

מתני' בראשונה, כל מי שרוצה לתרום את המזבח - תורם. ובזמן שהן מרובין - רצין ועולין בכבש, כל הקודם את חברו בארבע אמות - זכה. ואם היו שניהן שוין - הממונה אומר להן: הצביעו.

ומה הן מוציאים - אחת או שתים. ואין מוציאים אגודל במקדש.

מעשה שהיו שניהם שוין ורצין ועולין בכבש, ודחף אחד מהן את חברו ונפל ונשברה רגלו. וכיון שראו בית דין שבאין לידי סכנה - התקינו שלא יהו תורמין את המזבח אלא בפייס. ארבע פייסות היו שם, וזה הפייס הראשון.

גמ' והא מעיקרא מאי טעמא לא תקינו לה רבנן פייסא? - מעיקרא סבור: כיון דעבודת לילה היא - לא חשיבא להו, ולא אתו. כיון דתו דקאתו ואתו לידי סכנה - תקינו לה פייסא.

והרי איברים ופדרים, דעבודת לילה היא, ותקינו לה רבנן פייסא! סוף עבודה דיממא היא.

האי נמי תחלת עבודה דיממא היא, דאמר רבי יוחנן: קידש ידיו לתרומת הדשן - למחר אין צריך לקדש, שפבר קידש מתחילת עבודה.

MISHNA Initially,^N the practice among the priests was that whoever wishes to remove the ashes from the altar^N removes them. And when there are many priests who wish to perform that task, the privilege to do so is determined by a race: The priests run and ascend^N on the ramp leading to the top of the altar. Any priest who precedes another and reaches within four cubits of the top of the altar first is privileged to remove the ashes. And if both of them were equal and neither preceded the other, the appointed priest says to all the priests: Extend your fingers, and a lottery was performed, as will be explained.^H

And what fingers do they extend for the lottery? They may extend one or two fingers, and the priests do not extend a thumb in the Temple. The reason is that the lottery was conducted by the appointee choosing a number and counting the extended fingers of the priests standing in a circle. As the count progressed, a priest could calculate and manipulate the result in his favor by surreptitiously extending his thumb and an additional finger. Since there is separation between the thumb and the forefinger it could appear as though they belonged to two different priests, skewing the results of the lottery.

Initially, that was the procedure; however, an incident occurred where both of them were equal as they were running and ascending on the ramp, and one of them shoved another and he fell and his leg was broken. And once the court saw that people were coming to potential danger, they instituted that priests would remove ashes from the altar only by means of a lottery. There were four lotteries^H there, in the Temple, on a daily basis to determine the priests privileged to perform the various services, and this, determining which priest would remove the ashes, was the first lottery.

GEMARA The Gemara questions the original practice of holding a race to determine which priest would remove the ashes: And what is the reason that the Sages did not initially institute a lottery for the removal of the ashes as they did for other parts of the service? The Gemara answers: Initially they thought: Since it is a service performed at night it would not be important to the priests, and not many of them would come to perform it, so a lottery would be unnecessary. Then, when they saw that many priests did indeed come and that they were coming to danger by racing up the altar's ramp, they instituted a lottery.

The Gemara poses a question against the assertion that nighttime Temple services did not normally require a lottery: But there is the burning of the limbs of burnt-offerings and the fats of other offerings, which is a service that is performed at night, and nevertheless the Sages instituted a lottery for that from the outset. The Gemara answers: The burning of those parts is not considered a nighttime service but the end of a daytime service, as the main part of the sacrificial service, the slaughtering and the sprinkling of blood, took place during the day.

The Gemara asks: If so, it could be argued that this service of removing the ashes is also not a nighttime service but the start of a daytime service, as Rabbi Yohanan said: If a priest has sanctified his hands at night by washing them for the removal of the ashes,^H the next day, i.e., after daybreak, if he remained in the confines of the Temple, he need not sanctify his hands again,^N because he already sanctified them at the start of the service. Apparently, the removal of the ashes, though performed at night, is considered the start of the next day's service.

NOTES

Initially – בראשונה: The earlier commentaries debate whether or not the High Priest performed all the Temple services on Yom Kippur. Some authorities say he did, and that no other priest participated in the day's responsibilities; others say that those tasks that were not particular to Yom Kippur were assigned to other priests. Many proofs are brought for both approaches. The Ramban argues that this chapter supports the position that other priests were involved in certain services. Were it not so, this entire chapter, as well as some subsequent material that discusses the selection of priests for various tasks, would be altogether unrelated to Yom Kippur and would therefore have no place in this tractate. However, a possible explanation is that since the previous chapter mentioned the daily removal of the ashes, this chapter continues to explore the regular services (*Tosefot Yom Tov*).

