

לְמִיטְעוֹ, אָמְרִי: הָאֵי חָסֵר הוּא, וְהָאֵי  
דְּלָא עֲבִיד מֵאֲתָמוּל – מְשׁוּם דְּלָא  
אֲפִשְׁר. אוּ דְלִמָּא מְלָא הוּא, וּבְיָמֵינוּ  
עֲבָדוּ.

to err. They will be unsure how to interpret the lighting of the torches, as they will say: Perhaps this month is deficient, i.e., of twenty-nine days, and the reason that the torch sequence was not performed yesterday, on Shabbat eve, is due to the fact that it was impossible to do so on Shabbat. Or perhaps it is a full, thirty-day month, and they are performing the sequence at its proper time. Therefore, the Sages instituted that the torches should be lit only after deficient months, and the absence of this signal means that the month was a full one.

וְלִיעֲבִיד בֵּין אֲמֵלָא בֵּין אַחְסָר. וְכִי  
מְקַלְע רֵאשׁ הַדָּשׁ בַּעֲרֵב שַׁבָּת לָא  
לִיעֲבִיד כָּלֵל. וּבֵינָן דְּלָא עֲבָדִין מוֹצְאֵי  
שַׁבָּת, וְעֲבָדִין אֲמֵלָא – מִיָּדַע יָדְעֵי  
דְּחָסֵר הוּא!

The Gemara suggests: **And let them perform** the ceremony both for a full, thirty-day month and for a deficient one, and when the New Moon occurs on Shabbat eve, in which case they would have to light the torches after Shabbat, let them not perform it at all. And since the torches are not lit this month at the conclusion of Shabbat, and one normally performs the sequence for a full month, people will know that the month is deficient. In this manner, it should be possible to light the torches for all the months, with this one exception.

אֲפִילוּ הָכִי אָתוּ לְמִיטְעוֹ, אָמְרִי: הָאֵי  
מְלָא הוּא, וְהָאֵי דְּלָא עֲבָדִי – אִיתְגַּנְסִי  
הוּא דְּאִיתְגַּנְסִי.

The Gemara answers: **Even so**, people might come to err, as they will say: This month is indeed full, and the reason that they are not performing the ceremony is that they were subject to circumstances beyond their control.<sup>n</sup> Therefore, there might still be confusion as to the date of the New Moon that month.

וְלִיעֲבִיד אֲמֵלָא וְלָא לִיעֲבִיד אַחְסָר  
כָּלֵל! אָמַר אַבְיִי: מְשׁוּם בֵּיטוּל מְלָאכָה  
לְעַם שְׁנֵי יָמִים.

The Gemara asks: **And let them perform** the ceremony of torches only for a full, thirty-day month, and not perform it for a deficient month at all, in which case there will never be room for error. **Abaye said:** This cannot be done, because this would lead to a two-day suspension of work for the people,<sup>n</sup> as it was customary to refrain from certain types of work on the New Moon. After a full month there will always be a suspension of work for two days, as the people must abstain from work on the thirtieth of the month in case it is declared the New Moon. However, if the torches are lit for a deficient month, then at least in that case people could return to work the following day. Therefore, the Sages instituted that the torches are lit only for a deficient month.

#### NOTES

They were subject to circumstances beyond their control – אִיתְגַּנְסִי הוּא דְּאִיתְגַּנְסִי – The commentaries explain that this concern does not apply to actions that are performed on a regular basis, but only to unique circumstances, e.g., the New Moon occurring on a Shabbat eve (*Tosafot*; Rid). Rashi explains that the circumstances beyond their control refer to the possibility of inebriation at the Shabbat meal, which is beyond their control at the time. Others add that this does not refer to the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, but to the people at the stations along the way (*Tziyyun LeNefesh Hayya*).

Suspension of work for the people – בֵּיטוּל מְלָאכָה לְעַם – Rashi

explains that this is referring specifically to Rosh HaShana, not to every New Moon. *Tosafot* state that it was customary not to work on the New Moon, as indicated in the verse: “When will the New Moon be gone, that we may sell grain?” (Amos 8:5). Even nowadays it is customary for women not to perform certain types of work on the New Moon. Some commentaries explain further that the reason women in particular merited this special Festival is because they did not participate in the sin of the Golden Calf (*Tosafot*; see *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer*). The Rosh adds that they established the New Moon as a special holiday for women because women, like the moon, experience renewal from month to month, in their menstrual cycle.

Long poles [*kelonsot*] – כְּלוֹנסוֹת: Apparently from the Latin columnas or the Greek κλωνός, *klonos*, meaning pillars. In the language of the Sages it means wood beams and branches.

