on His day of bliss.*<sup>604</sup> On His wedding day -- this refers to the giving of the Torah. On His day of bliss -- this refers to the building of the Holy Temple, may it be built soon in our days. Amen.]

A. Yom Kippur is understandable [as such a grand day of celebration], for there is forgiveness and pardon [on that day]. It is a day on which the second tablets were given.<sup>605</sup> But the fifteenth of Ab? What is its significance?

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<sup>604</sup>The original text reads, "King Solomon." However, as Rashi explains, King Solomon's name is taken to mean, "the-King-to-whom-peace-belongs," indicating not Solomon but God.

<sup>605</sup>Rashi directs us to Deuteronomy 9, when the second tablets of the Torah were given after the sin of the Golden Calf. The giving of the second set of tablets was a sign of forgiveness and pardon. Thus, that day was set aside as a day of favor to gain forgiveness before God.

B. R. Judah said in the name of Samuel: On this day [the fifteenth of Ab], the tribes were permitted to marry with one another. From where is this derived? (Numbers 36:6) *This is what the Lord has commanded concerning the daughters of Zelophehad: [They may marry anyone they wish, provided they marry into a clan of their father's tribe]*. The word "this" indicates only that generation [and thereafter they may marry outside of their father's tribe].<sup>606</sup>

C. R. Joseph said in the name of R. Nachman: On this day [the fifteenth of Ab], the tribe of Benjamin was permitted to enter the community, as it is said, (Judges 21:1) *Now the men of Israel had taken an oath at Mizpah: "None of us will give his daughter in marriage to a Benjaminite."* From where is this derived? Rab said: It says "of us," but this does not apply to our children.<sup>607</sup>

D. Rabbah Bar Bar Chanah said in the name of R. Jochanan: On this day [the fifteenth of Ab], the generation of the wilderness finished dying off,<sup>608</sup> as a Master said: Until the generation

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<sup>606</sup>Rashi explains that the daughters of Zelophehad had no male heirs, and thus they could not marry into another tribe without losing their inheritance to their husband. This constituted a restriction between intermarriage between tribes. However, the word, "this," indicates that it was restricted to that generation only, and thereafter they could intermarry.

<sup>607</sup>Rashi explains that due to the events related in Judges 19-20, the tribes of Israel swore not to intermarry with Benjamin. However, the phrase, "of us," indicates that it was restricted to that generation only, and thereafter they could intermarry.

<sup>608</sup>Rashi comments that the generation that wandered the wilderness was not permitted to enter the Promised Land, and it took forty years for this decree to be carried out. On the eve of every Tisha B'Ab, a decree would go out declaring that everyone needed to dig a grave and lie in it that night. In the morning, another decree would go out asking the living to rise, separating the living from the dead. Thus it went year after year, but in the fortieth year, all arose in the morning alive. They continued digging and lying in graves for the week lest they made some mistake in calculating when Tisha B'Ab was. On the fifteenth, they saw the full moon and realized that there had been no mistake and the decree against the generation of the wilderness had been carried out. They made this day into a holiday.

of the wilderness finished dying out, there was no revelation to Moses, as it is said, (Deut. 2:16-17) *When all the warriors among the people had died off, the Lord spoke to me.* "To me" did the revelation come.<sup>609</sup>

E. 'Ulla said: On this day [the fifteenth of Ab], Hosea Ben Elah canceled the guards that Jeroboam Ben Nebat had set up on the roads so that Israelites could not go up [to Jerusalem] for a Festival, and he said, **[31a]** "Whoever desires may go up."<sup>610</sup>

F. R. Mattenah said: On this day [the fifteenth of Ab], the slain of Bethar were given burial,<sup>611</sup> and R. Mattenah said: On the day that the slain of Bethar were given burial, those at Jabneh established the prayer, "The One who is good who does good."<sup>612</sup> "The One who is good" indicates that [the bodies of the dead] did not decompose [and thus could be buried after a long time]. "Who does good" indicates that they were [finally] given burial.