Removal of the ashes – תרומת הדשן: The priest who removed the ashes from the altar wore the priestly garments, but they were of lower quality than the vestments worn for the performance of other services. The service involved scooping up some ash in a shovel to fulfill the mitzva to remove ashes from the altar (see Leviticus 6:3). Since it was not a particularly prestigious service, there was concern that few priests would be interested in performing it (*Me'iri*).

The priests run and ascend – רצין ועולין: Various commentaries ask how the priests could run in the Temple courtyard, since running is not a respectful manner of conduct, and the priests were normally expected to walk with very small steps, placing the heel adjacent to the toe of the other foot at each step. Some explain that the race mentioned in the mishna did not involve actual running but walking quickly with these small steps (*Tosafot Yeshanim*).

The next day he need not sanctify his hands again – למחר: The basis for this discussion is the fact that with regard to offerings, the night is connected to the previous day, unlike the usual Jewish practice, where the night is considered the beginning of the subsequent day. Therefore, there is some doubt as to whether an act performed before daybreak could be associated with the following day.

HALAKHA

The lottery – מעשה הפייס: The Temple appointee was also responsible for the lotteries. He instructed the priests to extend their fingers, and the priest on whom the count ended was granted the task being assigned (Rambam *Sefer Avoda, Hilkhot Temidin UMusafin* 4:3).

Four lotteries – ארבע פייסות: Four lotteries were held every day for the privileges of performing the Temple services. The first determined who was to remove the ashes from the altar (Rambam *Sefer Avoda, Hilkhot Temidin UMusafin* 4:5).

Sanctified his hands for the removal of the ashes – קידש ידיו לתרומת הדשן: A priest who has sanctified his hands for the removal of the ashes need not sanctify his hands again to perform a subsequent service. Although the ashes were removed while it was still night, that act was considered the start of the next day's service, and the hand washing sufficed for the entire day, as the Gemara states (Rambam *Sefer Avoda, Hilkhot Biat HaMikdash* 5:9).

NOTES

But was the ordinance due to that reason – ותקנתא להך גיסא: Some commentaries write that the purpose of the lottery was to show that the service of removing the ashes was an important task, so that priests would be drawn to performing it (Rabbeinu Tam, Sefer HaYashar; Peirush Kadmon).

We learned that the priests run and ascend on the ramp and only afterward it says: Any priest who precedes another – רצין: ועולין בכבש תגן והדר כל הקודם את חבירו: Some commentators claim that the Gemara's proof from this sentence is from the phrase: They ran, as it cannot be considered running in such a short space as less than four cubits (Tosefot Ri HaLavan).

HALAKHA

Who was privileged to perform the removal of the ashes – מי: שזכה בתרומת הדשן: The priest who won the right to remove the ashes was also given the privileges of arranging the wood pile and of placing the two logs on the altar (Rambam Sefer Avoda, Hilkhot Temidin UMusafin 4:5; see Lehem Mishne).

BACKGROUND

The altar and the ramp – המזבח והכבש: Numbers in this diagram, which is not to scale, indicate measurements in cubits. As the diagram illustrates, the vertical rise of the altar from the base to its top was not a straight line, but retreated two cubits inward. The ramp, seen on the right, inclined toward the altar but was not completely flush against it. The question at hand is whether the four cubits are measured from where the ramp meets the altar or from the dotted line perpendicular to the base.



Altar and ramp

אימא: שכבר קידש מתחילה לעבודה.

איכא דאמרי: מעיקרא סבור: כיון דאיכא אונס שינה – לא אתו, כיון דחזו דאתו, וקאתו נמי לידי סכנה – תקינו לה רבנן פייסא. והרי איברים ופדרים דאיכא אונס שינה, ותקינו לה רבנן פייסא! – שאני מיגנא ממיקם.

ותקנתא להך גיסא הואי? ותקנתא להאי גיסא הואי, דתנא: מי שזכה בתרומת הדשן (זוכה) בסידור מערכה ובשני גזירי עצים!

אמר רב אשי: שתי תקנות הן: מעיקרא סבור לא אתו, כיון דחזו דקאתו, ואתו נמי לידי סכנה – תקינו לה פייסא, כיון דתקינו לה פייסא – לא אתו. אמרי: מי יימר דמתרמי לן? הדר תקינו לה: מי שזכה בתרומת הדשן זוכה בסידור מערכה, ובשני גזירי עצים, כי היכי דיתנו ונפייסו.