*Katrom* – קַתְרוֹם: Apparently from the Greek κέδρος, *kedros*, meaning cedar tree.

*Gulmish* – גּוּלְמִישׁ: Possibly related to the Persian gulamūš, referring to a species of willow, *Salix balchica*. Others, based on the reading *zugelmish* found in some manuscripts, suggest a relationship with the Aramaic word *zambeliga*, a type of cedar.

Ship [*burnei*] – בּוּרְנֵי: From the Greek λιβυρνίς, *liburnis*, or the Latin liburna. It refers to a boat used for war or shipping, which was commonly sailed in the Adriatic Sea.



Reconstructed liburna

Romans [*Armai*] – אַרְמָי: In its narrow and precise sense, this word refers to Arameans, speakers of the Aramaic language. However, the meaning of the term expanded, perhaps because Babylonia, the main area of Jewish settlement in the Persian Empire, was officially called Bei Armai, the house of Armai. Ultimately, the term was used in reference not only to speakers of Aramaic, but to all the gentile peoples in Babylonia.

#### BACKGROUND

*Afarsema* – אַפְרָסְמָא: This is the balsam, which may be the same as the *tzori* mentioned in the Bible (Genesis 37:25). It is apparently *Commiphora apobak samum*, a bush or low tree approximately 3–5 m in height, with thin branches and intricate leaf patterns. The best balsam oil drips from the ends of the stems, although most of the balsam oil is extracted by shaking the branches. Balsam oil has medicinal qualities, although it was primarily used for incense and as a fragrance. It was so valuable that it was sold for its own weight in gold.

*Berata* – בְּרִתָּא: There are divergent opinions with regard to the proper identification of the *berata*. Some say that it is what is presently known as the cypress, *Cupressus*, while others identify it as the pine, *Pinus*, or the juniper, *Juniperus*.

*Shaga* – שָׂאָנָא: The root of this word is in the Sanskrit saka, which became the Persian saj. It refers to the teak tree, *Tectona grandis*. The term was borrowed from Persian to Aramaic.

*Shorivna* – שׁוּרִיבְנָא: This term, which is Syrian as well as Arabic, refers to the cypress tree.

*Butmei* – בּוּטְמֵי: This tree produces the nuts referred to as “the choice fruits of the land” (Genesis 43:11) and apparently refers to the terebinth, *Pistacia vera* L.

*Balutei* – בְּלוּטֵי: This refers to one of the species of the oak tree, *Quercus*.

*Tornita* – תּוֹרְנִיתָא: Most commentaries say this is a kind of pine, *Pinus*, although some say it refers to the acacia tree.

“כִּי־יִצַד הָיוּ מִשִּׁיִּיִן מִשׂוֹאוֹת מְבִיִּיִן כְּלוֹנסוֹת” כּוּ: אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה: אֲרַבְעָה מִיְּנֵי אֲרָזִים הֵן: אֲרֹז, קַתְרוֹם, עֵץ שָׁמֹן, וּבְרוֹשׁ. קַתְרוֹם – אָמַר רַב: אֲדָרָא. דְּבִי רַבִּי שִׁילָא אָמְרִי: מְבִלְיָנָא; וְאָמְרִי לָהּ: זוֹ גּוּלְמִישׁ.

וּפְלִיגָא דְרֵבָה בַּר רַב הוּנָא. דָּאֵמַר רַבָּה בַּר רַב הוּנָא: אָמְרִי בִּי רַב: עֲשֶׂה מִיְּנֵי אֲרָזִים הֵם, שְׁנַאֲמַר “אֲתֵּן בְּמַדְבַּר אֲרֹז שִׁטָּה וְהֵדֵם וְעֵץ שָׁמֹן אֲשִׁים בְּעֵרְבָה בְרוֹשׁ תְּדַהֵר וְתֵאשׂוּר יִתְדוּ.” אֲרֹז – אֲרָזָא; שִׁטָּה – תּוֹרְנִיתָא; הֵדֵם – אֲסָא; עֵץ שָׁמֹן – אַפְרָסְמָא; בְרוֹשׁ – בְּרִתָּא; תְּדַהֵר – שָׂאָנָא; תֵּאשׂוּר – שׁוּרִיבְנָא.

הֵנִי שְׂבַעָה הוּא! כִּי אֲתָא רַב דִּימִי אָמַר: הוֹסִיפוּ עֲלֵיהֶם אֲלוּנִים, אֲלִמוּנִים, אֲלִמוּנִי. אֲלוּנִים – בּוּטְמֵי; אֲלִמוּנִים – בְּלוּטֵי; אֲלִמוּנִי – כְּסִיתָא. אֵיכָא דְאָמְרִי: אֲרוּנִים, עֲרֻמוּנִים, אֲלִמוּנִי. אֲרוּנִים עֲרִי; עֲרֻמוּנִים דּוּלְבִי; אֲלִמוּנִי – כְּסִיתָא.

