

# **Lost and Found: Tractate Liknot Shokolad – The Chocolate Mishnah!**

*By*

*Nada Chandler and Sue Resnick*

## **Prologue**

The manuscripts originated in Ziklag, a small city that can be considered a suburb of Gaza. There is Biblical evidence of a Jewish population in Ziklag dating from the time of King Saul. “And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid upon the South, and upon Ziklag, and had smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire.” (I Samuel 30:1). The community re-established itself after this destruction although no firm date can be established. It is known, again from Biblical sources, that there was a sufficient Jewish community there, post-Babylonian exile, for Nehemiah to list it as a place where there was a vital Jewish community, “And for some villages, with their fields, some of the children of Judah dwelt in Kiriath-arba, and the towns thereof ... and in Ziklag... (Nehemiah 11:25 – 28). The community in Ziklag was relatively prosperous, enjoying the benefits of being so close to the trading center and port of Gaza. One other benefit of their proximity to Gaza was their involvement in the Spice Trade. The Nabatean traders brought spices from the East through Petra in Jordan to Avdat in the Negev and then on to Gaza for transport throughout the Mediterranean. Their history, documented elsewhere, is only of significance to the story of the lost manuscripts because of the spices they brought to Gaza and Ziklag. One of these spices was a bean that when dried and mashed, and then mixed with other ingredients yielded a sweet substance, and when mixed with liquid produced a pleasant and invigorating drink. Because the product of this bean had no preservative qualities, it was not highly regarded. The Jewish community of Ziklag, however, became enamored of its taste, so the Nabateans would trade their small stock of these exotic beans there, and take their more lucrative products to the merchants of Gaza. The Nabateans were famous for the secrecy with which they guarded not only their trading routes across the desert, but also their sources, so the secret of chocolate was safe from the outside world. The disruption caused by the Roman conquest in the first century BCE had nearly as great an impact on the Nabateans as on the Judaeans, and the trade

slowed considerably. By allying themselves with the Romans during the revolt of 70 CE, the Nabateans slowly came under Roman dominion and their exclusive trade was lost. In the years immediately before and after the revolt, their market for the cocoa bean had all but disappeared so it was no longer brought from its mysterious source to the port of Gaza or the town of Ziklag.

Having provided the historical background for cocoa in Ziklag, it is now appropriate to understand the Jewish community that lived there. As was often the case in small towns, the best and the brightest made their way North to Jerusalem, Jaffe, and the Galilee. During the reign of Herod I, there was barely a study group in all of Ziklag. One bright scholar, Hershi, made his way to Jerusalem to study with the great sages there, but vowed that he would return to Ziklag and establish an academy there, no matter how small it would be. In Jerusalem, Hershi studied with Avtalyon, who was also a teacher of Hillel. Based on the dates that they were students, Hershi and Hillel were students at the same time. It was in Jerusalem that Hershi became acquainted with the current state of the Oral Law and the practice of the sages to write down their thoughts (or have them written for them) so that they could be shared with a wider circle of students and sages. Of course, at this time, there was no attempt to gather or to codify this material.

After several years of study in Jerusalem, Hershi returned to Ziklag, where he kept his promise and founded a small academy whose students included R. Devash, R. Elite, R. Bartons, and R. Kamtzan. R. Martook was also a part of this circle of sages, but legend says that R. Martook was actually the wife of R. Hershi. The examination of the manuscripts seems to indicate that one of the two authors was a woman, lending credibility to this legend. A close look at the teachings of R. Martook indicates a level of sensitivity far more common in women than in men. Within two years of starting the Academy at Ziklag, a fellow student of R. Hershi's joined him from Jerusalem. Having studied with the great Shammai, as well as with Avtalyon, and not being a native to the area, R. Mar had a somewhat different perspective on the local customs and traditions. This attitude is often reflected in his teachings. Having studied in Jerusalem and learned from the great sages of his day, R. Hershi felt no need to do more than teach what others had expounded, except in the area of chocolate. Since this treat was both unknown and unavailable in Jerusalem, any rulings on its use would have to come from R. Hershi and

his Academy. Realizing this, R. Hershi and his students developed and wrote down their teachings on this subject so that the people of their community would have some guidance in this matter.