”ובזמן שהן מרובין” וכו’. אמר רב פפא: פשיטא לי, ארבע אמות דארעא לא, רצין ועולין בכבש” תגן. קמיתא – נמי לא, רצין ועולין בכבש” תגן, והדר כל הקודם את חבירו.

The Gemara responds by emending Rabbi Yoḥanan’s statement: Say the following version of the end of Rabbi Yoḥanan’s statement: **Because he had already sanctified them at the outset for service.** According to this formulation, Rabbi Yoḥanan did not say that the removal of the ashes is considered the start of the following day’s service. Rather, he said that although the removal of the ashes is a nighttime service, since the priest sanctified his hands before performing that service, the sanctification remains in effect for the services performed after daybreak as well, since there is no interruption between the two activities.

Some say that the original practice should be explained as follows: **Initially, the Sages thought that since there is a likelihood of being overcome by sleep at that time of night, not many priests would come. When they saw that they did indeed come and that they were also coming to danger, the Sages instituted a lottery** for this task. The Gemara asks: **But there is the burning of the limbs of burnt-offerings and the fats of other offerings, a service for which there is the same likelihood of being overcome by sleep, and nevertheless the Sages instituted a lottery for that from the outset.** The Gemara answers: **Lying down to go to sleep late is different from rising in the middle of the night.** It is not as difficult to stay up late in order to burn limbs on the altar as it is to rise before dawn to remove the ashes from the altar.

The Gemara addresses the substance of the mishna’s claim: **But was the ordinance to assign the removal of ashes by means of a lottery due to that reasonⁿ** cited in the mishna, the matter of the dangerous incident? **The ordinance was instituted due to this reason:** There were other important tasks associated with the removal of the ashes that required a lottery in their own right, as it was taught in a *baraita*: The priest who was privileged to perform the removal of the ashesⁿ was also privileged with laying out the arrangement of wood on the altar and with placing the two logs that were placed on the altar each morning. Since these were inherently important tasks, the only way to assign them was through a lottery, which would also determine who removed the ashes.

The Gemara answers: **Rav Ashi said: There were two separate ordinances instituted.** **Initially, the Sages thought that priests would not come forward to perform the task of removing the ashes. Once they saw that many priests did come and that they were also coming to danger, the Sages instituted a lottery for this task. Once they established a lottery for removing the ashes, the priests did not come anymore. They said: Who says the lottery will fall in our favor?** Therefore, they did not bother to come. **Then the Sages instituted for the priests that whoever was privileged with performing the removal of the ashes would also be privileged with laying out the arrangement of wood on the altar and with placing the two logs, so that the importance of all these tasks combined would ensure that the priests would come and participate in the lottery.**

It was taught in the mishna that before the lottery was instituted, **when there were many priests who sought to perform the removal of the ashes, the first priest to reach within four cubits of the top of the altar was privileged with performing the removal of the ashes.** **Rav Pappa said: It is obvious to me that the four cubits the mishna is referring to are not the four cubits adjacent to the ramp on the ground, because we learned in the mishna that the priests run and ascend on the ramp, and not adjacent to the ramp.^b It is also not referring to the first four cubits from the foot of the ramp, because we learned that the priests run and ascend on the ramp, and only afterward it says: Any priest who precedes anotherⁿ and reaches within four cubits of the altar first, indicating that the competition begins only once they have ascended the ramp to some extent.**

דְּבִינֵי בֵּינֵי נְמוּ לֹא, דְּלֹא מְסִימָא מִיְלָתָא. פְּשִׁיטָא לִי דְגַבֵּי מוֹבַח תֵּנָן.

It is also not referring to four cubits somewhere in the middle, between the four on the bottom and the top of the altar, because the matter is not defined and there is no clear indication which four cubits on the ramp are the determining cubits. In light of all this, it is obvious to me that the four cubits we learned in the mishna are referring to the four cubits that are adjacent to the altar itself. The priest who reaches those four cubits first is the one privileged to remove the ashes.

בְּעֵי רַב פָּפָא: אַרְבַּע אַמוֹת שְׁאָמְרוּ, בְּהִדְיָה אִמָּה יְסוּד וְאִמָּה סוֹבֵב,

Rav Pappa raised a dilemma based on the above clarification: Are the four cubits that they stated, which are the four cubits adjacent to the altar, calculated including the cubit of the base of the altar and the cubit of its ledge, as the ramp continues and overlaps these two cubits at the top of the altar,

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or are they perhaps calculated excluding the cubit of the base of the altar and the cubit of its ledge? The altar's edge can be considered to be at the end of the ramp, the point at which it meets the altar, or it can be considered the point on the ramp that is directly over the external base of the altar, which is two cubits away from the point where the ramp meets the altar. Which of these two calculations is the correct one? Rav Pappa's question remains unanswered, and the Gemara concludes: The dilemma shall stand unresolved.

