



Volume 2. Issue 28.

Learning History from the *Mishnah*

This week we began *Messechet Yoma*, which deals predominantly with the temple service performed by the high priest on *Yom Kippur*. The name of the tractate, *Yoma*, is an Aramaic word meaning “The Day” – in other words, the special day or as the *Gemarah* in *Rosh Hashanah* (21a) states “*Yoma Raba*” (the great day).

The first chapter of *Messechet Yoma* deals with the preparation of the high priest in the seven days prior to *Yom Kippur*. The *Mishnah* teaches us that there are two main reasons for this separation. Firstly, to guard and maintain the purity of the high priest lest he become impure and be unable to perform the temple service and secondly, that the high priest learns about the temple service and internalise every intricate detail.

As we know, during the latter part of the second temple period, the priesthood was no longer a prestigious group of deeply religious and learned people who were unwavering in their dedication to their G-d and their work in the temple. Rather, the priesthood and the job of the high priest in particular, were sold to the highest bidder – a person who was not always religious and rarely learned.

This fact is hinted to in a number of the *Mishnayot* in the first chapter of *Messechet Yoma*. For example, the third *Mishnah* states:

The provided him sages from among the sages of the court who read to him about the service of the day. Then they say to him: My lord, *Kohen Gadol*, read with your own mouth, perhaps you have forgotten or perhaps you have not learned.

The words “perhaps you have not learned” can easily be attributed to a high priest who has not learnt the sixteenth chapter of *Vayikra* which outlines the temple service on *Yom Kippur*, or the relevant laws pertaining to the temple service, due to the fact that he purchased his title with money rather than earning it through religious piety.

However, failing to learn the appropriate section of the Torah was not the only shortcoming of some of the high priests who attained the position. In the fourth *Mishnah* we learnt that the *Kohen Gadol* was not allowed to eat a large

meal on *erev Yom Kippur* so as not to become sleepy lest he falls asleep and becomes impure and therefore unable to perform the temple service. The sixth *Mishnah* then states what the high priest did to occupy his time on the eve of *Yom Kippur*:

If he was a scholar he lectured; but if not, scholars would lecture before him. If he was accustomed to read Scripture, he would read; but if not, they would read to him. And from what did they read to him? From Job, from Ezra, and from Chronicles. *Zechariah ben Kevutal* says: Many times I read before him from Daniel.

We see from here that not only were there some high priests who were unable to learn *Torah* by themselves, and others who could not even read the *Torah* by themselves, but there were even those who did not even understand enough Hebrew to have the *Torah* read to them and therefore read from the book of Daniel which is written predominantly in Aramaic.

A further example of life in the second temple period influencing the writings of the *Mishnah* can be found in the fifth *Mishnah*. As we know there were a number of different sects of Judaism in the first century BCE. The rabbis were mostly Pharisees but another sect was the Sadducees who did not believe in the oral law and were mostly made up of priestly families and wealthy aristocrats living in the Jerusalem area.

The *Mishnah* explains that the elders of the *Beit Din* made the high priest swear an oath that he would not change even a small part of the temple service. The *Gemarah* explains that this was due to the possibility that the high priest was in fact a Sadducee who would perform the ritual literally as it is stated in the *Torah* without incorporating any of the explanations taught by the Rabbis that were passed down from Moshe via the oral tradition.

Although the *Mishnah* is not a history book and does not aim to teach us the history of the *Mishnaic* period, we are able to gain a number of interesting insights into Jewish life in the times of the second temple period based on the writings of the *Mishnah*.

Ben-Zion Hain

www.mishnahyomit.com

מסכת שקלים was sponsored.

Revision Questions

שקלים ח' ו'י-ח'

- In which cases do *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel* argue about where *tameh kodshim* should be burnt? (ח':י)
- Describe the opinion of *R' Eliezer* and *R' Akiva* regarding the previous question. (י':ח')
- Where the following limbs placed prior to being placed on the *mizbeach*: (ח':ח')
 - *Korban tamid*?
 - *Korban mussaf*?
 - *Korban mussaf* of *Rosh Chodesh*?
- Which of the following applies nowadays (without a *Beit Ha'Mikdash*): (ח':ח')
 - *Ma'aser Dagan*?
 - *Bikurim*?
 - *Bechorot*?
 - *Shekalim*?

יומא א' א' – ב' ג'

- How many days before *Yom Kippur* was the *kohen gadol* separate from his home? (א':א')
- To where was the *kohen gadol* taken? (א':א')
- What *avodah* would the *kohen gadol* do during this period? (א':ב')
- Who helped the *kohen gadol* revise the order of the *Yom Kippur* services? (א':ג')
- What would they do on the morning *erev Yom Kippur*? (א':ג')
- Why would they prevent the *kohen gadol* from eating a heavy meal on *erev Yom Kippur*? (א':ד')
- About what would the *ziknei kehuna* make the *kohen gadol* swear and why? (א':ה')
- What would the *kohen gadol* do during the night of *Yom Kippur*? (א':ו')
- What two things would the *pirchei kehuna* do if they noticed the *kohen gadol* dozing off? (א':ז')
- When was the *trumat ha'deshen* performed: (ח':א')
 - On a regular day?
 - On *Yom Kippur*?
 - On one of the *regalim*?
- Initially, how did they decide which *kohen* would perform the *trumat ha'deshen*? (ב':א')
- What incident caused them to change this system and what was it replaced with? (ב':ב')
- What roles were decided by the second daily lottery? (ג':ב')

Local Shiurim

Sunday -Thursday
Between mincha & ma'ariv
Mizrachi Shul

Friday & Shabbat
10 minutes before mincha
Mizrachi Shul

Audio Shiurim on-line!

- 613.org/mishnah.html
- www.shemayisrael.com/mishna/

**www.
mishnah
yomit
.com**

Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
12 th March י"ב אדר	13 th March י"ג אדר	14 th March י"ד אדר	15 th March ט"ו אדר	16 th March ט"ז אדר	17 th March י"ז אדר	18 th March י"ח אדר
Yoma 2:4-5	Yoma 2:6-7	Yoma 3:1-2	Yoma 3:3-4	Yoma 3:5-6	Yoma 3:7-8	Yoma 3:9-10

