The Gemara asks: If so, then just as a priest who ministers in the Temple may not be physically blemished, so too, a priest who recites the benediction may not be blemished.

The Gemara asks: And what did you see that you juxtaposed the cases in favor of a leniency? Perhaps you should juxtapose for a stringency, by comparing the priest who recites the benediction to a nazirite with regard to grape pits, and comparing him to a priest ministering in the Temple in relation to the prohibition against reciting the benediction if he has a physical blemish. The Gemara explains: These proofs are cited merely as support for halakhot that apply by rabbinic law, and consequently, they are interpreted as a leniency, not a stringency.

The Gemara asks: But how can a person’s offering be sacrificed when he is not standing next to it? The early prophets, Samuel and David, instituted twenty-four priestly watches. For each and every priestly watch there was a corresponding watch in Jerusalem of priests, Levites, and Israelites. When the time arrived for the members of a certain priestly watch to ascend, the priests and Levites of that watch would ascend to Jerusalem.

**HALAKHA**

**Blemished** – בָּלַעַת: A priest who has a physical blemish on his face or hand may not recite the Priestly Benediction, lest the people be distracted from the benediction by his defect. If the local populace is already accustomed to the priest’s defect, according to many commentaries, the conclusion of the Gemara is that both comparisons, i.e., comparing a priest who recites the benediction to a ministering priest and to a nazirite, are cited merely as support for a rabbinical prohibition. However, some contend that the verse “To minister to Him and to bless in His name” (Deuteronomy 10:8) is an explicit comparison, which cannot be relegated to mere support (Ra’avad). According to this opinion, the prohibition against a drunk priest reciting the benediction is derived from the comparison to a priest who is performing the Temple service in a state of inebriation, a prohibition that is expressly stated in the Torah (Leviticus 10:8). Conversely, the comparison to a nazirite is only a hint that a priest who recites the benediction is not similar to a ministering priest in all regards (see Mi’hotam and Meir). Rabbeinu Hananel also indicates that only the juxtaposition is rabbinical.

**NOTES**

**Are support, etc. – רַס בְּנֵי:** According to many commentaries, the conclusion of the Gemara is that both comparisons, i.e., comparing a priest who recites the benediction to a ministering priest and to a nazirite, are cited merely as support for a rabbinical prohibition. However, some contend that the verse “To minister to Him and to bless in His name” (Deuteronomy 10:8) is an explicit comparison, which cannot be relegated to mere support (Ra’avad). According to this opinion, the prohibition against a drunk priest reciting the benediction is derived from the comparison to a priest who is performing the Temple service in a state of inebriation, a prohibition that is expressly stated in the Torah (Leviticus 10:8). Conversely, the comparison to a nazirite is only a hint that a priest who recites the benediction is not similar to a ministering priest in all regards (see Mi’hotam and Meir). Rabbeinu Hananel also indicates that only the juxtaposition is rabbinical.

**BACKGROUND**

**Priestly watches – מִשְׁמָרָה:** The twenty-four priestly watches were apparently centered in specially chosen areas of Eretz Yisrael. Just as when the land was originally distributed among the tribes certain cities were set aside for the priests, the custom continued in the Second Temple period for priests to live in particular locales. Even after the destruction of the Temple, the priests went into exile as families, and each watch lived in a different village in the Galilee, as can be seen from various lists of priestly watches in their towns.
The Sages taught: There were twenty-four priestly watches in Eretz Yisrael, and twelve in Jericho. The Gemara expresses surprise at this statement: Twelve in Jericho? In that case there are too many of them, as this makes a total of thirty-six watches. Rather, the baraita should be read as follows: There were twenty-four in total, twelve of which were in Jericho. How so?

When the time arrived for the members of a certain priestly watch to ascend, half the priestly watch would ascend from all over Eretz Yisrael to Jerusalem, and half the priestly watch would ascend from Jericho, in order to provide water and food to their brothers in Jerusalem from Jericho.

Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: Priests, Levites, and Israelites are all indispensable for the offering, and consequently, they all must be present when the daily offering is sacrificed. It is taught in a baraita that Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: Priests, Levites, and musical instruments are indispensable for the offering. The Gemara asks: With regard to what principle do they disagree? One Sage, Shmuel, holds that the main aspect of the Levites’ song that accompanied the offerings is vocal, and one Sage, Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar, holds that the main aspect of their song is instrumental, performed with a vessel, and therefore both the Levites and their instruments must be present for the daily offering.