G. Rabbah and R. Joseph both said this [explanation]: On this day [the fifteenth of Ab], they ceased cutting wood for the altar, as it was taught in a Baraita that R. Eliezer the elder says: On the fifteenth of Ab and onwards, the power of the sun wanes, and they would not cut wood

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<sup>609</sup>Rashi explains that there was revelation to Moses, but it was not in privacy with intimacy as it had come before. The words, "to me," indicate a restoration of this intimacy. There are others who say the quality of the revelation Moses received diminished during this time, coming in visions and dreams and not "mouth to mouth."

<sup>610</sup>Rashi clarifies that Hosea Ben Elah was an evil king, but not as evil as his ancestors. This act of allowing Israelites to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem shows how he was not as evil as his ancestors. It comes from II Kings 17:2, *He did what was displeasing to the Lord, though not as much as the kings of Israel who preceded him.*

<sup>611</sup>Rashi explains from Gittin 57a that the citizens of Bethar were massacred in the Bar Kochba Revolt. They were not permitted to be buried until much later.

<sup>612</sup>The fourth benediction of Grace After Meals. See Steinsaltz, 173.

for the altar because it would not dry out sufficiently.<sup>613</sup>

1. R. Menashya said: They called it, "the day of the breaking of the axe."

2. From this [day] onward, he who increases, gains, and he who does not increase is gathered.<sup>614</sup> R. Joseph taught in a Baraita: What is meant by "gathered"? R. Joseph said: His mother will bury him.

II. For on them the daughters of Jerusalem [would go out in borrowed white garments (that one who had none would not be embarrassed; all of these garments required ritual immersion)].

A. It was taught in a Baraita: The daughter of the king would borrow from the daughter of the High Priest.<sup>615</sup> The daughter of the High Priest would borrow from the daughter of the Deputy High Priest.<sup>616</sup> The daughter of the Deputy High Priest [would borrow] from the daughter of the Anointed for War.<sup>617</sup> And the daughter of the Anointed for War [would borrow] from a the daughter of a regular priest. And all Israel would borrow from one another so that one who had none would not be embarrassed.

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<sup>613</sup>Rashi adds that moist wood was liable to become infested with worms, which cannot be used on the altar (Middot 2:5).

<sup>614</sup>Rashi explains that from this day the nights become longer and there is more opportunity for Torah study. Those who increase their Torah study gain life, and those who do not die prematurely (that is, he is gathered into his grave).

<sup>615</sup>Rashi explains that although these women obviously had white garments, such was the uniform practice down the hierarchy to save all, according to their station, embarrassment.

<sup>616</sup>Rashi explains that the Deputy High Priest would take the High Priest's place on Yom Kippur if need be.

<sup>617</sup>Rashi clarifies that the Anointed for War was the priest who recited Deut. 20 to the troops allowing those who were exempt to leave.



B. All of these garments required ritual immersion. R. Eleazar said: Even if they were folded and resting in a box.<sup>618</sup>

III. And the daughters of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards. [And what would they say? "Young man, lift up your eyes and look. What would you choose for yourself? Do not gaze upon beauty. Gaze upon family."]

A. It was taught in a Baraita: He who did not have a wife would turn toward there.

B. The distinguished members of the community would say, "Young man," etc..

1. Our rabbis taught in a Baraita: What would the beautiful women among them say? "Turn your eyes to beauty, for a woman is for beauty."

2. What would the distinguished among them say? "Turn your eyes to family, for a woman is for raising children."<sup>619</sup>

3. What would the unattractive among them say? "Make an acquisition for the sake of Heaven, only adorn us in gold."<sup>620</sup>

C. 'Ulla Bira'ah said in the name of R. Eleazar: In the future, the Holy One Blessed Be He will make a ring of the righteous as in a chorus, and He will sit in their middle in the Garden of Eden. Each and every one will point with his finger, as it is said, (Isaiah 25:9) *In that day they shall say: This is our God; We trusted Him, and He delivered us. This is the Lord, in whom we trusted; let us rejoice and exult in His deliverance!*

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<sup>618</sup>Rashi explains that even those these clothes were not in danger of contamination, universal immersion spares embarrassment for those that did need immersion.

