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The *Parochet* and Getting Excited About *Mitzvot*

The last *Mishnah* learnt this week discusses the dimensions of the *parochet* – the curtain that divided between the *kodesh* and *kodesh ha'kodashim* (holy of holies) in the *Beit Ha'Mikdash*. At first the *Mishnah* appears to be presenting a technical description of one of the components of the *Beit Ha'Mikdash*. However, keen mathematical analysis reveals an insight into the character of the *kohanim* in the *Beit Ha'Mikdash* and how they represented the ideal role models.

The *Mishnah* (8:5) writes as follows:

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says in the name of *Rebbi Shimon* the son of the *Segan*: The curtain was one handbreadth thick, woven on seventy-two strands, and on each strand were twenty-four threads; its length was forty *amot* and its width twenty *amot*, and of eighty-two ten-thousands it was made; and they would make two every year, and three hundred *kohanim* would immerse it.

After reading the above what is left to ask other than a search for meaning for all the details. Such an endeavor would be beyond the abilities of the author of this article. Nevertheless one detail is worth probing.

The *Mishnah* ends by explaining that it would take three hundred *kohanim* to immerse the *parochet* in the *mikvah*. The *Bartenura* explains, citing *Gemarah Chagigah*, that whenever any utensil was made, even if completed in a state of purity, it would still require immersion in a *mikvah* prior to its use.

The *Bartenura* also proceeds to explain the statement that the immersion required three hundred *kohanim* is a blatant exaggeration. The *Melechet Shlomo* points out that if the *parochet* was so heavy that it truly required three hundred people to carry it, it would break. This opinion is shared by many *Rishonim* and confirmed in *Gemarah Chulin* (90b) where *R'*

Yitzchak bar Nachmani cites this *Mishnah* as one of three instances where the *Chachamim* exaggerated.

Granted that the number three hundred is an exaggeration, why did they pick that number? Why not choose two hundred, five hundred or six hundred thousand? The *Melechet Shlomo* suggest that this exaggeration explains the *Midrash* (*Shmot Rabbah VaYakhel*) that all the *kohanim* would come to take part in the immersion. How does the figure three hundred support the *Midrash*?

The *Etz Yosef* cites the *Grah* that applies some mathematics in explaining the choice of three hundred. It was explained earlier that the length of the *parochet* was forty *amot* (cubits) while the width was twenty *amot*. This means that the perimeter of this curtain was one-hundred and twenty *amot*. Now, the *amah* used in the *Beit Ha'Mikdash* was different and equal to five *tephachim* - handbreadths (unlike elsewhere, where it was equal to six *tephachim*). Consequently, the perimeter was equal six hundred *tephachim*.

This now explains the choice of the number three hundred. The *kohanim* in their eagerness in wanting to take part in the *mitzvah* of *tevilah* would grab on with two hands and with a perimeter of six hundred *tephachim* that would divide between three hundred *kohanim*. The point is not that the immersion required three hundred *kohanim*, but rather that all the *kohanim* wanted to take part and there was only room for three hundred. He continues that it is indeed an exaggeration because even though it divides evenly two hands would not be able to share the same corner (perpendicular *tephachim*).

Consequently out of this technical detail we learn of the *kohanim's* eagerness to take part in a *mitzvah*. No matter the *mitzvah*, as long as they could get two hands in, they would jump at the opportunity.

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Revision Questions

שקלים ו' - ח' - ה'

- Explain the debate regarding the use of the *shofarot* labelled “*kinim*” and “*gozlei olah*”? (ו' :ה')
- What is the minimum that one must provide if they vowed to bring: (ו' :ר')
 - Wood?
 - Frankincense?
 - Gold?
- What was done with the coins donated for a *nedava*? (ו' :ר')
- What was done with coins found in between piles of coins for: (ז' :א')
 - *Shekalim* and *Nedava*?
 - Wood and frankincense?
 - Mundane use and *Ma'aser Sheni*?
- What was done with coins found: (ז' :ב')
- Before animal traders in *Yerushalaim*?
- On *Har Ha'Bair*?
- In *Yerushalaim*? (Give two scenarios)
- What was done with limbs and cut up meat of animals found: (ז' :ג')
- In the *Azarah*?
- In *Yerushalaim*?
- Outside *Yerushalaim*?
- What was done with animals found just outside *Yerushalaim*? (ז' :ד')
- Why did the *Chachamim* revert their decree that the person that finds a *korban* must provide the required *nesachim*? (ז' :ה')
- What were the seven decrees by *Beit Din*? (ז' -ו' :ז')
- According to *R' Meir*, when is spit found in *Yerushalaim* assumed to be *tameh*? (ז' :א')
- According to *R' Yosi*, during the year, what part of the road was travelled by *tameh* people? (ז' :א')
- List the opinions of *R' Meir* and *R' Yosi* regarding the assumed *tum'ah* status of *keilim* found in *Yerushalaim*. (ז' :ב')
- When is there a difference between the assumed *tum'ah* status of a knife and cleaver found in *Yerushalaim*? (ז' :ג')
- How does one treat the *parochet* that came in contact with: (ז' :ד')
- A *vlad ha'tumah*?
- An *av ha'tumah*?
- How thick was the *parochet*? (ז' :ח')
- How many new *parochets* were made each year? (ז' :ח')

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Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
5 th March ה' אדר	6 th March ו' אדר	7 th March ז' אדר	8 th March ח' אדר	9 th March ט' אדר	10 th March י' אדר	11 th March יא' אדר
Shekalim 8:6-8	Shekalim 8:8 - Yoma 1:1	Yoma 1:2-3	Yoma 1:4-5	Yoma 1:6-7	Yoma 1:8 - 2:1	Yoma 2:2-3