As the situation with Judaea deteriorated, the community of Ziklag felt very vulnerable. Some felt they would be secure in the north where there were more Jewish communities; others, including R. Hershi and his followers, headed further west and south to Alexandria, which had a thriving Jewish community. After a brief sojourn in Alexandria, the group determined that big city life was not for them. By this time, the revolt against Rome was in full progress, so there was no chance of returning to Judaea. Traders from the south indicated that there were other Jewish communities further up the Nile that were smaller and perhaps more like the small community to which they had been accustomed.

The hardy group proceeded to make their way up the Nile to Elephantine, where a Jewish community had existed from the time of King Solomon. Although they were warmly received there, Elephantine also proved to be too commercial a place for R. Hershi. They then settled in one of the small, nameless towns and taught the young men the words of the sages. R. Hershi entrusted their manuscripts which they had brought with them to his sons, and they to their sons. Although the teaching was lost over the centuries, the legend of the teachers from Jerusalem was preserved throughout the ages. The current flurry of archeological activity located the manuscripts which were returned to the land where they were written.

**MOED**  
**Tractate Liknot Shokolad**

**Chapter 1**

1. Chocolate is a product of the cocoa plant; only the fruit of this may be considered chocolate.
2. Chocolate may be eaten at any time; however, one is obligated to eat chocolate on all feast days, including Shabbat. R. Elite said in the name of R. Hershi that on Hanukah, Purim and Rosh Hodesh, children and unmarried women must be given a double portion; all others should consider partaking of a double portion. Chocolate must be savored for its sweetness as joyous music, as it is written: "Then our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with singing." (Ps. 126). For this reason, chocolate may not be acquired or consumed from the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz until the 10<sup>th</sup> of Av.
3. The primary portion of chocolate to be eaten on feast days must consist of those foods where chocolate represents no less than 50/60ths of the ingredients. If one is not sure of the proportions, one is obligated to eat a double portion of that item to fulfill the primary obligation.
4. Notwithstanding the need to consume a double portion, the minimum amount of chocolate that must be eaten is chocolate that is the size of a hen's egg. R. Hershi said that this measure represented the largest rather than the smallest egg produced.
5. Purveyors of lesser chocolate are to be treated by the same standards for those who use false weights and measures. R. Bartons said: for them, Olam Habah is Gehenna.
6. By three means is chocolate acquired: by money, by gift, and by barter. By money -- the School of Bartons said: by a denaris worth by the gram, and the School of Neuhaus, by a perutah's worth by the ounce. By gift -- that is, by Shaloch Manot on Purim. R. Elite said: chocolate that is the value of one perutah may serve to validate a betrothal. But R. Mar said: since one cannot determine the intensity of the chocolate without first tasting it, there is no way to determine if it is worth a perutah, and cannot be used. R. Hershi told this story: although he [R. Hershi] was poor, he celebrated his ketubah with a chocolate confection [groom's cake], which proved his merit despite his apparent poverty. By barter -- that is, by dreidl gelt, gold or silver, on Hanukah.

7. Only chocolate produced by the House of Bartons may be consumed on Pesach. R. Martook expounded before the Sages: so long as the chocolate has been properly supervised and is made and sold only by a Jew, it may be considered kosher for Pesach.

Gemara:

Why is the House of Bartons given exclusivity to produce chocolate consumed on Pesach, when the Sages have said that one is obligated to eat chocolate on all feast days, including Shabbat, without giving production rights to any one in particular? The Gemara answers: credence must be given to the teaching of R. Martook, because even our ancestors in the desert would observe this mitzvah. For it was known that no home was purified [free from chometz] earlier [that is, closer to Purim than Pesach] than the House of Bartons, allowing the Sages to enjoy other chocolate during the period of preparation [for Pesach] in the homes of others. We are reminded that the Sages celebrated R. Hershi's ketubah with a chocolate confection, in the period between Purim and Pesach. Yet R. Bartons went to the home of R. Hershi to help him prepare for his betrothal, and was ta'meh when he returned [to his kitchen] to prepare [Pesach-dik chocolate to sell].