“וְצִי אֲדִיר לֹא יַעֲבִרְנּוּ” – אָמַר רַב: זוֹ בּוּרְנֵי גְדוּלָּה.

הֵיכִי עֲבָדוּ? מֵייתוּ שִׁית אֲלִפֵי גַבְרֵי בְּתַרְסֵר יָרְחֵי שְׁתָּא, וְאָמְרִי לָהּ: תַּרְסֵר אֲלִפֵי גַבְרֵי בְּשִׁיתָא יָרְחֵי שְׁתָּא, וְטַעֲנִי לָהּ חֲלָא עַד דְּשַׁכְּנָא וְנַחֲתִי בַר אַמּוּרָא, וְקַטְר אֲשׁוּגֵי דְכִיתָנָא בְּכִסִּיתָא, וְקַטְר לָהּ בְּכִסִּיתָא. וְנִטְלֵי חֲלָא, וְשׂוּרֵי לְבָרְאֵי, וְכַמָּה דְמַדְלִיא עֲקָרָא וּמְתִיא.

וּמַחְלִיף עַל חַד תֵּרִין בְּכִסְפָּא. תְּלַת פְּרוּתָא הוּיִין, תְּרֵיתֵי בִי אַרְמָי וְחַדָּא דְּבִי פְרָסָאִי. דְּבִי אַרְמָי מִסְקֹן כְּסִיתָא, דְּבִי פְרָסָאִי מִסְקֹן מְרַגְנִיתָא, וּמַקְרִיאֵי פְרוּתָא דְמִשְׁמַהֲיָא.

§ The mishna taught: How would they light the torches? They would bring long poles [*kelonsot*]<sup>1</sup> of cedar and other materials that burn well, tie them all together, and set them on fire. Rav Yehuda said that there are four types of cedar: Cedar, *katrom*,<sup>1</sup> pinewood, and cypress. With regard to the identification of the tree called *katrom*, Rav said: This is the *addera* tree. In the school of Rabbi Sheila, they say: This is the *mavliga* tree. And some say it is the *gulmish*<sup>1</sup> tree.

The Gemara comments: And this opinion of Rav Yehuda disagrees with that of Rabba bar Rav Huna. As Rabba bar Rav Huna said that they say in the school of Rav: There are ten species of cedar,<sup>N</sup> as it is stated: “I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia tree and myrtle and the pine tree; I will set in the desert cypress, the plane tree, and the larch together” (Isaiah 41:19). The seven species mentioned in this verse are all types of cedars. The Gemara proceeds to identify these trees by their Aramaic names: Cedar is *arza*, acacia is *tornita*,<sup>B</sup> myrtle is *asa*, pine tree is *afarsema*,<sup>B</sup> cypress is *berata*,<sup>B</sup> maple is *shaga*,<sup>B</sup> and box tree is *shorivna*.<sup>B</sup>

The Gemara asks: Even if we count all the names in the verse, these are only seven, not ten. When Rav Dimi came<sup>N</sup> from Eretz Israel to Babylonia, he said: They added to them three more types of cedar: Terebinth, oak, and coral wood. The Gemara identifies them: Terebinth is the tree called *butmei*,<sup>B</sup> oak is *balutei*,<sup>B</sup> and coral wood is *kasita*. There are those who say that the additional three types are: Bay tree, plane tree, and coral wood. And their Aramaic names are as follows: Bay tree is *arei*, plane is *dulvei*, and coral wood is *kasita*.

§ Apropos coral, the Gemara cites a relevant verse: “Neither shall a *tzi adir*<sup>N</sup> be able to cross it” (Isaiah 33:21), i.e., it will not be able to traverse the river that will issue forth from the Temple in the future. What is this *tzi adir*? Rav said: This is a great ship [*burnei*]<sup>1</sup> used to collect coral from the sea.

The Gemara explains: How do they perform this collection of coral? They bring six thousand men to work for twelve months of the year, and some say they bring twelve thousand men for six months of the year. And they load the ship with sand until it sinks to the bottom of the sea. A diver descends and ties flax ropes around the coral and ties the other ends of the ropes to the boat. And then they take the sand and cast it overboard, and the boat rises once again to the surface. And as it rises, it uproots and brings the coral with it.