Rav Hama bar Gurya said that Rav said: Moses initially instituted for the Jews eight priestly watches, four from the descendants of Elazar and four from the descendants of Itamar. Samuel came and established them as sixteen, and David came and established them as twenty-four, as it is stated, after the watches are listed: “In the forty-first year of the reign of David they were sought for, and there were found among them mighty men of valor at Jazer of Gilead” (1 Chronicles 26:31).

The Gemara raises an objection against this opinion from a baraita. Moses instituted for the Jews eight priestly watches, four from Elazar and four from Itamar. And David and Samuel came and established them as twenty-four, as it is stated: “Whom David and Samuel the seer ordained in their set office” (1 Chronicles 9:32). This baraita indicates that David and Samuel together established the twenty-four watches. The Gemara explains: This is what the baraita is saying: Through their ordination by David and Samuel of Rama, the priestly watches incrementally increased in number until they established them as twenty-four.

And half the priestly watch would ascend from Jericho — and half the priestly watch would ascend from Eretz Yisrael. Some commentaries maintain that when the time came for the members of a particular watch to ascend to Jerusalem for their week of service in the Temple, half would ascend to the capital, while the other half would go to Jericho to bring supplies of water and food for their brothers in Jerusalem. After three days, the two groups would switch roles (Meiri). In the Jerusalem Talmud it is indicated that most of the members of the watches were residents of Jerusalem or Jericho.

Moses instituted for the Jews — and then Moses divided the priestly watch into eight watches, four from the descendants of Elazar and four from the descendants of Itamar. This continued until the days of Samuel, when the prophet and King David divided the priestly watch into twenty-four watches (Rambam Sefer Avoda, Hilkhhot Kele’i HaMiddah 4:3).

The main aspect of their song — The musical accomplishment provided by the Levites to the sacrificial services in the Temple was mainly vocal. In addition to the choral singing, there was also instrumental music played by Levites and Israelites (Rambam Sefer Avoda, Hilkhot Kele’i HaMiddah 3:3).

The Gemara expresses surprise at this statement: Twelve in Jericho? This verse is cited to teach us that it was King David, not the prophet Samuel, who expanded the watches so that the total number stood at twenty-four, as Samuel had passed away by the fortieth year of David’s reign (Meiri; Maharsha).
It is taught in another baraita: Moses instituted for the Jews sixteen priestly watches, eight from Elazar and eight from Itamar. And when the descendants of Elazar grew more numerous than the descendants of Itamar, he divided the descendants of Elazar and established them together with the descendants of Itamar as twenty-four watches, as it is stated: “And there were more chief men found of the sons of Elazar than of the sons of Itamar, and they were divided thus: Of the sons of Elazar there were sixteen heads of fathers’ houses, and of the sons of Itamar, according to their fathers’ houses, eight” (1 Chronicles 24:4). And it says: “One father’s house taken for Elazar, and proportionately for Itamar” (1 Chronicles 24:16).

The Gemara asks: What is: And it says? Why was it necessary to quote a second verse? The Gemara explains: And if you would say that just as the descendants of Elazar increased, so too, the descendants of Itamar increased, and the eight watches were initially four, as claimed by Rav Hama bar Gurya, then come and hear: “One father’s house taken for Elazar, and proportionately for Itamar,” which indicates that the descendants of Itamar remained as they were. This verse is an apparently conclusive refutation of the opinion of Rav Hama bar Gurya, who says that Moses established only eight priestly watches.

The Gemara responds: Rav Hama bar Gurya could have said to you that the initial order of the priestly watches is a dispute between tanna'im, as indicated by the previous baraita, and I stated my opinion in accordance with that tanna who said that Moses instituted eight priestly watches.