<sup>619</sup>Rashi adds that those of good lineage never lack suitors.

<sup>620</sup>Rashi says that after they are married, it is a custom to beautify one's wife with nice clothes, etc..

### The Meiri

The Meiri explains that the final mishnah comes with a message of hope and deliverance so that no one despairs from the great number of calamities which make up the subject of this tractate. The mishnah highlights two days that outshine all other days in terms of rejoicing. The first is Yom Kippur, on which is pardon and forgiveness as well as a commemoration of when the second set of tablets were given to Moses for Israel. The Meiri recounts the events leading up to this event which has been explained earlier. The second day of rejoicing is Tu B'Ab, or the fifteenth of Ab, for which the Gemara gives many reasons as to why it is such a day of rejoicing. The Meiri reiterates them all: 1) It was on this day that the generation of the wilderness finished dying off so that the Israelites could enter the Promised Land (the Meiri cites the explanation from the Palestinian Talmud, 4:7, that Rashi gives as to how this came to be commemorated on the fifteenth of Ab, see Rashi). 2) Direct revelation to Moses was restored in all its clarity. 3) On this day, the tribes could intermarry with one another. 4) The tribe of Benjamin could enter the community-at-large on this day. 5) This is the day sentries were taken off the roads from the Kingdom of Israel to Judea to allow the members of the Northern Kingdom to come to Jerusalem on pilgrimage. 6) It was on this day that the slain of Bethar were allowed burial who had miraculously not decomposed and who had a blessing in the Grace After Meals commemorate them. 7) This was the day that cutting wood for the altar ceased, lest the wood not dry out thereafter and, as explained in the Palestinian Talmud 4:7, there be maggots that would make the wood ineligible for the Temple. 8) As the days got shorter from the fifteenth on, students could spend more time at night studying Torah.

Finally, 9) as the mishnah states, this was a day in which single men could view eligible women and arrange marriages with their families. The women would go about in white garments that were borrowed and immersed. These

two requirements kept those who did not have a white garment or who did need to immerse their garment from shame. Even new garments in a box required immersion, for, as the Palestinian Talmud explains (4:7), if a woman immersed a garment, she would be more willing to lend it out now that it was not in "mint condition." This is supported by Chullin 123a, which explains that if one is willing to immerse a garment ritually, one is willing to let other things happen to it as well.

In any case, the Gemara explains that the beautiful women would ask the young men to look upon their beauty, while those of good lineage would ask them to look upon their family, while the unattractive ones would ask the young men to be pious and act for the sake of Heaven. The men would then go and make a betrothal with the women's families.

The Meiri concludes with an exposition of Song of Songs 3:11 from the mishnah, which speaks of King Solomon's wedding day and his day of bliss. King Solomon here is not supposed to refer to David's son but actually be a euphemism for God, translating Solomon's name as, "the-King-to-whom-peace-belongs." His wedding day is a reference to the day of the giving of the Torah, and the Meiri concludes his commentary to this tractate by stating that raising children to study Torah and do God's will is where real joy resides, as Scripture says, (Proverbs 23:24) *The father of a righteous man will exult; he who begets a wise son will rejoice in him.*

#### END OF CHAPTER IV

## **Epilogue: Tractate Ta'anit and the Method of the Meiri**

Tractate Ta'anit, like all tractates in the Talmud, appears as if it is the recording of an ongoing dialogue. The rabbis, from different times and places, appear to be discussing different topics with each other. The editors of the Talmud have created the illusion that we are overhearing the sages' conversation. Our task is to sort out the speakers and the themes, spending much of our energy discovering where topics begin, end, and often, begin again. The goal of the sages and of the editors of the Talmud was to seek truth through respectful dialogue, and we are invited to participate in the give-and-take of the arguments and exchange of perspectives.

Such an approach results in an arrangement of topics that does not resemble the order of a treatise. As in any conversation, the debates move from topic to topic through association, often addressing a certain subject, leaving it, and then addressing it again many pages later. The Talmud demands openness and lends itself to ever-new forms of questioning. The discussions can expand outward with apparently no limit.

