



Volume 6. Issue 4

My Sons Have Defeated Me

The *Mishnayot* learnt this week dealt with different cases of earthenware ovens and stoves and their susceptibility to *tumah*. One *Mishnah* (5:10) discussed two complex cases by name - the *tanur* (oven) of *Achnai* and the *tanur* of *Ben Dinai*. The commentaries explain that the former oven was named after the man who manufactured such ovens, while the latter was named after the thief who constructed these makeshift ovens.¹ While providing historical detail is interesting, it is nonetheless odd that the *Mishnah* stated the name of the ovens after they were clearly described. What was the reason for this inclusion?

The *Gemara* (*Bava Metzia* 59) asks “What is *Achnai*?” The *Ben Yehoyada* explains that the *Gemara* is asking precisely our question. Granted that *Achnai* produced such ovens, why did the *Mishnah* need to mention it? The *Gemara* explains that the oven was the subject of a fiery debate between *R’ Eliezer* and the *Chachamim*. The *Chachamim* surrounded him with arguments like an *achna* (snake) and decreed such ovens as *tameh* according to their opinion.

The *Gemara* then continues describing the debate. When the debate hit a deadlock, *R’ Eliezer* proceeded to summon miraculous events in order to support his case which culminated in a Heavenly voice that appeared to indicate that he was correct.² Nonetheless *R’ Yehoshua* overruled all these proofs by declaring that *halachic* rulings cannot be swayed by heavenly intervention as the *Torah* had decreed that the final ruling is decided by the majority human opinion.³ Later the *Gemara* recounts that *Hashem* smiled at that moment and said, “My sons have defeated Me, My sons have defeated Me.”

Having explained why the *Mishnah* included the name *Achnai*, the commentaries also explain the inclusion of the name of the other oven – *Ben Dinai*. The *Bartenura* writes that this oven required the *Chachamim* to rule (*danu*) many laws (*dinim harbe*). The *Tosfot Anshei Shem* explain further that the derogatory name of *Achnai* was given to the first case, because *R’ Eliezer* did not concede defeat, while the more complimentary term *Dinai* was given to the second, as resolution was finally reached amongst the opponents.

The *Tosfot Anshei Shem* however cites a difficulty with this explanation. If that was the reason, then the second oven should have been referred to as “*Dinai*” and not “*Ben Dinai*”. The question is left as a difficulty.

Based on the contrast in the naming one could suggest the following. The second case in which consensus was finally reached is referred to as “*Ben Dinai*”, with the word “*ben*” being a singular term, because it stresses the point that consensus was reached more clearly. The *Chachamim* reached a point where they were “like one man with one heart”.

With this we can perhaps offer a novel answer to another question. Why at the end of the episode with the *tanur* of *Achnai* did *Hashem* repeat “My sons have defeated Me”? Both times the word “sons”, a plural reference, is used. Perhaps the first reference is to the majority opinion that withstood the test of the miracles and ruled, consistent with the *Torah* dictum, according to the majority. The second reference is perhaps an allusion to the bitter-sweet conclusion. As the dust settled from the heated debate, *R’ Eliezer* did not concede, and they remained “*banai*” – two groups in conflict.

Yisrael Yitzchak Bankier

¹ See the *Mishnah* for further details about their construction.

² See the *Gemara* for more details. Also see, for example, the *Maharsha* and *Ben Yehoyada* who each explain the message contained in the miracles and how they supported his cause.

³ The *Ben Yehoyada* explains that it was to teach this fundamental lesson (that *Chachamim* will not react to any miracles when it involves overriding a *Torah* principle) that such miracles occurred.

Revision Questions

כלים ה' טי' – ח' א'

- If a *tanur* came in parts how does the addition, removal and subsequent addition of *limudin* effect its *tumah* and *tahara*? (ה' טי')
- What is the *tanur shel achnai* and what is the debate regarding it? (ה' י')
- What is the *tanur shel ben dinai* and what is its status regarding *tumah* and *tahara*? (ה' י')
- How does an oven made of metal differ from the ovens discussed so far with respect to: (ה' י"א)
 - Susceptibility to *tumah*?
 - When it becomes *tahor*?
- Does covering a metal oven with clay give it the status of an earthenware oven? (ה' י"א)
- What are *pitputim* and when are they susceptible to *tumah*? (ה' י')
- If a stone is used to rest a pot on alongside another item, for which of those items is the stone susceptible to *tumah* and for which is it not? (ה' ב')
- What was the *kirat nezirim*? (ה' ב')
- Explain the case of the *kirat hatabachim*. (ה' ב')
- What is the law regarding three stones that are used as two stoves (the middle stones serving both) where the outer stone became *tameh*? (ה' ג')
- What is the law regarding the previous question if: (ה' ג')
 - The other outer stone were removed?
 - The *tameh* stone was removed?
 - The center stone was very large?
 - If the center stone was removed? Then returned?
- What is the law regarding a *kira* of two stones where additional stones were placed on either side? (ה' ד')
- Regarding *kalatut* of *ba'alei batim*, when does it become *tahor*? (ה' א')
- What is a *dachon* and why (and how) is it susceptible to *tumah*? (ה' ב')
- If a *kira* is cut in a vertical direction, when is it *tahor* and when is it (still) *tameh*? (ה' ג')
- Does the same rule apply to a *kofach* and why? (ה' ג')
- When is a *chatzar ha'kira* susceptible to *tumah*? (ה' ג')
- Regarding the previous question, when does the law differ and how so? (ה' ד')
- When are the space of *pitputei kira* all *tameh*? (ה' ד')
- Explain the debate if one of them is removed. (ה' ה')
- What other two cases are debated in a similar manner? (ה' ה')
- How is the space between the *pitputim* measured? (ה' ו')
- Can a *tanur* be divide for *tumah* and *tahara* by placing a plank of wood in the middle? (ה' א')

Local Shiurim

Sunday -Thursday

Between mincha & ma'ariv
Mizrachi Shul

Friday & Shabbat

10 minutes before mincha
Mizrachi Shul

Next Week's Mishnayot...

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | שבת קודש |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 15 th March י"ט אדר | 16 th March כ' אדר | 17 th March כ"א אדר | 18 th March כ"ב אדר | 19 th March כ"ג אדר | 20 th March כ"ד אדר | 21 st March כ"ה אדר |
| Kinim 8:2-3 | Kinim 8:4-5 | Kinim 8:6-7 | Keilim 8:8-9 | Keilim 8:10-11 | Keilim 9:1-2 | Keilim 9:3-4 |