The Sages taught: Only four priestly watches ascended from the Babylonian exile,6 while the other twenty stayed in Babylonia. And these are the watches who returned: The descendants of Jedaiah, Harim, Pashhur, and Immer. The prophets among those who returned arose

6And likewise the prophets among them stipulated that even if the descendants of Jehoiarib, who originally headed the priestly watches, ascended to Eretz Yisrael, Jedaiah would not be demoted from its place as the first of the watches. Rather, the watch of Jedaiah would retain precedence, and Jehoiarib would be subordinate to it.
Thus says the Lord: If not for My covenant day and night, I would not have appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth (Jeremiah 33:25). This verse teaches that it is inferred from this reason the members of the non-priestly watch would fast for the daily offerings brought in the morning and evening, heaven and earth would cease to exist. The Gemara here derives the connection between the continued existence of the universe and the sacrificial service in the Temple from the conversation between Abraham and God. According to this interpretation of their exchange, Abraham did not ask for a sign that his descendants would inherit Eretz Yisrael, but for a means of atonement that would ensure that his descendants would continue to exist and the land would remain theirs forever (Maharsha).

The members of the priestly watch would pray – נא ממעשיך וביدماتיך. Each priestly watch was divided into six or seven sub-groups called patrilineal families, each of which performed the Temple service for one day of the week. While one patrilineal family performed the actual service, the remaining patrilineal families offered prayers that the offerings be accepted by God (Rabbeinu Gershon; Rabbeinu Eliahou).

Four fasts – יא יא יא יא. Some commentaries suggest that the groups for which the members of the non-priestly watch fast correspond to those types of people who are obligated to give thanks-offerings and recite special prayers when they are delivered from distress, as derived from Psalm 107: Seafarers, desert travelers, the sick after they have been healed, and those who have been released from prison, as each potential disaster requires a separate fast. In addition, in the Jerusalem Talmud it is inferred from this baraita that the same fast may not be proclaimed for more than one impending calamity, as each potential disaster requires a separate fast. Therefore, the members of the Great Sanhedrin would divide themselves into sub-groups, each of which fasted one day of the week together with the members of the non-priestly watch (see Rabbeinu Eisanai).

The Gemara explains this verse. Abraham said: Master of the Universe, perhaps the Jews will sin before You. Will You treat them as You did the generation of the flood and the generation of the dispersion, and destroy them? God said to him: No. Abraham said before God: Master of the Universe, tell me, with what shall I inherit it? How can my descendants ensure that You will maintain the world? God said to Abraham: “Take for Me a three-year-old heifer, and a three-year-old goat, and a three-year-old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon” (Genesis 15:9). God was alluding to the offerings, in whose merit the Jewish people, and through them the entire world, will be spared divine punishment.

Abraham said before God: Master of the Universe, this works out well when the Temple is standing, but when the Temple is not standing, what will become of them? God said to him: I have already enacted for them the order of offerings. When they read them before Me, I will ascribe them credit as though they had sacrificed them before Me and I will pardon them for all their transgressions. Since the offerings ensure the continued existence of the Jewish people and the rest of the world, the act of Creation is read in their honor.

The Sages taught: The members of the priestly watch would pray for the offerings of their brothers, the daily offering, that it should be accepted with favor. And meanwhile, the members of the non-priestly watch remained in their towns and would assemble in the synagogue and observe four fasts. On Monday of that week, on Tuesday, on Wednesday, and on Thursday. On Monday they would fast for seafarers, that they should be rescued from danger, as the sea was created on Monday. On Tuesday they would fast for those who walk in the desert, as the dry land was created on Tuesday.

On Wednesday they would fast over croup, that it should not befall the children, as on the fourth day the bodies of light [me'orot] were created, a textual allusion to curses [me'orot]. On Thursday they would fast for pregnant women and nursing women, as living beings were first created on this day. For pregnant women they would fast that they should not miscarry, while for nursing women they would fast that they should be able to nurse their children properly. And on Shabbat eve they would not fast, in deference to Shabbat, and a fortiori they would not fast on Shabbat itself.

The mishna taught: And the Israelites of the priests who watched in their towns and read the act of Creation. The Gemara asks: From where is this matter, that they must read this specific portion, derived? Rabbi Ya’akov bar Aha said that Rabbi Asi said: Were it not for the non-priestly watches and the Temple service, heaven and earth would not continue to exist, as it is stated: “And he said: Lord God, by what shall I know that I shall inherit it?” (Genesis 15:8).