Upon learning this, R. Martook was heard to exclaim, "Ah HA!" Upon hearing that, the School of Neuhaus took this as a sign and promptly cleaned their kitchen [to prepare chocolate for Pesach to sell]. But a spouse went out from the House of Neuhaus and returned to the home of her father, when she refused [to help clean], seeing that the School of Neuhaus had gone mad. Upon seeing this, a student from the School of Neuhaus appealed to R. Martook to revoke his exclamation. But R. Martook refused, and iterated, "Ah HA!"

The student appealed to R. Devash, saying that R. Martook's statement was a conundrum, and had caused upheaval [in the House of Neuhaus]. But R. Devash chastised the student [for coming to him alone], and ordered him to bring another colleague to his home for the evening meal, that R. Devash might discourse, as it is written: "And He spoke to Me. (this is the table before the L-rd)." (Ezekiel 41:22). R. Devash taught the Gematria Ah HA is 12, that is Aleph = 1 and Hay = 5 and doubled is 12, as the 12 tribes. For we learn from R. Devash that the 12 tribes wandered the desert for 40 years, yet were united by the Tabernacles, though they remained ma'aseh until they had reached the edges of Canaan, the moment of their true liberation. And R. Devash said in the name of R. Martook, therefore it should be that remain that chocolate properly made and properly supervised, and made and sold only by a Jew should be considered kosher for Pesach. R. Mar later said that R. Devash was right, however, chocolate is chocolate, even during Pesach, and should be produced, acquired and consumed by any means.

8. Chocolate may be eaten at any time during the feast day. Both portions should not be eaten at the same time. R. Devash said that both portions may be eaten at the same time provided that the portions together represent a meal.
9. No additional blessings need be said before the consumption of either portion. After eating, the additional blessing for wondrous things should be included in Birkhat Hamazon. R. Mar said that an additional blessing must be said before and after eating the chocolate. R. Hershi, however, said that blessings recited before [eating] should only be said when no other food is being consumed and no other food has been consumed three hours previous.
10. No special blessings need be said when eating chocolate on non-Feast days. However, R. Elite taught that it is not a blessing said in vain if one chooses to make a special blessing: "It is always good to give praise unto Adonai."
11. Vows [to refrain from consuming chocolate] are not binding as follows: a woman with child, a woman with PMS, and students studying for finals.

Gemara:

R. Mar, who never married, asked: Since women must have their father's/husband's consent before making a vow (Numbers 30: 4-16), is this special consideration needed? A sensitive father/husband would understand that the circumstances and would prevent the vow from being executed anyway. And we are also cautioned, "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it" (Ecclesiastes 5:3).

Not all men are understanding of women, replied R. Martook. You, who had only brothers and whose mother died when you were seven, what do you know of the ways and moods of women? Since the disallowing must occur on the same day as the vow, this would not address allow conditions that we know to occur when a woman is alone, as she is likely to be when with child or suffering PMS. The true reason for this precept is recognition of women's greater faithfulness to their vows, and their lesser susceptibility to making vows in vain. Did not Hannah remember her promise to Eli the priest and gave to him her son (I Samuel 1:17)? Did not the wife of Manoah observe faithful the vow of a Nazirite (Judges 12:15)? Look how the offspring of that vow, Samson, broke his word and let his hair be cut. Further, we are taught by the example of Jephthah how a man can make a vow that costs a life. No woman did that.

R. Mar said: It is like a king of flesh-and-blood. When he ascends to the throne, he asks the people to swear loyalty to him. When the people fail to keep their promise, then the king can abandon them and seek out followers who will keep their vows. So it is with Israel, "And Israel vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, If Thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hands, then I will utterly destroy their cities (Numbers 21:2)." And the Lord honored their vow and delivered the

Canaanites into their hands at Hormah. Thus, we learn that you cannot abandon a vow.