The Gemara comments: And this coral is so precious that it is exchanged for twice its weight in silver. The Gemara further notes: There are three ports in those places. Two belong to the Romans [*Armai*],<sup>1</sup> and one belongs to the Persians. In the one belonging to the Romans, they raise up coral, whereas in the one belonging to the Persians, they raise up pearls. And the Persian ports are called royal ports.

#### NOTES

Ten species of cedar – עֲשֶׂה מִיְּנֵי אֲרָזִים: See *Tosafot* for a discussion concerning the different lists of four and ten kinds of cedar. It is mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud that there are twenty-four kinds of cedar [*erez*]. Apparently, *erez* in the language of the Sages is not a specific kind of tree or even a botanical family; rather, all non-fruit trees that are used for building and for adornment are called *erez*. This explains the divergent opinions concerning the number of these types of tree.

When Rav Dimi came – כִּי אֲתָא רַב דִּימִי: Rav Dimi would often travel from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia, primarily to transmit the Torah of Eretz Yisrael to the centers of the Diaspora, although occasionally he traveled for business purposes as well. Many

questions, particularly those concerning the Torah of Eretz Yisrael, remained unresolved in Babylonia until a messenger would arrive and elucidate the *halakha*, the novel expression, or the unique circumstances of a particular statement that required clarification.

*Tzi adir* – צִי אֲדִיר: The term *tzi* in the Bible means a boat, as explained by the commentaries and translators. A *tzi adir* is therefore a great, strong ship. That is why the description of the raising of the coral from the ocean floor is mentioned here, as an especially strong ship is required for this purpose. The use of the word *tzi* in modern Hebrew to mean a fleet of ships is a neologism.

Likened to a myrtle in the wilderness – דומה להדס – במדבר: As the Sages commonly compare a Torah scholar to a myrtle, this statement is based on that comparison (Maharsha).

For their blood I will not hold innocent – דמם לא נקיתי: The plain meaning of Joel 4:21 is: “And I will hold as innocent their blood that I have not held as innocent.” However, the Gemara reads it as: And I will hold as innocent, but for their blood I will not hold innocent. In other words, items are replaceable, and one can even return more than one took. However, there is no replacement for people such as Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues (see Maharsha).

אמר רבי יוחנן: כל שיטה ושיטה שננטלו גוים מירושלים עתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא להחזירן לה, שנאמר: “אתן במדבר ארו שיטה.” ואין מדבר אלא ירושלים, שנאמר: “ציון מדבר היתה” וגו’.

אמר רבי יוחנן: כל הלומד תורה ואינו מלמדה – דומה להדס במדבר. איכא דאמר: כל הלומד תורה ומלמדה במקום שאין תלמידי חכמים – דומה להדס במדבר, דחביב.

אמר רבי יוחנן: או להם לגוים שאין להם תקנה שנאמר: “תחת הנחשת אביא זהב ותחת הברזל אביא כסף ותחת העצים נחשת ותחת האבנים ברזל.” תחת רבי עקיבא וחביריו מאי מביאין? ועליהם הוא אומר: “נקיתי דמם לא נקיתי.”

“ומאין היו משיאין משואות כו’ ומבית בלתיין.” מאי בית בלתיין? אמר רב:

With regard to the aforementioned verse, Rabbi Yohanan said: Each and every acacia tree that the gentiles took from Jerusalem will be returned to the city by the Holy One, Blessed be He, as it is stated: “I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia tree and myrtle and the oil tree; I will set in the desert cypress, the plane tree and the larch together” (Isaiah 41:19). And the term wilderness is referring to nothing other than Jerusalem, as it is stated: “Zion is become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation” (Isaiah 64:9).

And Rabbi Yohanan also said: Anyone who studies Torah but does not teach it to others is likened to a myrtle in the wilderness.<sup>N</sup> The myrtle has a pleasant fragrance, but there is nobody to enjoy it in the wilderness. There are those who say a different version of this statement: Anyone who studies Torah and teaches it to others in a place where there are no other Torah scholars is likened to a myrtle in the wilderness, which is especially precious and thoroughly enjoyed by those who find it.

And Rabbi Yohanan further said: Woe to the nations of the world, as they have no remedy for the sins they committed against the Jewish people, as it is stated: “For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron” (Isaiah 60:17). For all things there is a remedy, as one can always exchange them for an item of equivalent or greater value. However, for Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues, whom the nations put to death, what can one bring to atone for their sin? And with regard to them it is stated: And I will hold them as innocent, but for their blood I will not hold them innocent (see Joel 4:21).<sup>N</sup>

§ The mishna states: And from which mountains would they light the torches? From the Mount of Olives to Sartava, and from Sartava to Gerofina, and from Gerofina to Havran, and from Havran to Beit Baltin. And from Beit Baltin they would not light torches in any other pre-established places. The Gemara asks: What is this place called Beit Baltin? Rav said:

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זו בירם. This is the town called Biram.

