

Talmud Passage of the Week

BH

Be Prepared!

Originally posted 10/20/96

Look for new passages approximately every 2 weeks (next passage approximately 11/05/96).

Dear Friends,

Before we begin our study, let me thank you for a wonderful year (!) of Talmud study on the internet. When we began this endeavor, I thought we would have perhaps 50 people in the group. We have, now, almost 400 e-mail participants on every inhabited continent. Thank you for being part of this. Your participation in the e-mail program, your answers to the questions and your insights about life, are what make this whole program run. Thank you for taking the time to share your insights with the group!

Some people deserve special mention. First of all, to those people who have become Maqom Associates and contributed \$36 or more to help keep us in "ether", I say, "Thank you for your generosity and for all the kind 'snail mail' you send! Your financial, emotional and spiritual contributions are greatly appreciated." Second, to Chris Benton who helps maintain the site technically, I say, "I literally could not have done this without you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!" Third, to the folks at JCN, especially Yori Yanover and Larry Yudelson, who helped expand Maqom's Talmud study mission, I say, "Thanks for believing in the power of text study and for giving Maqom the chance to move into new realms."

May God grant us another wonderful year of text study!

Bavli Ta'anit 17a, Steinsaltz, Volume 14, pp. 31-33:

[On] the first three fasts, the members of the *mishmar* fast but do not complete [their fast], etc."

Our Rabbis taught: Why did they say [that] the members of the *mishmar* are permitted to drink wine in the nights but not in the days? Lest the [Temple] service weigh heavily on the members of the *beit av* and they will come and they will help them.

Why did they say [that] the members of the *beit av* [may not drink wine,] neither in the day nor in the night? Because they are always engaged in the [Temple] service.

From here they said: Any priest who can identify his *mishmar* and his *beit av* and who knows that [the members of] his *beit av* were established there, is forbidden to drink wine all that day. If he can identify his *mishmar* but cannot identify his *beit av*, but he knows that [the members of] his *beit av* were established there, he is forbidden to drink wine all that week. [If] he cannot identify his *mishmar* or his *beit av*, but knows that [the members of]] his *beit av* were established there, he is forbidden to drink wine all the year.

Rabbi says, I say: He is forever forbidden to drink wine. But what can I do? For his remedy is its [the Temple's] ruin." Abaye said: In accordance with whom do the priests drink wine today? In accordance with Rabbi.

The members of the *mishmar* and the members of the *ma'amad* are forbidden to cut their hair or wash their clothes. But on Thursday they are permitted because of the honor of Shabbat. What is the reason? Rabbah bar Bar Hanah said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: So that they should not enter their watch when they are unkempt.

Background

Review: Mishmar, Ma'amad, Beit Av

Let's review these terms. There are Israelites who accompany a group of priests to Jerusalem for their two, one-week stints each year. These lay Israelites are called the *Ma'amad* ("those who stand"). The priests that go to Jerusalem for these two weeks in the year are the *Mishmar* ("the guards"). During the week, on each day, a different *Beit Av* ("father's house") officiates in the Temple itself.

To quote Rabbi Steinsaltz's commentary (page 31): "Any priest who can identify his *mishmar*.' For many generations after the destruction of the Temple, the memory of the *mishmarot* was preserved, along with the lists of priestly families belonging to each *mishmar*. Such lists are found in a significant number of hymns and also in inscriptions found in ancient synagogues in Galilee, centuries after the destruction of the Temple."

When Can the Priest Drink?

The rationale behind these restrictions should be clear. We want the priest ready, willing and able to perform the sacrificial rites. A drunk priest is definitely no good. So a priest cannot drink wine on the day he *would have been* officiating if the Temple were standing. Thus, it behooves a priest to know what his *Mishmar* and *Beit Av* are since these greatly enhance his ability to drink. Rabbi (Yehudah HaNasi) opines that since it has been so long that the Temple is destroyed, we really can't justify the restriction on priests' drinking anymore on the basis of the *Mishmar* and *Batei Av*.

The *Mishmar* can drink at night because it is assumed they'll be clear headed by morning. But they can't drink in the morning because they might have to help another *Beit Av* in the Temple. The *Beit Av* cannot even drink at night because some tasks in the Temple were performed at night or, alternatively, because they may rise early before the alcohol has a chance to clear their system.

Hair cuts and Laundry

Hair cuts and doing laundry play a surprisingly large role in this tractate. They both are signs of happiness from which people refrain during fasts, mourning and in preparation for the Ninth of Av. Here, the *Mishmar* and *Ma'amad* are forbidden to do these things in order to make them perform these functions before they arrive in Jerusalem. In other words, it is not as if a student is coming home from college in need of refurbishing. No. One appears in the Temple at his (sic) best.

Discussion Questions

1. Should we stand perpetually ready for the Temple's reconstruction? What benefits does that bring us? What disadvantages accrue to such a stance?
2. Recalling that drinking wine was the way one imbibed God's essence, as it were, in the sages' days, what does this say about the priests and their ability to connect with God viscerally? What role do the sacrificial emoluments play in your calculations?
3. How would not doing your laundry or cutting your hair make you feel? How would it add to your mourning or fasting? What is the connection between mourning and serving in the Temple?
4. Here we have a case where a Baraita, an early source, says one thing, and an individual of a later era (Rabbi) says a contradictory thing and the law goes according to the later authority. In theory, the law goes according to the earlier authorities who have an authentic teaching to back them up. What does this say about the relative importance of these

sources, the way the redactors of the Bavli related to them and the adjustments the Jewish people made over time to the Temple's destruction?