“ואם היו שניהן שוין הממונה אומר להם הצביעו וכו'. תנא: הוציאו אצבעותיכם למנין. ונימניהו לדידהו! מסייע ליה לרבי יצחק, דאמר רבי יצחק: אסור למנות את ישראל אפילו לדבר מצוה, דכתב: “ויפקדם בבוק”.

It was taught in the mishna that if both of them were equal and neither preceded the other, the appointed priest says to all the priests: **Extend your fingers** [*hatzbiu*], and a lottery was performed. A *tanna* taught the meaning of the unusual term *hatzbiu*: **Put out your fingers for a count**. The Gemara asks: **Let him count the priests themselves directly**, rather than counting their fingers. The Gemara answers: This is a support for a teaching of Rabbi Yitzhak, as Rabbi Yitzhak said: **It is prohibited to count Jews^h directly, even for the purposes of a mitzva, as it is written concerning King Saul and his count of his soldiers: “And he numbered them with bezek”** (1 Samuel 11:8), meaning that he counted them through shards, one shard representing each man, rather than counting them directly.

מתקיף לה רב אשי: ממאי דהאי בוק לישנא דמִיבוק הוא? ודילמא שְׂמָא דמתא הוא, כדכתב: “וימצאו אדוני בוק?” אלא מהכא, “וישמע שאול את העם ויפקדם בטלאים”.

Rav Ashi strongly objects to this interpretation of the verse: **From where do you derive that this word bezek is a term related to the verb meaning to break apart**, so that it means shards? **Perhaps it is the name of a town**, and it means that Saul counted them in Bezek, as it is written: **“And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek”** (Judges 1:5), which shows that Bezek is the name of a place. The Gemara answers: Indeed, the proof is not from that verse **but from here**, where it says: **“And Saul summoned the people and numbered them by sheep”** (1 Samuel 15:4), meaning that Saul tallied his soldiers by having each one take a sheep and put it aside to represent him in the count.

אמר רבי אלעזר: כל המונה את ישראל עובר בלאו, שנאמר: “והיה מספר בני ישראל כחול הים אשר לא ימד”. רב נחמן בר יצחק אמר עובר בשני לאוין שנאמר: “לא ימד ולא יספר”.

Rabbi Elazar said: **Whoever counts a group of Jews violates a negative mitzva, as it is stated: “And the number of the children of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured”** (Hosea 2:1). Rabbi Elazar interprets the verse to be saying: Which may not be measured. **Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said: One who counts a group of Jews in fact violates two negative mitzvot, as it is stated in that verse: “Which cannot be measured and cannot be counted”** (Hosea 2:1).ⁿ

HALAKHA

Counting Jews – מנין ישראל: It is prohibited to count the Jewish people directly, but an indirect counting is permitted (Rambam Sefer Avoda, Hilkhot Temidin UMusafin 4:4; Magen Avraham; Shulhan Arukh, Oraḥ Hayyim 156:1).

NOTES

As it is written: He numbered them with bezek – דכתב ויפקדם: The early commentaries ask why the Gemara did not merely cite Exodus 30:11–16, where the Torah explicitly prohibits counting the Jewish people directly, without the use of atonement money through which a census was to be conducted. One answer to the question is that the Torah's prohibition applies only when the census is done for no particular reason. However, if it is necessary to count people in order to fulfill a mitzva, such as fighting a war required by the Torah, it is permitted to count them directly. Therefore, the Gemara cites Saul, who, although numbering the people in preparation for a religious war, still counted them indirectly (*Tosefot Ri HaLavan*). Others say that the atonement money required in that passage in the Torah atoned for the sin of the Golden Calf, so that episode cannot be used as a model for other situations (Maharsha and others).

לא ימד ולא יספר – The question is raised that the Gemara could have quoted the following verse from the Torah: “I will make your seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude” (Genesis 32:13), with the same effect. See the Maharsha, who asks and answers this question. In fact, according to Rabbi Avraham, son of the Rambam, his father held that this verse from Genesis was indeed the source for the prohibition.