On Wednesday they would fast over croup. Rashi follows the Jerusalem Talmud, where it is explained that the defective spelling of the Hebrew word for lights [me’orot], which were created on the fourth day of the week, teaches that Wednesdays are especially susceptible to curses [me’orot]. For this reason the members of the non-priestly watch would fast on Wednesdays, so that the disease of croup would not strike children. Others suggest that as the moon was diminished in size on Wednesday and became the smaller of the two celestial lights, small children are especially prone to illness on that day (Rav Yoshiya Pinto). Yet others suggest another explanation: Since croup is a divine punishment for the spreading of gossip, children are especially likely to be attacked by the disease on a Wednesday, as it was on that day that the first gossip was spoken: The moon spoke evil of the sun, as a result of which it was diminished in size (Rashi in Ein Yorokw).
The Gemara asks: What is the reason that they would not fast on Sunday? Rabbi Yohanan said: Due to the Christians, as Sunday is their day of rest, and they would claim that even the Jews ascribe significance to their special day. Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said: Because it is the third day after the creation of man, who was created on Friday, and the third day of recovery from a wound or sickness, in this case one's very creation, is considered the most painful.

Reish Lakish said: They would not fast on Sunday due to the added soul, as Reish Lakish said: An added soul is given to man on Shabbat eve, and at the conclusion of Shabbat it is removed from him, as it is stated: “He ceased from work and rested” (Exodus 31:17), which he expounds as follows: Since one has rested and Shabbat has passed, woe for the soul [vai nefesh] that is lost, the added soul that each individual relinquishes. Consequently, one is still weak from this loss on Sunday.

The mishna taught that on Sunday they would read the portions starting with: “In the beginning” (Genesis 1:1–5) and “Let there be a firmament” (Genesis 1:6–8). It is taught in a baraita: The section: “In the beginning” is read by two people, while “Let there be a firmament” is read by one. The Gemara asks: Granted, the passage “Let there be a firmament” is read by one individual, as it is three verses long, and one who is called to the Torah reads at least three verses. However, what is the reason that the section “In the beginning” is read by two individuals? It is five verses long, and it is taught in a mishna (Megilla 22a): One who reads from the Torah may not read fewer than three verses. Howen, then, are five verses read by two individuals?

The Gemara cites two answers. Rav said: The first reader reads the first three verses, and the second reader repeats the last verse read by the first, and continues with the final two verses. And Shmuel said: They split the middle verse into two, so that each of the pair reads half of it. The Gemara asks: And with regard to Rav, who said that one repeats, what is the reason that he did not say they should split a verse? The Gemara answers that Rav maintains that with regard to any verse that was not divided by Moses, we do not divide it.

And Shmuel said that one splits the middle verse into two. The Gemara asks: And may one split a single verse? But didn’t Rabbi Hanina Kara, the Bible expert, who taught the Bible to school-children, say: I had great trouble with Rabbi Hanina the Great when I asked him this question, and he permitted me to split long verses into two only for the benefit of schoolchildren, since it is performed to help them learn. And Shmuel can respond that what is the reason there, in the case of schoolchildren, that it is permitted to split verses? Because it is not possible to proceed in any other way. Here too, it is not possible for two people to read five verses other than by splitting one of them into two.

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**Notes**

Due to the Christians—Some commentaries explain that according to the opinion of Rabbi Yohanan, the members of the non-priestly watch did not fast on Sunday because the day was observed by Christians as a holiday, and there was concern that the Christians would react in a hostile way if the Jews observed a fast on their holiday (Rabbeinu Gershon; see Sifre Devarim 17:4). Others suggest that as the members of the non-priestly watch would refrain from work whenever they fasted, they did not fast on Sundays, as they did not want anyone to think that they were doing so in deference to the Christian holiday observed on that day (Maharsha). Yet others maintain that the word for Christians, notzrim, should be read as notzirim, those who are created. In other words, Rabbi Yohanan is providing essentially the same explanation as Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani, that the members of the non-priestly watch did not fast on Sunday because it is the third day after the creation of man. An alternative explanation is that the term notzrim here is a reference to the Babylonians, as in the verse: “Watchers (notzrim) come from a distant country” (Jeremiah 4:16; see Rabbi David Kimhi’s commentary on that verse). Since the Babylonians celebrated Sunday as a holiday, the Sages enacted that the members of the non-priestly watch should not fast on that day.

