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Time in the *Beit Midrash*

In the third *perek*, we find two *Mishnayot* from which we can learn important ideas relating to the *Beit Midrash*, and perhaps to learning in general.

The eighth Mishnah states:

“*Abba Sha’ul ben Batmit* who would fill his measuring utensil on *erev Yom Tov* and give them to customers on *Yom Tov*. *Abba Sha’ul* adds that even during *Chol Ha’moed* he would [prepare the utensils the night before] to ‘exact the measurements’”

The *Gemara* explains that “[*Abba Sha’ul* would] do so even during [*Chol*] *Ha’moed* because of [the potential] waste of *Beit Midrash* [time].” The *Gemara* explains that he was a great scholar who was regularly consulted and during *Chol Ha’moed* as many more people were free to deal with *Torah* the demand on his time would intensify. Consequently he would fill his utensils at night, outside *Beit Midrash* times, in order that he should be free during the day. Therefore the phrase in the *Mishnah* ‘to exact the measurements’ is explained to mean: the extra time spent in the *Beit Midrash* during [*Chol*] *Ha’moed* meant he would not have time to properly check the measurements during the day, so he filled them at night (*Rashi, Beitzah* 29a).

The idea brought here is ‘the wasting of *Beit Midrash* time’ rather than the more familiar ‘waste of *Torah*’. There are times when someone will return home from work tired and it is hard to learn. Just entering into the *Beit Midrash* has an influence. Firstly – entering allows more learning just by being surrounded by other people learning. Moreover, the *Beit Midrash* is not only a place for explaining *Halachot* but also a place representing a certain world perspective. A person whose house is a *Beit Midrash* expresses what his direction is in life and what is important to him. Entering into the *Beit Midrash* symbolises our relationship with *Torah* and how we are connected to it. The *Beit Midrash* is meant to be the centre of our lives. It is a place which gives us the strength and guidance when we leave its four walls. The wasting of *Beit Midrash* time is less time spent connecting to our “nerve centre”.

According to the first explanation brought down by *Rashi Abba Shaul*’s concern was the wasting of his own learning. In order that he should be free during the day to

answer people’s questions, he would work at night for his living. Interestingly, he considered the conflict as a potential waste of personal learning time, even though it was answering other people’s questions that were at risk. It is possible to say that denying the clarification of *Torah* for others or wasting others’ *Torah* learning generates a sense of lacking on the part of the individual as one has a responsibility for the wider community.

There are those that do not feel good when their personal progress is hindered by answering other people’s questions. Yet - “To learn and to teach, to guard and to do” – passing *Torah* to the wider circles and leading others down the path of *Torah* is no less important. The wasting of *Beit Midrash* time is broader than the notion of wasting time for learning *Torah*. On *Chagim* when there is more time, people would go to the *Beit Midrash*. When their *halachic* questions were answered, be they practical, for the sake of learning, for a deeper understanding or maybe even on totally unrelated matters, this would create a connection between them and the *Beit Midrash* – the centre of our lives.

There is a story about a *Chassid* who came to his Rav and asked him a medical question about his cow’s foot. The Rav gave his answer and was later asked by others, “why didn’t you tell him that he should simply go ask a vet?” The Rav explained that sometimes the question is just an excuse. The Jew wanted to get close to the Rav and he tried to find a way to encounter the *Torah* so he searched for questions. When one enters the *Beit Midrash* he needs to feel as if it is his place. If he already enters he has the basic connection, and it is our responsibility to continue and strengthen that connection.

The “*Beit Midrash*” appears elsewhere in our chapter where *R’ Tarfon* entered the *Beit Midrash* to consult on a particular query. “And they entered the *Beit Midrash*” is a unique statement throughout *Shas*. We do not see elsewhere an apparently incidental comment like this one in our *Mishnah*.

It seems that it is possible to learn a few things from this story aside from the need to also be meticulous in our transmission of events. Firstly, even *Rabbi Tarfon* the great *Tana* was not embarrassed to ask and clarify a situation, just as we learn in *Pirkei Avot* “the embarrassed does not learn”. Furthermore in order to clarify questions one has to enter the *Beit Midrash* - the place in which we clarify reality and learn how to work within it.

Uri Orbach
[Trans. Mark Steiner]

Revision Questions

ביצה ג' ד' – ה' ב'

- What is the law regarding slaughtering a *b'chor* that fell into pit on *Yom Tov*? (ג' ד')
- What is the law regarding an animal that dies on *Yom Tov*? (ה')
- How should a group divide shares in an animal that was slaughtered on *Yom Tov*? (ג' ר')
- In what manner is one allowed to sharpen a knife on *Yom Tov*? (ז' י')
- In what manner does one ask for food from a storekeeper on *Yom Tov* and why? (Provide two options) (ח' י')
- What are the restrictions on *Yom Tov*, placed on the manner one can carry:
 - Wine?
 - Produce? (יא' יב')
 - Fire wood? (יג' יד')
- Explain the debate regarding a *karpaf* from which it is suitable to collect firewood. (ט' י')
- In what manner can one chop firewood on *Yom Tov*? (יג' יד')
- Can one remove fruit from a store room that was sealed before *Yom Tov*, yet on *Yom Tov* was breached? (ט' י')
- What does *R' Meir* add regarding the previous question? (יג' יד')
- Can one produce coals on *Yom Tov*? (ט' י')
- Explain the debate regarding splitting a wick on *Yom Tov*? (יג' יד')
- What restrictions are placed on the manner in which one can clean out an oven on *Yom Tov*? (ט' י')
- Can one prop up a pot over a fire using two barrels and why? (ט' י')
- Can one direct an animal using a staff on *Yom Tov* and why? (ט' י')
- Explain the debate regarding taking a twig to use as a toothpick. (יג' יד')
- Can one take twigs to use as kindling from his *chatzer*? (יג' יד')
- Is one allowed to light a fire on *Yom Tov*? (ז' י')
- Explain the debate regarding how direct one must be when setting aside food placed in the *muktzeh* for use on *Yom Tov*. (ז' י')
- Can one place a utensil to catch water leaking from the roof? (יא' יב')
- What of the following categories that are prohibited on *Shabbat* are prohibited on *Yom Tov*: (ה' ב')
 - *Shvut*?
 - *Reshut*?
 - *Mitzvah*?
- What activities are prohibited on *Shabbat* that are listed in the *Mishnah* as fitting into the following categories: (ה' ב')
 - *Shvut*?
 - *Reshut*?
 - *Mitzvah*?
- Complete the following phrase:
 " _____ אלמא טוב לשבת אלמא _____ "

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Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
21 st May כ"ג אייר לי"ח לעומר Beitzah 5:3-4	22 nd May כ"ד אייר לי"ט לעומר Beitzah 5:5-6	23 rd May כ"ה אייר מ' לעומר Beitzah 5:7 – <u>Rosh Hashanah</u> 1:1	24 th May כ"ו אייר מ"א לעומר Rosh Hashanah 1:2-3	25 th May כ"ז אייר מ"ב לעומר Rosh Hashanah 1:4-5	26 th May כ"ח אייר מ"ג לעומר Rosh Hashanah 1:6-7	27 th May כ"ט אייר מ"ד לעומר Rosh Hashanah 1:8-9