מאי גולה? אמר רב יוסף: זו פומבדיתא. מאי כמדורת האש? תנא: כל אחד ואחד נוטל אבוקה בידו ועולה לראש גג.

§ The mishna taught: He would wave the torch back and forth and up and down, until he would see the entire Diaspora before him alight like one large bonfire. The Gemara asks: What is the meaning in this context of the term Diaspora, which certainly cannot be referring to the entire Diaspora across the world? Rav Yosef said: This is referring to the city of Pumbedita<sup>B</sup> in Babylonia. The Gemara further asks: What is the meaning of the phrase: Like one large bonfire? It is taught in a *baraita*: Each and every individual would take a torch in his hand and ascend to the top of his roof and light it. In this manner, the entire city would present the appearance of a large bonfire.

תנא, רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר: אף חרים וכייר וגדר וחבורתיה. איכא דאמר: ביני וביני הוו קיימי; איכא דאמר: להך גיסא דארץ ישראל הוו קיימי. מר חשיב דהאי גיסא, ומר חשיב דהאי גיסא.

It is taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: Torches were also lit at Harim, and Kayar<sup>B</sup> and Geder, and its neighboring places. There are those who say that the places added by Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar are located between the places mentioned in the mishna, whereas there are those who say that they are located on the other side of Eretz Yisrael, on the side nearer Babylonia. The Sage in the mishna enumerates the places found on one side of Eretz Yisrael, whereas the Sage in the *baraita* enumerates the places found on the other side.

## BACKGROUND

Pumbedita – פומבדיתא: Pumbedita, a town on the Euphrates River northwest of Neharde’a, was an important center of the Babylonian Jewish community for many generations. As early as the Second Temple period, Pumbedita was referred to simply as: The Diaspora. After the destruction of Neharde’a, its yeshiva moved to Pumbedita, and Torah study continued there uninterrupted until the end of the geonic period.

The scholars of Pumbedita were particularly renowned for their acumen. The most famous heads of the yeshiva in Pumbedita were Rav Yehuda, its original founder; Rabba; Rav Yosef; Abaye; Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak; Rav Zevid; and Rafka bar Pappa. The yeshiva in Pumbedita was prominent in the geonic period as well, often overshadowing the yeshiva in Sura. The last heads of the yeshiva in Pumbedita were the renowned *geonim* Rav Sherira Gaon and his son, Rav Hai Gaon.

Harim and Kayar – חרים וכייר: The locations of these places have not been established with certainty, apart from the city of Geder. As stated in the Gemara, is not known whether this list refers to a parallel route of torches, perhaps in the direction of Syria, or simply extra stations along the way.

The gathering of the witnesses – כּוּנֵס הָעֵדִים: Anyone who saw the moon would come to the court of seventy-one judges. The court would gather all the witnesses together, and provide them with great feasts so that they would be willing to come on the next occasion (Rambam *Sefer Zemanim*, *Hilkhot Kiddush HaHodesh* 2:7).

The permission for the witnesses to walk two thousand cubits – הֵתֵר לְעֵדִים לְלַכֵּת אֲלֵפִים אַמָּה: Anyone who is permitted to venture beyond his Shabbat limit, e.g., a witness who comes to testify about the new moon, is entitled to walk two thousand cubits in every direction from the place where he arrives. If he comes to a city, he is considered like the people of that city, who may walk throughout the entire city and two thousand cubits beyond (Rambam *Sefer Zemanim*, *Hilkhot Kiddush HaHodesh* 2:7 and *Hilkhot Shabbat* 27:16).

Those who leave with the permission of the court – הַיּוֹצֵאִים בְּרִשּׁוֹת בֵּית דִּין: Any individual whom the Sages permit to go beyond his Shabbat limit, e.g., a midwife, or one going to rescue Jews from gentiles or from natural disasters, may walk two thousand cubits in every direction from the place where they arrived. If it is dangerous to stay there, they are permitted to return to their place of origin (*Shulhan Arukh*, *Orah Hayyim* 407:1, 3).

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: בֵּין כָּל אַחַת וְאַחַת שְׂמוֹנֶה עָרְסָאוֹת. כַּמָּה הֵווּ לְהוֹ? תִּלְתֵּינָן וְתַרְתֵּינָן. וְהָאֵלֶּיךָ דְּנָא טוֹבָא הוּא! אָמַר אַבְיִי: אִסְתַּתְמוּמֵי אִסְתַּתְמוּם לְהוּ דְרַבִּי.