Subsequent tradition, however, demanded not more expansion on the Talmud's subjects but clarity and decisiveness. Whereas the Talmud seeks more discussion, later scholars, such as the Meiri, wanted to decide what the law should be and by what ethics one should live. They wanted to apply the Talmud's concerns to their time and place. This does not mean that they did not want to halt the expansion of the Talmud's discussion. Rather, the Meiri and other legal scholars wanted to focus the discussions in a more direct fashion.

The Meiri, as discussed in the introduction, seeks to achieve clarity through a certain

method. His method has three main features. First, he creates a digest of themes by following the order of the Mishnah. These themes break down into legal concerns and ethical teachings. Second, he uses the Palestinian Talmud to clarify texts in the Babylonian Talmud. Finally, he compares and contrasts the discussions of the legal authorities that have preceded him, principally focusing on Rashi, Maimonides, the Ravad, and the Rif.

An analysis of these methods over the entire tractate would be too exhaustive. Rather, the Meiri's method can be illustrated by focusing on two of the most critical sections of the tractate, presented here in sections 6 and 25. Section 6 deals with the beginning of the cycle of fasts that the sages declared in response to drought. Section 25 addresses ritual concerns around Tisha B'Ab. The Meiri comments at length on these issues, and all aspects of his methodology show themselves.

The first feature of the Meiri's approach, the outlining of legal and ethical themes, is apparent at first glance in both sections 6 and 25. From the start, he numbers the themes of the chapter in which the section is located. In each one of these sections themselves, the Meiri first explicates the Mishnah and then moves on to the Gemara. In section 6, for instance, he explains why the mishnah describing the fasting of distinguished "individuals" and the first phase of fasts imposed upon the community should follow a discussion of prayers for rain. His goal is to put the mishnah in context, and he does so by explaining that fasting comes as a result of a situation when praying alone is not efficacious. Similarly, in section 25, the Meiri reiterates the discussion of the mishnah, explaining the debate as to what it means that one should not eat two cooked dishes during the final meal before a fast as well as the prohibitions against eating meat and drinking wine. He also explains the perspective of what it means to "turn over one's bed," as an added

form of self-denial. The Meiri reviews all of the opinions in the mishnah, adding that the law follows the first, anonymous opinion (the Tanna Kamma), and then moves on to the lengthier discussions in the Gemara.

The Meiri continues to focus on the legal and ethical topics in the Gemara as well. In focusing on the legal topics, the Meiri highlights these topics and expands upon them. In section 6, for instance, he addresses the dilemma of when one's fast day conflicts with a holiday. There are certain days on which it is forbidden to fast, and the rabbis included Chanukkah and Purim among these days even though they are rabbinical, and not biblical, institutions. The Meiri extrapolates his discussion on this subject from the Gemara's statement about the Scroll of Fasting, which is a list of rabbinic holidays upon which it is forbidden to fast.

Another example of a legal topic that the Meiri addresses is the Meiri's comparison of a declaration to fast and the wording of a vow. If one's fast conflicts with a holiday, as discussed previously, one way to avoid the conflict is to fast at another time in compensation. If one's declaration to fast, however, was explicit and specific about the terms, then the declaration resembles a vow which cannot be so easily adjusted. The Meiri focuses on this legal issue and extends its scope from the discussion in the Talmud.

Yet another example of a legal issue from section 6 that the Meiri chooses to expound is the statement that there are no longer any more community-wide fasts mandated by tradition other than Tisha B'Ab. The Meiri analyzes this one statement in the Gemara for all of its implications. He concludes that Yom Kippur was not mentioned in the generalization because it is so obvious that it did not need to be, and then he goes on to analyze different kinds of fasts. He distinguishes between community-wide fasts, emergency fasts, and fasts that the community

voluntarily takes upon itself. In this way, the Meiri creates a digest and expounds upon the legal material of the tractate.

