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A "Simple" Mishnah

It would seem that to learn a *Mishnah* cannot or should not be that difficult. However as we see from the second *Mishnah* of the second *perek* of *Nazir*, at times *Rebbi* did not always leave us too many clues on how to understand a 'simple' *Mishnah*.

Broadly speaking, the second *perek* of *Nazir* deals with various declarations that include the desire to become a *nazir*. However, the wording of the *Mishnah* is difficult to understand and can leave one wondering as to the nature of the case being discussed.

The second *Mishnah* for example, describes a case where a man is in front of a cow and exclaims that the cow says that it will become a *nazir* if it stands. Clearly, work is required to explain the simple meaning of the text.

The commentators approach this difficulty in different ways. *Rashi* on the *Mishnah* gives a rather lengthy explanation of the case and is "forced" to inform the person learning the *Mishnah* what the *Gemara* says. This approach, even though logical, is not always the method used by *Rashi*. *Rashi* often will leave the reader in suspense and just comments "the *Gemara* will explain". Alternatively, at times *Rashi* will give his own understanding that does not necessarily have to follow the conclusion of the *Gemara*.

One example of this is the first *Mishnah* of the fourth *perek* of *Gittin* where it discusses a decree (*tekanah*) preventing a husband from canceling the duty of a messenger carrying a *get* to his wife. There *Rashi* explains that the reason for the *tekanah* was to prevent the husband forming a *Beit Din* of three people in another place and annulling the *get*. *Rashi* goes further and explains the concern for not allowing this is that the woman will be unaware and get remarried. When this section of *Mishnah* is discussed in the *Gemara*, both the number of people required in such a *Beit Din* and the reason for the *tekanah* are debated. The combination that *Rashi* uses to explain that *Mishnah* does not fit according to the possible options that are raised on the *daf*. This

style within *Rashi* allows the learner to understand a *Mishnah* on a *pashat* level without the need to understand the complexity of the *Gemara*. *Rashi* gives the *pashat*, even when it will not stand strong against the explanation of the *Mishnah* from within the *Gemara*.

In our case, *Rashi* explains that the man assumes that the cow intends to only move when it wants to and will not be prompted by a person. This person making this declaration is implying that he will be a *nazir* (from the cow) if the cow's wishes are fulfilled and the person is unsuccessful in making the cow stand. It appears as if the man has given the cow the ability to choose if the person will become a *nazir* or not.

Tosephot as well has a lengthy explanation like *Rashi*, yet differs pointing out that the cow has really no level of intelligence to choose if it wants to stand or not. *Tosephot* brings an example from the boat that *Yonah* was on where the verse recounts that the boat itself was "thinking" about breaking. Again it cannot be that an object has the ability to think and choose; even an animal does not have this ability to think and choose. This can best be explained by the common phrase "animal instincts"; that the animal performs action in life but does not have to think about performing them or does not have the *bechira* (choice) of whether or not to perform them. Therefore *Tosephot* explains that it just appears that the animal is making a choice to sit and not move but in truth it is not making any real decision.

Tosephot brings a *R' Yosef ish Yerushalayim* who explains that on seeing the cow lying down the person remarks to himself that the cow appears to be thinking "I wish I could get up. I would gladly become a *nazir* if I could succeed in getting up" Of course a cow cannot be a *nazir*! Rather the person himself accepts to "fulfill her (apparent) wishes" if she indeed stands.

That is just one example of how to understand a 'simple' *Mishnah*. How great was our master *Rebbe* and how far are we from him!

Rabbi Natan Rickman

Revision Questions

נזיר ב' א' – ג' ד'

- Explain the debate regarding someone who said “I am a *nazir* from dried figs”? (ב' א')
- How does *R' Yehuda* understand the above debate? (ב' א')
- What case is raised in the next *Mishnah* that is debated in a similar manner to the previous questions? (ב' ב')
- What is law regarding a person that is presented with a cup of a wine, and proclaims “I am a *nazir* from this”? (ב' ג')
- Is this law different if the person was already inebriated? (ב' ג')
- What is the law regarding a person that accepts upon himself *nazirut*
 - On the condition that he can drink wine? (ב' ד')
 - But at the time did not know that a *nazir* was not allowed to drink wine? (ב' ד')
 - And knew that a *nazir* is not allowed to come into contact with dead bodies, but that in this instance, since he is an undertaker, the *Chachamim* would allow him to come into contact with dead bodies. (ב' ד')
- If a person says “I am a *nazir* and I accept also to bring the *korbanot* for another *nazir* at the completion of his term”, and his friend hears, and says “Me too!” – what should they do? (ב' ה')
- Explain the debate regarding a case similar to the one in the previous question, but where the first person said, “I am a *nazir* and I accept also to bring the *korbanot* for ‘half’ another *nazir*”. (ב' ו')
- Does the term “*vlad*” also include a *tumtum*? (ב' ו')
- Explain the debate regarding a person that makes a *neder* if his wife has a “*vlad*” and then the wife miscarries. (ב' ז')
- Regarding the previous question, what if they then have a child? (ב' ז')
- Provide a practical difference between a person that says “I am a *nazir*, and also a *nazir* when I have a child”, and a person that says, “I am a *nazir* when I have a child, and also a *nazir*”. (ב' ט')
- If someone said “I am a *nazir* when I have a child, and also a *nazir* for 100 days”, when would the duration of his *nazirut* be greater than 130 days? (ב' י')
- With what acceptance of *nazirut*, after which, if one cuts his hair on the thirtieth day is it (*bedi'aved*) acceptable, and when is it not? (ב' יא')
- If someone accepts two *nazirut* on which days does he cut his hair? (ב' יב')
- What did *R' Papyas* testify about, regarding the previous question? (ב' יב')
- Explain the debate regarding a *nazir* that becomes *tameh* on the thirtieth day. (ב' יג')
- Explain the debate regarding a 100-day *nazir* that becomes *tameh* on the one-hundredth day. (ב' יד')
- Explain the debate regarding a 100-day *nazir* that becomes *tameh* on the one-hundred and first day. (ב' יד')

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28 th January ט"ז שבט	29 th January י"ח שבט	30 th January י"ט שבט	31 st January כ"א שבט	1 st February כ"ב שבט	2 nd February כ"ג שבט	3 rd February כ"ד שבט
Nazir 3:5-6	Nazir 3:7-4:1	Nazir 4:2-3	Nazir 4:4-5	Nazir 4:6-7	Nazir 5:1-2	Nazir 5:3-4