דְּכַתְּבִיב: "לִכֹּן הֲנִי שֶׁךְ אֶת דְּרַכְךָ בְּסִירִים." רַב נַחְמָן בַּר יִצְחָק אָמַר מֵהֶכָּא. דְּכַתְּבִיב: "נִתְּיבֹתֵי עוֹדָה."

מִתְנִי' חֲצֵר גְּדוּלָה הִיְתָה בִירוּשָׁלַיִם, וּבֵית יַעֲקֹב הִיְתָה נִקְרָאָת, וְלִשְׁם כָּל הָעֵדִים מִתְכַּנְּסִין, וּבֵית דִּין בּוֹדְקִין אוֹתָם שָׁם. וְסַעֲוֹדוֹת גְּדוּלוֹת עוֹשִׂין לָהֶם, בְּשַׁבָּיל שְׂיָהוּ רְגִילֵין לְבָא.

בְּרִאשׁוֹנָה לֹא הָיוּ זְוִין מִשָּׁם כָּל הַיּוֹם; הִתְקִין רַבִּן גַּמְלִיאֵל הַזֶּקֶן שְׂיָהוּ מֵהֶלְכִין אֲלֵפִים אַמָּה לְכָל רוּחַ.

וְלֹא אֵלוּ בַלְבָּד אֵלָא אִף חֲכָמָה הַבָּאָה לְיֵילֵד, וְהַבָּא לְהַצִּיל מִן הַדְּלִיקָה וּמִן הַגַּיִס, וּמִן הַנְּהַר, וּמִן הַמַּפּוּלָּת – הָרִי אֵלוּ כְּאִנְשֵׁי הָעִיר, וְיֵישׁ לָהֶם אֲלֵפִים לְכָל רוּחַ.

Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Between each and every one of the stations there was a distance of eight parasangs. The Gemara asks: How many parasangs are these in total? Thirty-two parasangs. The Gemara further asks: Isn't the distance from the Mount of Olives to Beit Baltin now much greater than thirty-two parasangs? Abaye said: The direct routes have become blocked, and therefore people nowadays must use indirect routes, making the journey much longer.

The Gemara provides a source for this claim. As it is written: "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns,<sup>N</sup> and make a wall against her, that she shall not find her paths" (Hosea 2:8). Rav Naḥman bar Yitzḥak said: It is derived from here, as it is written: "He has made my paths crooked" (Lamentations 3:9), which indicates that over the course of the exile the routes have become longer.

**MISHNA** There was a large courtyard in Jerusalem, which was called Beit Ya'zek. And there all the witnesses coming to testify about the new moon would gather,<sup>HN</sup> and the court of seventy-one judges would examine them there. And they would prepare great feasts<sup>N</sup> for them, so that they would be willing and accustomed to coming and submitting their testimony.

Initially, when witnesses would arrive on Shabbat from a distant place, they would not move<sup>N</sup> from there all day, as they had left their Shabbat limit, and it was consequently prohibited for them to walk more than four cubits in any direction once they had completed their mission. Concerned that this limitation would discourage witnesses from coming, Rabban Gamliel the Elder instituted that the witnesses be permitted to walk two thousand cubits in each direction.<sup>H</sup>

The mishna continues: And not only these witnesses are granted two thousand cubits from their new place, but this applies also to a midwife who comes to deliver a child, and one who comes to rescue Jews from a fire, from an invasion of gentile troops, from a flooding river, or from the collapse of a building. All these are considered like the inhabitants of the city where they arrive, and therefore they have two thousand cubits in each direction.<sup>H</sup>

NOTES

Hedge up your way with thorns – שֶׁךְ אֶת דְּרַכְךָ בְּסִירִים: This passage alludes to the constant disruptions the Roman officials caused to the transmission of information concerning the sanctification of the month (Maharsha).

And there all the witnesses gather – וְלִשְׁם כָּל הָעֵדִים מִתְכַּנְּסִין: Rashi and Rabbi Ovadya Bartenuira explain that this refers specifically to witnesses who came on Shabbat. Others maintain that the witnesses would go to Beit Ya'zek on all occasions, and they were not allowed to leave until their testimony had been examined (Rambam; Rabbeinu Yehonatan; Meiri).

Great feasts – סַעֲוֹדוֹת גְּדוּלוֹת: The later authorities discuss whether these feasts were a reward for the witnesses, as it is prohibited for witnesses to receive any kind of payment for their

testimony. Apparently, this type of benefit is not considered reward for testimony at all (see Responsa of Noda Bihuda).