The Meiri deals likewise with the legal material of section 25. He reiterates all of the prohibitions that occur on Tisha B'Ab that are mentioned in the Mishnah. He then adds all of the restrictions that are mentioned in the Gemara, such as the prohibition against studying certain religious texts because they are a source of joy to those who study them.

Most interestingly, the Meiri lists and evaluates the legal definition of "two cooked dishes" that form the subject of the mishnah of this section. Does "two cooked dishes" mean two different kinds of food, two different vessels with different mixtures of food in them, or different vessels with a different kind of food in each one? The Meiri's purpose is to clarify such legal problems.

A final example of how the Meiri focuses on the legal sections of the tractate can be seen in a topic taken from section 6 concerning vessels used by Gentiles. The Talmud's discussion brings up such vessels as a side-remark in the course of story. There could not be a more tangential point in the Talmud's discussion. Nevertheless, the Meiri focuses on any legal topic that is mentioned in the tractate, no matter how off the topic it appears to be. He discusses how Jews might be able to use vessels that were once used by Gentiles, explaining that Jews may use them only after a lengthy time of storage.

Just as the Meiri focuses on all legal matters in the Talmud, he also highlights the ethical aspects that are brought up in the Talmudic debate. The Meiri is sure to mention any passage prescribing the conduct for a pious Jew and Torah scholar.

For instance, the Meiri brings up in his commentary to section 6 points on how the Torah

scholar is to behave. These ethical insights come as a result of defining who have the merit to be considered distinguished "individuals" as mentioned in the mishnah to this section. These people, in this context, are the first to fast on behalf of the community. These distinguished "individuals" should be beyond reproach. However, the Meiri also reiterates the Gemara's point that common people may be considered "individuals" with regard to fasting, for fasting and humbling oneself in such a manner does not benefit the individual. The Meiri extrapolates that it would be arrogant for a common person to comport himself to be like a Torah scholar. Fasting, however, does not fall into the venue of Torah scholars alone.

Another ethical insight that the Meiri focuses upon from section 6 is the person who fasts too much. He takes this from a point made in the Talmud that a Nazirite, one who has sworn to abstain from certain pleasures in a display of piety, has nevertheless committed some kind of sin that demands a sin-offering at the Temple. The Meiri discusses under what conditions one may practice self-denial and when such self-denial itself becomes a sin. His point is that excessive piety may actually be against God's will.

The Meiri also highlights ethical messages from section 25. He explains that, on Tisha B'Ab, one should show signs of mourning for the Temple. He uses the sages described in the Gemara as paradigms of conduct. One should remember that this is a time of grief and behave accordingly.

Similarly, the Meiri also explains that Tisha B'Ab demands we not only mourn for Jerusalem on that day but that we remember the city so that we can share in its ultimate redemption. He cites from Isaiah and other places in the Talmud to indicate that it is a Jewish ethic to always remember Jerusalem, even in times of gladness. By always remembering



Jerusalem in this fashion, the Meiri writes, the Gemara specifically teaches such mourning for Jerusalem will turn into rejoicing in the time to come.

The Meiri thus focuses on the legal and ethical themes of the tractate, extending and clarifying these points. Whether a such points are tangential to the discussion of the Mishnah and Gemara is of no consequence to the Meiri. The Meiri gives any such topic extensive attention.

The second feature of his commentary is his extensive use of the Palestinian Talmud in comparison to the Babylonian Talmud. There is not a single section in which the Meiri does not cite the Palestinian Talmud for clarification or contextualization.

In section 6, for example, the Meiri cites the Palestinian Talmud several times. The first time he does so is when he is defining "individuals," as explained above. The Gemara of the Babylonian Talmud explains that such individuals are Torah scholars, and the Meiri compares this with what is written in the Palestinian Talmud, which suggests that they are appointed officials. From this comparison, the Meiri derives that the individuals are those Torah scholars who are worthy enough to be appointed officials, though this might not necessarily be the case.

