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The Power of the Shulchan

The last *Mishnah* of the *masechet* (3:8) mentions that after *Yom Tov*, utensils from the *Beit Ha'Mikdash* would be immersed in the *mikvah* for purification. The reason being that during the festival, *kohanim* that were *amei ha'aretz* came in contact with these vessels. Even though during the festival these *kohanim* are assumed to maintain level of purity (see 3:6) after the festival we are concerned about the utensils' purity. The *shulchan* (table) however was not allowed to be removed (see *Shmot* 25:30). The *Mishnah* therefore explains that they directed the *kohanei amei ha'aretz* to refrain from touching the *shulchan* during the festival.

The *Gemara* (*Chagigah* 26b) questions how it attracted impurity at all. The *shulchan* was constructed from wood and wooden utensils can only attract impurity if they exhibit the same attributes as a bag (*sak*), i.e., carried either empty or with contents. Since the *shulchan* rested in the *heichal* it should not attract impurity. The *Gemara* responds that indeed it was carried with its content – the show bread. A miracle occurred with the show bread that even though it rested on the *shulchan* for a week, when it was removed, it was as hot and fresh as when it was placed there. During the festivals, the *shulchan* was carried outside and displayed to the nation to demonstrate this miracle.

The *Gemarah* then asks why we even need this reason that it was carried out during the festivals; the *shulchan* was coated in a metallic substance which would define it as a metallic utensil. Consequently it could attract impurity even if it was never moved. The *Gemarah* responds that despite being coated in metal, the *Torah* calls it a wooden utensil:

The *mizbeach* (alter), three *amot* high, and two *amot* long was of wood, and it had corners; and its length and its walls were of wood and he said to me, this is the *shulchan* that is before *Hashem*. (*Yechezkel* 41:22)

The reference of the *shulchan* as a *mizbeach* led the *Gemarah* to provide another lesson:

R' Yochanan and *Reish Lakish* both say: At the times of the *Beit Ha'Mikdash* the *mizbeach* atoned

for a person. Nowadays a person's table atones for him.

How exactly does a person's table atone for him? *Rashi* explains that it is the vehicle for the *mitzvah* of *hachnasat orchim* (attending to guests). It appears that one can explain the *chesed* that can be performed with one's *shulchan* is the current avenue for atonement.¹

The *Maharsha* (*Menachot* 97a) however quotes a *Mishnah* from *Avot* (3:3) that suggests a different reason:

... but three people that eat on one table, and say words of *Torah* it is as if they have eaten from the table of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* as it says "... this is the *shulchan* that is before *Hashem*."

It appears then that it is the *Torah* learning that is the source of *kapparah*.²

This second reason presents a problem. Why is the *Torah* learning at one's table better than any other place? The *Tiferet Yisrael* explains that it is a matter of focus. When one sits down to a meal there can be two intentions. It is well known that a human being needs to eat in order to live – and this should be the focus. Food is a necessary prerequisite for our *Avodat Hashem*. However some people live in order to eat – or other purely materialist pursuits. Therefore when one learns as part of the meal, it reveals what one's attitude is to food and the material in general.

Perhaps this reason is not so distant from *Rashi's* reason earlier. When someone sits down to a meal, which could potentially be a base and animalist act, yet elevates it in the performance of a *mitzvah* it is tantamount to offering *korban* on the *mizbeach*.

With all the above said, we may be able to suggest a final reason. As we know, there are three things that can annul a negative heavenly decree – *teshuva* (repentance), *tefillah* (prayer) and *tz'daka* (charity). The *shulchan* is a place where all three are performed. Firstly *tz'daka* - through *mitzvah* of *hachnasat orchim*. *Teshuva* – learning in one's meal demonstrates and even realigns one's direction in *avodat Hashem*. And finally *tefillah* - with *birkat ha'mazon*, one of the only biblical commanded *tefillot*.

David Bankier

¹ See *Tosfot* there. Also see *Brachot* 55a where *Rav Yehuda* lists "extending the length of one's meals" as one of the things that extends one's life as a longer meal increases the chance that a poor person will come and be provided for.

² The *Bartenura* explains that this idea is hinted two in the beginning of the *pasuk*. The dimensions of three "*amot*" should be read as three "*imot*" (authorities) referring to either *Torah*, *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim* or *Chumash*, *Mishnah* and *Gemarah*. This is how a table is measured!

Revision Questions

חגיגה ב' - ג' - ח:

- With regards to which process in the offering of a *korban* on *Yom Tov* did five groups of *Tana'im* debate? (ב' ב')
- Which personal *korban* did *Beit Shammai* argue cannot be brought on *Yom Tov*? (ג' ב')
- What was different about the way *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel* allowed a *korban Shlamim* do be brought on *Yom Tov*? (ג' ב')
- In what situation do *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel* agree that the *korban Re'iyah* is not offered on *Yom Tov*? (ד' ב')
- Regarding the previous question, what does the *kohen gadol* do on this day to demonstrate that the *korban* is not offered? (ד' ב')
- For what five things must one wash their hands prior to eating? (ה' ב')
- What requires more than hand washing prior to eating? (ה' ב')
- What are the five levels of "*kedushah*" described in the *Mishnah* and why are they important? (ו' ב')
- In what manner are the clothes of *ochlei trumah tameh* for *ochlei kodesh*? (ז' ב')
- What are the four section of a utensil that applies for *trumah* but not for *kodesh*? (ז' א')
- What is different about they way one purifies a utensil for use in *trumah* as apposed to use for *kodesh*? (ז' א')
- If a utensil was made and its purity preserved, in what situation does it nevertheless require immersing in a *mikvah*? (ז' ב')
- What is the furthest degree of *tum'ah* that can affect *trumah* and *kodesh*? (eg, *sheni, shlishi*, etc.) (ז' ב')
- In what case can only one hand become *tameh*? (ז' ב')
- Can one touch *ochlim neguvim* that is *trumah* without washing their hands? (ז' א')
- What two people require *tevilah* for *kodesh* but not for *trumah*? (ז' א')
- In what case do we trust a person in regards to the purity of *kodesh* more than we would for *trumah*? (ז' ד')
- What is the geographical border beyond which we no longer trust the sellers of earthenware about the purity of their wares? (ז' ה')
- Do we trust a thief, which returned what he stole, when he assures us that he did not touch anything else in the house? (ז' ו')
- What assumption do we make regarding *tum'ah ve'tahara* during the festivals? (ז' ו'-ז' א')
- In what case do they debate whether this assumption carries over till after the festival? (ז' ו')
- Which of the utensils was unable to be taken to the *mikvah* and thus required extra precaution with respect to *tum'ah ve'tahara*? (ז' ח')
- Which two utensils in the *Beit Ha'Mikdash* do not require *tevilah* and why? (ז' ח')

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MAZAL TOV!

SIYUM SEDER MOED

Let's get into Seder Nashim!

Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
6 th August י"ב אב	7 th August י"ג אב	8 th August י"ד אב	9 th August ט"ו אב	10 th August ט"ז אב	11 th August י"ז אב	12 th August י"ח אב
Yevamot 1:1-2	Yevamot 1:3-4	Yevamot 2:1-2	Yevamot 2:3-4	Yevamot 2:5-6	Yevamot 2:7-8	Yevamot 2:9-10