Initially they would not move – בְּרִאשׁוֹנָה לֹא הָיוּ זְוִין: The commentaries discuss how the institution allowing witnesses to walk in the new place evolved. Rashi indicates that at first they had to remain in the courtyard, and only afterward were they allowed to leave and to walk around in the city. However, there are several other opinions in this regard (see Tosafot). In the Jerusalem Talmud it is stated that there were four stages: At first they did not move at all from their location, then they were allowed to walk four cubits, later they could move in the entire courtyard, and finally, they were permitted to wander throughout the city.

The term Beit Ya'zek – לְשׁוֹן בֵּית יַעֲזֵק: In the *Arukh* the translation of *bazikim* is *be'izkaya*, which has the same root as Beit Ya'zek. It is explained in the Jerusalem Talmud that the place was called by this name because they would fix and deal with [ozkim] the *halakha* there.

לְפָנֵי הַחֲמָה אוֹ לְאַחֵר – In front of the sun or behind the sun, etc. – הַחֲמָה וְכוּ: The mishna indicates that these questions served to establish whether the testimonies of the two witnesses matched. However, others explain that the court would first produce their own astronomical calculation for the new moon, by means of which they would determine its angle, its visible width, and on which side it should be seen. If the account of the witnesses differed significantly from their own expectations they would reject it as mistaken or false testimony. It was only if the testimony of the first witness aligned with the court's own calculations that they would check the congruence of the statements of the witnesses with each other.

In front of the sun – לְפָנֵי הַחֲמָה: In the Jerusalem Talmud it is explained that the phrase: In front of the sun, which could also mean: Before the sun, obviously does not mean beforehand in time. Rather, it refers to the location of the moon relative to the sun.

The sun has never seen the concave side of the moon – מְעוֹלָם לֹא רָאָתָה חֲמָה פְּגִימָתָהּ שֶׁל לְבָנָה: Since the light of the moon is merely a reflection of that of the sun, and a rainbow is also produced by the sun's rays, the concave side necessarily faces the other direction. In the Jerusalem Talmud it is further stated that the constellations also come one after the other, i.e., a setting constellation never faces the rising constellation, as this would distress the departing constellation.

As it would be distressed – דְּחֻלְשָׁה דְּעֵתָה – The commentaries note that the Sages were aware that there are natural explanations for these phenomena. However, they wanted to provide ethical reasons for why the phenomena were created in this manner (Ritva).

## HALAKHA

בְּדִיקַת – The examination of the witnesses of the new moon – עֵדֵי הַמוֹלָד: The court would start their proceedings with the pair of eyewitnesses who arrived first. They would examine the greater one of them and ask him details about his sighting of the moon. If his account was plausible, astronomically speaking, they would bring in the second witness and examine him as well. If their statements were accurate and identical, their testimony would stand. However, the court would still hear from the other witnesses and ask them general questions, so that they would not be discouraged the next time around (Rambam *Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Kiddush HaHodesh* 2:4, 7).

**GEMARA** A dilemma was raised before the Sages: What is the correct reading of the mishna? Did we learn: Beit Ya'zek, or did we learn: Beit Yazek? The Gemara explains the difference between these two versions. Did we learn: Beit Ya'zek,<sup>n</sup> which is an lofty term, indicating that it was a fine place where the witnesses had a pleasant experience, as it is written: "And he dug it [*vaye'azzekehu*] and cleared it of stones" (Isaiah 5:2), which shows that the root *a-z-k* denotes improvement? Or perhaps we learned: Beit Yazek, which is a term of distress, reflecting the fact that the witnesses who arrived there on Shabbat were not permitted to move from there all day, as it is written: "And he was bound with chains [*bazikim*]" (Jeremiah 40:1).

אָמַר אַבְיִי תָא שְׁמַע: סְעוּדוֹת גְּדוּלוֹת הָיוּ עוֹשִׂין לָהֶם שָׁם כְּדִי שִׁיהוּ רְגִילִים לְבוֹא! דְּלִמָּא תִּרְתִּי הָווּ עֲבָדֵי בְּהוּ.

Abaye said: Come and hear the mishna: They would prepare great feasts for them there, so that they would be accustomed to come and submit their testimony. This indicates that the witnesses were made welcome, in accordance with the name Beit Ya'zek. The Gemara rejects this argument: Perhaps they performed two practices for them, i.e., they provided feasts but they also restricted their movement. Therefore, there is no proof from the mishna for this version of the name.