The second and third passages that the Meiri cites from the Palestinian Talmud are homilies that the Meiri uses as support for some of his claims concerning ethics. The Meiri explains that the Gemara teaches that one should not disassociate oneself from the community, especially in a time of famine. Sharing in the community's pain means, teaches the Meiri, that one should refrain from sexual relations during such a time. He refers to the Palestinian Talmud (1:6) for support of this practice, explaining that one should not engage in "building" (as sexual relations may be perceived) while God is destroying (as a famine might appear). Similarly, in Job 30:3, *Wasted from want and desolation* is taken to mean in the Palestinian Talmud that when

when the land is "*wasted from want*," one should regard one's spouse with "*desolation*." The last homily in section 6 that the Meiri cites comes when he is explaining that Torah scholars should not fast excessively, and the Palestinian Talmud (Demai 7:3) supports this teaching. There, a tale is told of R. Jochanan rebuking a schoolteacher who is too weak to teach his students because he has been fasting a great deal.

The Meiri also cites the Palestinian Talmud in section 25. Here, the Meiri's use of the Palestinian Talmud is crucial, for it contains the text of a prayer that one should insert into the Amidah on Tisha B'Ab. In the Palestinian Talmud (2:2), the text of the prayer is cited, asking God to be merciful on Jerusalem and rebuild it with the same power with which it was destroyed. The Palestinian Talmud also claims that the insertion should be made into the seventeenth benediction of the Amidah, which the Meiri uses as a starting-point for his discussion as to why the insertion is made in his day elsewhere.

As these examples illustrate, the Meiri uses the Palestinian Talmud for support and sometimes information that is central to his teachings. The frequency of his use of the Palestinian Talmud distinguishes his commentary from others'. However, the third feature of the Meiri's commentary, his summary of the legal discussions of his predecessors, clearly differentiates his exposition, for it is there that he takes his stand among other legal authorities in deciding the law.

The first authority whose commentary the Meiri continually cites is Rashi. The Meiri rarely cites Rashi for a legal perspective, however. Rather, the Meiri turns to Rashi's commentary for alternative definitions of certain words or explanations of esoteric phrases. Rashi, for the Meiri, is a source of understanding the basic text of the Talmud and the situations it presents. An example of this kind of usage appears in section 6, where the Gemara claims that all fast cycles

begin on Monday and never on Thursday. The Meiri cites Rashi to explain why this should be. Rashi's explanation is that merchants will see people buying a large quantity of food in preparation for the Sabbath as well as the fast and might inflate their prices, concluding that there must be a famine in the land. To avoid such a situation, all fasts must begin earlier in the week, on Monday. Thus does the Meiri use Rashi to clarify the Talmud's presentation of ideas.

With other authorities, however, the Meiri cites them for the purpose of legal debate. His two principle legal authorities who he continually cites are the Ravad, representing the Meiri's Provençal school of thought, and Maimonides, of whom the Ravad was a harsh critic. The Meiri shows Maimonides an enormous amount of respect by continually citing his opinion and, when he disagrees, attempting to find some justification for Maimonides reasoning. The Ravad, in contrast, is referred to as the Meiri's main legal authority whose rulings are decisive.

In section 6, for instance, the Meiri cites a dispute between Maimonides and the Ravad in typical fashion. The issue is fasting for a matter of hours. That is, if one has not eaten at all during the day, and one has not declared one's intention to fast on the previous day, may one announce that one intends to complete the day fasting and thus officially fast for a matter of hours and pray the appropriate prayers? The Meiri says that this is a legitimate possibility, citing two statements by R. Chisda of this section that one who fasts cannot taste anything all day and that the sun must set on a fast that occurs for a matter of hours. A fast such as described is consistent with both of R. Chisda's statements. The Meiri then cites Maimonides' opinion that one may fast for a matter of hours even if one ate that very morning. The Meiri completely rejects this notion, but before he does so, he tries to find some justification for Maimonides' reasoning. Perhaps, the Meiri claims, Maimonides did not feel that R. Chisda's first statement was legally binding and one

may indeed taste something during the day that one fasts. A second possibility is that Maimonides thought one's declaration to fast resembled a vow and this gave the one who fasts permission to pray the prayer of fasting at sunset. In any case, after reviewing these possibilities, the Meiri rejects Maimonides' statement (found in *Mishneh Torah* Hilchot Ta'anit 1:13) in the name of his teacher, the Ravad. The Ravad holds with both of R. Chisda's statements and defines a fast for a matter of hours as the Meiri has presented it.