R. Hershi replied, “But one must be serious about the vow. A woman under stress is not focused enough. She is like Joseph when his father asked him to make a vow. Joseph had to be asked twice. So, it is with a woman, if asked twice if she would really reject chocolate, she would decline. Since it is likely no one can hear her initial vow, muttered under her breath or screamed into her mirror, there is no Jacob to make her re-affirm it, and thus it is forgotten. R. Martook then replied, “Would that there were more sensitive men to understand and negate the vow. Since there are not, the ruling must stand.” Remember, only Adonai feels the tears of women.

12. But R. Kamtzan did not fulfill the obligation. He said: I cannot, on advice from my physician, lest I die [of anaphylactic shock]. R. Elite said: he may fulfill the obligation by providing chocolate to a Shaliach to be eaten in his presence. The Shaliach should be chosen based on his ability to discern fine chocolate and his inability to pay for it. R. Bartons said: may you live to be 120.

## **Chapter 2**

1. The double portion of chocolate may be eaten in any form, including those foods in which chocolate is not the major ingredient, such as cookies, cake, and ice cream. R. Elite said that one of the portions must be where chocolate is the sole or main ingredient, the second portion may be either solely chocolate or in a mixed form.
2. Chocolate used to completely cover fruit such as raisins and strawberries does not fulfill the obligation for either the first or second portion. Fruit dipped in chocolate and not completely covered by it does not fulfill the obligation for the second portion.
3. Chocolate containing nuts or nut butters does not fulfill the primary obligation. It fulfills the obligation for the second portion only when the nuts or nut butters are used to enhance the flavor of the chocolate and thus to enhance the fulfillment of the obligation.
4. Chocolate cake that has a fruit jam as its filling fulfills the obligation. R. Hershi expounded before the Sages that if the frosting is not primarily chocolate, the cake may not be used to fulfill the obligation, but if the frosting is primarily chocolate, the obligation is fulfilled. Likewise, he said that ice cream with some chocolate in it fulfills the obligation only if it is eaten with a chocolate sauce. R. Elite said that the obligation is only fulfilled if the sauce is hot fudge.

5. Chocolate chip cookies only can be used to fulfill the secondary obligation but only if there is chocolate in each and every bite of the cookie.
6. Chocolate milk does not fulfill either obligation since chocolate milk is always consumed on days when there is no obligation. The same applies to hot cocoa.
7. Minors may not eat white chocolate or dark chocolate that has no sugar in it. R. Devash said that they may eat both but only in the presence of their parents.
8. There is no difference between the consumption of white and dark chocolate; either fulfills the obligation to eat chocolate. One need not wait any time after consuming white chocolate to consume dark, and after dark to consume white. The difference between the two is like eating the white grapes from the vineyard and then the purple.
9. Milk chocolate may only be eaten with a dairy meal, but one need not wait after consuming milk chocolate to eat other forms of chocolate. R. Mar said that in order to maintain a fence around the Torah, chocolate may only be eaten at dairy meals so as not to confuse milk chocolate from other varieties. R. Matook said in the name of R. Hershi that like eggs when mixed with milk become dairy, whereas eggs that are mixed with oil are not, so, too, with chocolate. Chocolate mixed with milk is dairy; chocolate with no milk is pareve and may be eaten at any time.

## **Epilogue**

This tractate is the product of two Master's Candidates at the Laura and Alvin Siegel College for Judaic Studies. At the conclusion of a class on Mishnah, the assignment was to produce text in the style of the Mishnah reflecting how the document was constructed; the exercise was thus a test of the students' ability to construct rules and discussion that might have occurred around a specific topic. The topic was to be a humorous one lest the tractate gain any credibility as true Oral Law. Upon the completion of the text, the students added in some sample Gemara as well as an explanation of the source of the material. The joint project was concluded in a chocolate shop over dishes of chocolate orange, chocolate trifle, and chocolate silk ice cream.