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני, רבי יונתן רמי, כתיב: "והיה מספר בני ישראל כחול הים" וכתוב: "אשר לא ימד ולא יספר!"

לא קשיא: כאן - בזמן שישיראל עושין רצונו של מקום, כאן - בזמן שאין עושין רצונו של מקום. רבי אמר משום אבא יוסי בן דוסתאי: לא קשיא: כאן - בידי אדם, כאן - בידי שמים.

אמר רב נהילאי בר אידי אמר שמואל: בין שנתמנה אדם פרנס על הציבור - מתעשר. מעיקרא כתיב: "ויפקדם בבוק" ולבסוף כתיב: "ויפקדם בטלאים" ודילמא מדידהו? אם בן מאי רבותא דמילתא?

"ויורב בנחל" אמר רבי מני: על עסקי נחל. בשעה שאמר לו ראה הקדוש ברוך הוא לשאול: "לך והכית את עמלק" אמר: ומה נפש אחת אמרה תורה הבא עגלה ערופה, כל הנפשות הללו על אחת כמה וכמה!

ואם אדם חטא - בהמה מה חטאה? ואם גדולים חטאו - קטנים מה חטאו? יצאה בת קול ואמרה לו: "אל תהי צדיק הרבה". ובשעה שאמר לו שאול לדואג: "סוב אתה ופגע בכהנים" יצאה בת קול ואמרה לו: "אל תרשע הרבה".

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yonatan raised a contradiction: It is written in this verse: "And the number of the children of Israel will be like the sand of the sea," suggesting that they will have a specific number, though it will be very large. On the other hand, it continues and says: "Which cannot be measured and cannot be counted," which means they will not be countable at all. How can these two statements be reconciled?

It is not difficult: Here, in the second statement, it is referring to a time when the Jewish people fulfill the will of God; then they will be innumerable. There, in the first statement, it is referring to a time when the Jewish people do not fulfill the will of God; then they will be like the sand of the sea, having a specific number. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said a different resolution in the name of Abba Yosei ben Dostai: It is not difficult: Here, in the second statement, it is referring to counting by the hand of man; the Jewish people will be too numerous to count by man. There, in the first statement, it is referring to counting by the hand of God, and He will find that they are like the number of the grains of the sand of the sea.

Rav Nehilai bar Idi said that Shmuel said: Once a man is appointed as a leader of the community, he becomes wealthy.^N This is derived from the verses cited above. Initially, it is written with regard to Saul: "And he numbered them with bezek," meaning pottery shards, and in the end it is written: "And he numbered them with sheep," indicating that he was able to provide enough of his own sheep to use them in counting the people. The Gemara asks: But perhaps the people provided these sheep from their own flocks. The Gemara rejects this: If so, what is the novelty in the matter? Why would the text tell us that the people were counted with sheep if not to illustrate incidentally the great wealth of Saul?

Having mentioned the verse about Saul, the Gemara proceeds to interpret more of that passage: "And Saul came to the city of Amalek and he strove in the valley" (1 Samuel 15:5). Rabbi Mani said: This means that Saul strove with God, as it were, concerning the matter of the valley. At the time when the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Saul: "Now go and attack Amalek and proscribe all that belongs to him; do not pity him, but kill men and women alike, infants and sucklings alike, oxen and sheep alike, camel and donkey alike" (1 Samuel 15:3), Saul countered and said: Now, if on account of one life that is taken, in a case where a slain person's body is found and the murderer is unknown, the Torah said to bring a heifer whose neck is broken to a barren valley, in the atonement ritual described in Deuteronomy 6:1-9, all the more so must I have pity and not take all these Amalekite lives.

And he further reasoned: If the men have sinned, in what way have the animals sinned? Why, then, should the Amalekites' livestock be destroyed? And if the adults have sinned, in what way have the children sinned? A Divine Voice then came forth and said to him: "Do not be overly righteous" (Ecclesiastes 7:16). That is to say: Do not be more merciful than the Creator Himself, Who has commanded you to do this, for to do so would not be an indication of righteousness but of weakness. At a later time, when Saul said to Doeg: "Turn around and strike down the priests, and Doeg the Edomite turned around and struck down the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod, and he struck Nob the city of priests by the sword, man and woman alike, infants and sucklings alike, oxen and donkeys and sheep, by the sword" (1 Samuel 22:18-19), a Divine Voice came forth and said to him: "Do not be overly wicked" (Ecclesiastes 7:17).^N

NOTES

פרנס מתעשר - A leader of the community becomes wealthy: The reason for this is that a leader who is financially secure will not be intimidated by wealthy members of the community and will feel little compunction in rebuking them for their misdeeds (Ben Yehoyada).