מִתְנִי בִּיצֵד בּוֹדְקִין אֶת הָעֵדִים? וְזָג שָׂבָא רֵאשׁוֹן בּוֹדְקִין אוֹתוֹ רֵאשׁוֹן, וּמְכַנְּסִין אֶת הַגְּדוֹל שְׂבָהָן. וְאוֹמְרִין לוֹ: אָמור בִּיצֵד רֵאִיתָ אֶת הַלְּבָנָה: לְפָנֵי הַחֲמָה אוֹ לְאַחֵר הַחֲמָה? לְצַפּוֹנָה אוֹ לְדְרוֹמָה? כַּמָּה הָיָה גְבוּהָ, וְלֵאמֹן הָיָה נוֹטָה? וְכַמָּה הָיָה רְחֹבָה? אִם אָמַר "לְפָנֵי הַחֲמָה" – לֹא אָמַר כְּלוּם.

**MISHNA** How do they examine the witnesses who come to testify about the new moon? They deal with them in order, as the pair of witnesses that arrives first they examine first. They bring in the greater of the two witnesses, and they say to him: Say how you saw the moon. Was it in front of the sun or behind the sun?<sup>n</sup> To its north or to its south? How high was the moon over the horizon, and in which direction did it tilt? And how wide was it? If, for example, he said that he saw the moon in front of the sun, he has not said anything of substance, as this is impossible and therefore he is either mistaken or lying.

וְאַחֵר כֵּךְ הָיוּ מְכַנְּסִין אֶת הַשְּׁנִי וּבּוֹדְקִין אוֹתוֹ. אִם נִמְצְאוּ דְבָרֵיהֶם מְכוּוָּנִים – עוֹדוֹתָן קִייַּמָּת. וְשִׂאָר כָּל הַזְּוָגוֹת שׁוֹאֲלִין אוֹתָן רֵאשִׁי דְבָרִים. לֹא שְׁהִיוּ צְרִיכִים לָהֶם, אֲלָא כְּדִי שִׁלֵּא יֵצְאוּ בְּפִתֵי נַפְשׁ. בְּשִׁבְלֵי שִׁיהוּ רְגִילִים לְבוֹא.

And after they finish hearing the first witness's testimony, they would bring in the second witness and examine him in a similar manner. If their statements match, their testimony is accepted and the court sanctifies the New Moon. And the court then asks all the other pairs of witnesses certain general matters, without probing into all the details. They do this not because they require the additional testimony, but so that the witnesses should not leave disappointed, and so that the witnesses should be accustomed to coming to testify, and will not hesitate to come the next time, when they might be needed.<sup>h</sup>

גַּמְ' הֵינּוּ לְפָנֵי הַחֲמָה – הֵינּוּ לְצַפּוֹנָה, הֵינּוּ לְאַחֵר הַחֲמָה – הֵינּוּ לְדְרוֹמָה! אָמַר אַבְיִי: פְּגִימָתָהּ לְפָנֵי הַחֲמָה אוֹ לְאַחֵר הַחֲמָה. אִם אָמַר "לְפָנֵי הַחֲמָה" – לֹא אָמַר כְּלוּם.

**GEMARA** The Gemara asks: In front of the sun<sup>n</sup> is the same as to its north, and behind the sun is the same as to its south. Why would the court ask the witnesses both sets of questions? Abaye said: The first question does not refer to the moon's position relative to the sun, but to the concave side of the moon, whether it was before the sun, pointing toward it, or behind the sun, pointing away from it. If he said that it was before the sun, he has said nothing.

דְּאָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: מֵאֵי דְכִתְבִּיב: "הַמֶּשֶׁל וּפְחָד עִמּוֹ עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו"? מְעוֹלָם לֹא רָאָתָה חֲמָה פְּגִימָתָהּ שֶׁל לְבָנָה, וְלֹא פְּגִימָתָהּ שֶׁל קֶשֶׁת. פְּגִימָתָהּ שֶׁל לְבָנָה – דְּחֻלְשָׁה דְּעֵתָה; פְּגִימָתָהּ שֶׁל קֶשֶׁת – דְּלֹא לִימְרוּ עוֹבְדֵי הַחֲמָה

As Rabbi Yohanan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "Dominion and fear are with Him, He makes peace in His high places" (Job 25:2)? It means that the sun has never seen the concave side of the new moon,<sup>n</sup> nor has it ever seen the concave side of a rainbow, both of which always face away from the sun. It has never seen the concave side of the moon, as the moon would be distressed<sup>n</sup> by a sense of inadequacy if its concave side faced the sun. Therefore the sun sees only the full roundness of its convex side. In this way He makes peace in His high places between the sun and the moon. Furthermore, the sun has never seen the concave side of a rainbow, so that the worshippers of the sun not say, as though the sun is a god,