

Talmud Passage of the Week

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Look for new passages approximately every 2 weeks (next passage approximately 12/24/96).

BH

When the Going Gets Tough, the Tough Get Gemara!

Dear Friends,

Repeat to yourselves the following thought, please: "No matter how hard this passage is I will come back. There are easier, more relevant and fun passages just around the corner." There's no beating around the bush this week: this passage is difficult, repetitive and not the most interesting one we've ever come across. Part of developing Talmud study skills is learning to recognize tough passages and not become bogged down in them.

We're still on the topic of priests who let their hair grow and who drink wine whether they're allowed to officiate in the cult.

As always, you are welcome to join in the Jewish-Christian dialogue, being moderated by Michael Lotker (lotker@aol.com) and to request prayers from our on-line community for those who are sick.

Now, cut your hair, sober up and let's get on to our passage!

Bavli Ta'anit 17a-b, Steinsaltz, Volume 14, pp. 36-39:

If so[that the priests' obligation to cut their hair is from the Bible], even nowadays too [this should apply]!

It is similar to those who have drunk wine. Just as [regarding] those who have drunk wine, it is at the time of entry that it is forbidden, [but] not at the time of entry it is permitted, so too here [i.e., they can drink wine when they won't be in the Temple].

But surely it was taught: Rabbi says: I say: Priests are forever forbidden to drink wine. But what can I do? For his remedy is its [the Temple's] ruin." And Abaye said: In accordance with whom do the priests drink wine today? (17b) In accordance with Rabbi. [This proves] by implication that the Rabbis forbid [this].

What is the reason? The Temple will speedily be rebuilt, and we [will] need a priest who is fit for service and there will be none. Here it is possible for him to cut his hair and enter. If so, [regarding] one who has drunk wine also, it is possible [for him] to sleep a little and enter, in accordance with Rami bar Abba. For Rami bar Abba said: A walk of a mile and the slightest amount of sleep dissipate the [effects of] wine.

Has it not been said regarding this: Rav Nahman said in the name of Rabbah Bar Avuha: They did not teach [this] except when he drank the measure of a *revi'it*? But [if] he drank more than a *revi'it*, how much more so does walking make him unsteady and sleep make him drunk.

Rav Ashi said: [Regard] those who have drunk wine who disqualify [their] service, the Rabbis decreed concerning them. [Regarding] those with long hair who do not disqualify [their] service, the Rabbis did not decree concerning them.

They raised an objection: And these are those who are [liable] to death: Those who have drunk wine and those with long hair. Granted [regarding] those who have drunk wine, it is written explicitly regarding them: "Do not drink wine or strong drink. (Leviticus 10:9)" But from where [do we know about] those with long hair? For it is written: "And they shall not shave their heads and their locks they shall not let grow. (Ezekiel 44:20)" And it is written after that: "Nor shall any priest drink wine, when they enter the inner court. (Ezekiel 44:21)" And those with long hair are compared to those who have drunk wine: Just as those who have drunk wine are [liable] to death, so too are those with long hair [liable] to death. And from this, just as those who have drunk wine disqualify [their] service, so too do those with long hair disqualify [their] service. No. When they are compared, it is regarding the death penalty that they are compared. But regarding the disqualification of [their] service they are not compared.

Background

A *Revi'it*

A *revi'it* is one-quarter of a *log* (a bit less than a pint) and is, itself, about three ounces. It is a minimum amount of wine which, the sages considered, would not make a person irretrievably drunk for a long period.

Half an Analogy--Better than None?

This last paragraph is really quite difficult. In Steinsaltz's commentary, the parallel passage (B. Sanhedrin 22b) is cited and it is noted that after the discussion there, the Gemara concludes that this is all quite difficult (*kashya*). The gemara is drawing an analogy between a priest's drinking and a priest's allowing his hair to grow. The gemara allows the analogy as far as drinking is concerned but does not allow but not for hair that is grown too long. You can see this in the following table:

	<u>Service disqualified</u>	<u>Death penalty</u>
Hair long	no	yes (Ezekiel)
Drunk	yes	yes (Leviticus)

Usually, one either draws a complete analogy or one does not. This principle is summarized in the rule, *ein heikeish l'mechetsah*, that is, the inferences drawn in analogy have to be bilateral. Here, they are not and this is, indeed, a difficulty.

Discussion Questions

1. How are drinking wine and letting your hair grow similar and different? Why should these be the focus of so much discussion regarding the priests' participation in the cult? Can you draw any helpful, modern analogies?
2. What do you get out of the repetition of these texts from slightly different points of view each time? How can you take this as a lesson in spiritual development; the discipline of seeing things from multiple perspectives and developing patience?

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