צדיק הרבה...תרשע הרבה - Overly righteous...overly wicked: The principle here is that an individual who lacks proper control over his emotions will occasionally cause harm through misplaced

compassion. The same weakness of character leads to exaggerated cruelty in other situations. Thus, Saul's sin with Agag and his sin with the priests of Nob emanated from the same source of weak character (Me'iri). Some commentaries explain that Saul's actions against Nob disproved the claim that his earlier pity of Agag was due to the calculated reasoning attributed to him in the Gemara here, since the same sort of logic certainly would have led him to spare the accused city. The exhortation not to be overly wicked therefore fits both of Saul's actions (Ben Yehoyada).

How little does a person who has the support of his Lord have to worry or be concerned – כִּמָּה לֹא חָלִי וְלֹא מְרִיֵשׁ גְּבָרָא – דְּמָרִיָּה סִיֵּיעִיהּ: The Gemara implies that David was given more leeway by God simply because God liked him better than Saul. The commentaries raise the objection that it seems unfair for God to be more patient with one person than another for no reason other than that He likes him more. Some explain that the difference between the two personalities is that Saul's sins were errors in leadership, whereas David's infractions were in his private life. Alternatively, David repented for his sins and was therefore forgiven (Maharsha). The *Me'iri* writes, however, that from the outset Saul's kingship was meant to be only temporary. By right the kingship belongs to the tribe of Judah, of which David was a member, whereas Saul was from Benjamin. Due to this, one small sin was enough to cost Saul the throne, which was not the case with David (see *Petah Einayim*).

אָמַר רַב הוּנָא: כִּמָּה לֹא חָלִי וְלֹא מְרִיֵשׁ גְּבָרָא דְּמָרִיָּה סִיֵּיעִיהּ; שְׂאוּל בְּאַחַת – וְעֵלְתָהּ לוֹ, דְּדוֹד בְּשָׂתַיִם – וְלֹא עֵלְתָהּ לוֹ. שְׂאוּל בְּאַחַת מֵאֵי הֵיא – מַעֲשֵׂה דְאַגַּג, וְהָא אֵיכָא מַעֲשֵׂה דְנוֹב עִיר הַכֹּהֲנִים! אִמְעֵשָׂה דְאַגַּג בְּתֵיב: "נַחֲמֵתִי כִּי הִמְלַכְתִּי אֶת שְׂאוּל לְמֶלֶךְ."

Apropos Saul's contravention of God's command to obliterate Amalek, the Gemara observes that **Rav Huna said: How little does a person who has the support of his Lord have to worry or be concerned.**ⁿ The proof for this assertion is a comparison between Saul and David. **Saul failed with one single sin and it was counted against him**, costing him the throne. **David**, however, failed **with two sins and they were not counted against him**, as he retained his position. The Gemara asks: **What was Saul's one sin? The incident with Agag**, king of Amalek, whom Saul spared in defiance of God's command (see 1 Samuel 15:9). **But** was this his sole sin? **There is also the incident of Nob, the city of priests**, in which Saul later slew many innocent people, as cited above. The Gemara answers: It was after **the incident with Agag**, and even before the incident at Nob, that God said: **"I regret that I have crowned Saul to be king"** (1 Samuel 15:11).

דְּדוֹד בְּשָׂתַיִם, מֵאֵי נִינְהוּ – דְּאוּרִיָּה וְדִהֶסֶתָּה.

Rav Huna stated above that **David failed with two sins. What were they?** One was the incident in which he had **Uriah** killed. The other was the matter of **the incitement** of David to conduct a census of the Jewish people (see 11 Samuel 24:1), which led to many deaths in a plague.

וְהָא אֵיכָא נְמִי מַעֲשֵׂה דְבֵת שְׁבַע! הָתָם אֶפְרָעוּ מִיָּנִיָּה, דְּכִתְיִב: "וְנָאֵת הַכִּבְשָׁה יִשְׁלַם אַרְבַּעַתַּיִם" – יָלַד, אֲמַנּוֹן, תָּמָר, וְאַבְשָׁלוֹם.