Occasionally the Meiri will cite Maimonides opinion with approval, usually when there is no conflict to be had with the Ravad or other legal authorities. Such a case can also be found in section 6, where the Meiri relies upon Maimonides' distinction between "community-wide fasts" and "emergency fasts." In *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Ta'anit 3:1, Maimonides claims that "community-wide fasts" is a technical term that applies only to the Land of Israel. The Meiri cites this explanation with approval and uses it for his own purposes of clarification. The Meiri thus uses Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* as a reference and a guide, but he does not use it as a definitive book of law.

The most common legal authority to which the Meiri defers is the Ravad, the frequent legal opponent of Maimonides. For instance, in section 6, the Meiri addresses the issue as to why community-wide fasts are no longer declared in the Diaspora and only can occur in the Land of Israel. Among reasons given by Rashi and Nachmanides, the Meiri defers to the explanation given by the Ravad, who claims that Jews living in the Diaspora are for the most part poor and live in areas of bad air and disease. One should not create more hardship for them, the Ravad claims, by instituting community-wide fasts.

Similarly, the Meiri defers to the Ravad in section 25 when the Meiri discusses how one

should perform Havdalah when Tisha B'Ab falls on a Sunday. The Meiri cites many opinions in this regard, some claiming that one should perform Havdalah on Saturday night as usual, others claiming it should not be performed at all, and still others claiming it is performed later in the week after the fast day. Among these many opinions, the Meiri follows the Ravad's reasoning that Havdalah should take place after the fast of Tisha B'Ab and should not include either the blessing over fire or spices. The Meiri justifies with several sources the Ravad's perspective among the many other opinions that he cites.

A final legal authority to whom the Meiri gives continual treatment in his commentary as a whole is the Rif. The Rif appears often in the Meiri's *Beit Ha-Bechirah*, but he does not appear so frequently in this particular tractate. Instances of the Meiri citing the Rif may be found, however, in both sections 6 and 25. In section 6, the Meiri discusses the issue of when one has officially concluded one's meal at night when one is to begin fasting the next morning. He concludes, citing the Rif, that falling asleep is the determining factor to officially declare a meal finished. The Meiri comes to this conclusion over against the Ravad, who holds that clearing the table of food is the determining factor, thus making this passage unusual.

In section 25, a more typical citation of the Rif occurs, where the Meiri explains how some restrictions for Tisha B'Ab, such as against bathing and anointing, take hold before the onset of the day in the evening, while other restrictions, such as against wearing sandals, take hold only with daybreak. The Rif, holding with R. Ishmael in the Gemara, claims that even the restrictions against bathing and anointing do not take hold until daybreak, but the Meiri rejects this view in favor of other opinions cited in the Gemara.

The Meiri thus cites some of the greatest legal scholars and Talmudic commentators that

preceded him in making his commentary, and in doing so he creates a legal digest, not only of the Mishnah and Gemara, but also of the early medieval rabbinic legislators. In doing so, he also argues for the customs and opinions of his school of thought in Provence as represented by the Ravad. Regardless of how the Meiri has determined the course of Jewish law, however, his commentary is valuable for its outlining of legal and ethical themes, for its use of the Palestinian Talmud, and for the clarity it brings to the rabbinic legal debates of his times.

The Meiri's commentary thus serves as an example of rabbinic legal writing in the Middle Ages. While the Talmud is built through a chain of associations, dialogue, and over-arching themes, the Meiri's writing seeks to clarify the debates of the Talmud and his day. The Talmud would like to give the reader the illusion of listening in on an ongoing conversation. The Meiri seeks to teach the terms of the debate and their ongoing legal implications. The scope and magnitude of his work gives his effort lasting value.

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