The added soul—One interpretation of the added soul is that it represents man’s ability to enjoy the entirety of creation, which constitutes the soul’s rest on Shabbat (Rashi; see Arukh).

**Halakha**

One who reads…may not read fewer than three—One who is called to read from the Torah should read no fewer than three verses (Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 137:2).

Repeats—On those occasions when the Torah reading cannot be divided in such a way that each person reads a separate section consisting of three verses, e.g., on the New Moon, one of the readers may repeat a verse that has already been read by the previous reader, in accordance with the opinion of Rav (Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 137:2).

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**Personalities**

Rabbi Hanina Kara—An amora from Eretz Yisrael, from the second generation of amoraim. This Rabbi Hanina was a student of Rabbi Hanina bar Hama and Rabbi Yannai. Apparently, he was not only a children’s teacher but was also an expert in the Bible, which explains his title. He is presented as engaging in debate with his rabbis concerning matters that pertain to his work, as well as other issues of halakha.

Rabbi Hanina the Great—This is Rabbi Hanina bar Hama, who is labeled this way because he was one of the outstanding Sages of his generation. In the Jerusalem Talmud he is known as Rabbi Hanina Rabba, which bears the same meaning. This epithet is generally used when Rabbi Hanina is mentioned alongside another Sage of that name, in this case Rabbi Hanina Kara, to differentiate between them.
And according to the one who said that they split, let them split it — as he maintains that the Torah is not read by heart by an individual in public, with the exception of the High Priest on Yom Kippur. Instead, everyone reads the chapter together (see Rid and Diver Shiryon).

The Gemara questions this last conclusion. And Shmuel said that one splits the middle verse into two. What is the reason that he did not say that he repeats one of the verses, in accordance with the opinion of Rav? The Gemara explains: It is a rabbinic decree due to those who enter the synagogue in the middle of the reading, and a decree due to those who leave in the middle. If someone entered or exited in the middle of the reading and heard three full verses, he might think that one of the readers had read fewer than three full verses, which might lead him to conclude that it is permitted to read fewer than three verses.

The Gemara raises an objection from a baraita: A chapter consisting of six verses may be read by two individuals, and a chapter of five verses must be read by one. And if the first individual reads three verses from the five-verse chapter, the second one reads the last two verses of that chapter and one more from another chapter. And some say that three verses are read from the next chapter, as one may not begin to read a chapter for fewer than three verses.

The Gemara explains the objection: According to the one who said that they repeat the middle verse, let the second reader repeat a verse here as well. And according to the one who said that they split a verse, here too, let them split it. Apparently, the baraita contradicts the opinions of both Rav and Shmuel. The Gemara answers: It is different there, as the second reader has space, i.e., he has the option to read from the ensuing paragraph.

The mishna taught: A long passage is read by two people, and they read from the Torah in the morning prayer and in the additional prayer. And in the afternoon prayer they read the daily portion by heart, just as one recites Shema. A dilemma was raised before the Sages: With regard to what case is the tanna speaking? Does he mean that in the morning prayer and in the additional prayer they read the portion from a Torah scroll, but in the afternoon prayer each individual reads by heart, just as one recites Shema? Or perhaps this is what is taught: In the morning prayer they read it from a Torah scroll, but in the additional prayer and in the afternoon prayer they read it by heart, just as one recites Shema.

The Gemara suggests: Come and hear, as it is taught in a baraita: In the morning prayer and in the additional prayer they would enter the synagogue and read from the Torah in the manner that they read all year. But in the afternoon prayer, a single individual would read the portion for that day by heart. Rabbi Yosei said: But can an individual read matters of Torah by heart in the presence of the community? Rather, they all enter and read that day’s portion together, just as one recites Shema. This baraita clearly indicates that they would read by heart only in the afternoon service.

An individual reads it by heart — This apparently means that a member of the congregation would serve as a kind of prayer leader and read these chapters before the entire community. Rabbi Yosei takes issue with this ritual, as he maintains that the Torah is not read by heart by an individual in public, with the exception of the High Priest on Yom Kippur. Instead, everyone reads the chapter together (see Rid and Diver Shiryon).