The Gemara asks: **But** were these his only two sins? **There is also the incident of Bathsheba**, in which he took another man's wife as his own. The Gemara answers: **There**, in that case, **punishment was exacted from him** separately, so the matter is no longer listed among his sins, **as it is written** with regard to this incident: **"And he shall restore the lamb fourfold"** (11 Samuel 12:6). The lamb was a metaphor for Bathsheba, and ultimately David was indeed given a fourfold punishment for taking Bathsheba: The first **child** born to Bathsheba and David died (see 11 Samuel 12:13–23); David's son **Amnon** was killed; **Tamar**, his daughter, was raped by Amnon (see 11 Samuel 13); **and** his son **Avshalom** rebelled against him and was ultimately killed (see 11 Samuel 15–18).

הָתָם נְמִי אֶפְרָעוּ מִיָּנִיָּה, דְּכִתְיִב: "וְיִתֵּן ה' דְּבַר (בְּעַם מִן הַבּוֹקֵר) וְעַד עַתְּ מוֹעֵד!" – הָתָם לָא אֶפְרָעוּ מִגּוֹפִיָּה.

The Gemara asks: If sins for which David was punished separately are not counted, one could ask: **There, too**, with regard to the sin of the census, **he was punished** separately, **as it is written**: **"And the Lord sent a plague against Israel from the morning until the appointed time"** (11 Samuel 24:15). The Gemara responds: **There**, David was **not punished** personally, **in his own body**; rather, the punishment was inflicted on the Jewish people.

הָתָם נְמִי לֹא אֶפְרָעוּ מִגּוֹפִיָּה. לֹאִי, אֶפְרָעוּ מִגּוֹפִיָּה. דְּאָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: שְׂשָׂה חֲדָשִׁים נֶצְטָרַע דְּדוֹד, וּפְרָשׁוּ הַיָּמִנּוּ סְנֵהֲדְרִין, וְנִסְתַּלְקָה הַיָּמִנּוּ שְׂבִינָה, דְּכִתְיִב: "וְשׁוּבוּ לִי יְרֵאִיךְ וְיִודְעֵי עֲדוּתֶיךָ" וְכִתְיִב "הַשִּׁיבָה לִּי שִׁשׁוֹן יִשְׁעֶךָ."

The Gemara challenges this: **There, too**, in the incident with Bathsheba, David was **not punished** personally, **in his own body**; rather, it was his children who suffered punishment. The Gemara answers: That is **not so**; **he was punished** personally, **in his own body**, for that sin, as **Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: David was stricken with leprosy for six months** after that incident, **and the Sanhedrin withdrew from him** in protest over his behavior, **and the Divine Presence also left him. As it is written** that David prayed: **"May those who fear You return to me, and they who know Your testimonies"** (Psalms 119:79). Since he prayed for the return of those who fear God and who know His testimonies, referring to the Sages of the Sanhedrin, it can be inferred that they had withdrawn from him. **And it is written** as well: **"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, let a vigorous spirit support me"** (Psalms 51:14), where David asks for the return of the Divine Spirit, which had left him.

וְהָא אָמַר רַב: קִבַּל דְּדוֹד לְשׁוֹן הָרַע; כְּשִׁמוּאֵל, דְּאָמַר: לֹא קִבַּל דְּדוֹד לְשׁוֹן הָרַע.

The Gemara asks: And didn't David commit other sins? **Didn't Rav say: David accepted a slanderous report** from Ziba about Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, stating that the latter was pleased with David's downfall? There was, in that case, this additional sin. The Gemara responds: Consequently, it is necessary to follow the approach of **Shmuel, who said: David did not accept a slanderous report**, because Ziba's claim was true.

וְלִרְבִּי נָמִי, דְּאָמַר קָבַל דָּוִד לְשׁוֹן הָרַע הָאֵל
אִיפְרַעוּ מִיָּמֶיהָ, דְּאָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר
רַב: בְּשָׁעָה שְׂאָמַר לוֹ דָּוִד לְמִפְּבוֹשֶׁת:
”אָמַרְתִּי אִתָּהּ וְצִיבָא תַחְלִקוּ אֶת
הַשָּׂדֶה” יִצְאָה בֵּת קוֹל וְאָמְרָה לוֹ:
רַחֲבֵעַם וְרַבֵּעַם יַחְלִקוּ אֶת הַמְּלָכוּת.

”בֶּן שָׁנָה שְׂאוֹל בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ”. אָמַר רַב הוֹנָא:
כִּבְּן שָׁנָה, שְׂלֵא טַעַם טַעַם חֲטָא.

מִתְקִיף לָהּ רַב נַחְמָן בַּר יִצְחָק: וְאִימָא
כִּבְּן שָׁנָה שְׂמֵלֹכְלֶךְ בְּטִיט וּבְצוֹאָה?
אֲחֻיאוּ לִיהָ לְרַב נַחְמָן סִיטָא בַחֲלָמִיָּה.
אָמַר: נַעֲנִיתִי לְכֶם עֲצֻמוֹת שְׂאוֹל בֶּן
קִישׁ. הֲדַר חֲזָא סִיטָא בַחֲלָמִיָּה. אָמַר:
נַעֲנִיתִי לְכֶם עֲצֻמוֹת שְׂאוֹל בֶּן קִישׁ מֶלֶךְ
יִשְׂרָאֵל.

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר שְׂמוּאֵל: מַפְנֵי מָה
לֹא נִמְשְׁכָה מְלָכוּת בֵּית שְׂאוֹל – מַפְנֵי
שְׂלֵא הָיָה בּוֹ שׁוּם דּוֹפִי. דְּאָמַר רַבִּי
יִחְזַן מִשׁוּם רַבִּי שְׂמַעוֹן בֶּן יְהוֹצְדָק: אֵין
מַעֲמִידִין פְּרָגָם עַל הַצִּיבּוֹר אֶלָּא אִם בֶּן
קוֹפָה שֶׁל שְׂרָצִים תְּלוּיָהּ לוֹ מֵאֲחֻרָיו,
שְׂאָם תְּנוּחַ דְּעֵתוֹ עָלָיו – אוֹמְרִין לוֹ: חֲזוֹר
לְאַחֻרָיְךָ.

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: מַפְנֵי מָה
נַעֲנֵשׁ שְׂאוֹל – מַפְנֵי שְׂמַחַל עַל כְּבוֹדוֹ,
שְׂנַאֲמַר: ”וּבְנֵי בְלִיעַל אָמְרוּ מַה יוֹשִׁיעֵנּוּ
זֶה וַיִּבְזְוּהוּ וְלֹא הִבִּיאוּ לוֹ מִנְחָה וְהָיָה
כְּמַחְרִישׁ” וּכְתִיב: ”וַיַּעַל נַחֵשׁ הָעַמּוֹנִי
וַיַּחֲזֵן עַל יָבֶשׂ גִּלְעָד וְגו’.”

וְאָמַר רַבִּי יִחְזַן מִשׁוּם רַבִּי שְׂמַעוֹן בֶּן
יְהוֹצְדָק: כָּל תְּלָמִיד חָכָם

The Gemara continues: **And even according to Rav, who said that David accepted a slanderous report, one could answer that that sin is not counted, as was he not punished for it?** As Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: **At the time when David said to Mephibosheth: “I say that you and Ziba should divide the field”** (II Samuel 19:30), a Divine Voice came forth and said to him: **Rehoboam and Jeroboam will divide the kingship.** Because David believed Ziba’s slanderous report and awarded him half of Mephibosheth’s field, David was punished by having his kingdom divided into two. Following King Solomon’s death the Jewish people split into two kingdoms, Israel to the north and Judea to the south (see I Kings 12). Therefore, David was punished for that sin too.

§ The Gemara continues its discussion of Saul and David. It is written: **“Saul was one year old when he began to reign”** (I Samuel 13:1), which cannot be understood literally, as Saul was appointed king when he was a young man. **Rav Huna said:** The verse means that when he began to reign he was like a one-year-old, in that he had never tasted the taste of sin but was wholly innocent and upright.

Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak strongly objects to this interpretation of the verse, saying: You could just as well say that he was like a one-year-old in that he was always filthy with mud and excrement.ⁿ Rav Nahman was shown a frightful dream that night, and he understood it as a punishment for having disparaged Saul. **He said: I humbly submit myself to you, O bones of Saul, son of Kish, and beg your forgiveness.** But once again he was shown a frightful dream, and he understood that he had not shown enough deference in his first apology. He therefore said this time: **I humbly submit myself to you, O bones of Saul, son of Kish, king of Israel, and beg your forgiveness.** Subsequently, the nightmares ceased.

Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: **Why did the kingship of the house of Saul not continue on to succeeding generations? It is because there was no flaw in his ancestry; he was of impeccable lineage.** As Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yehotzadak: **One appoints a leader over the community only if he has a box full of creeping animals hanging behind him,**ⁿ i.e., he has something inappropriate in his ancestry that preceded him. Why is that? It is so that if he exhibits a haughty attitude toward the community, one can say to him: **Turn and look behind you** and be reminded of your humble roots. This is why David’s kingdom lasted while Saul’s did not, as David descended from a family with problematic ancestry, namely Tamar (see Genesis, chapter 38) and Ruth the Moabite (see Ruth 4:18–22).

Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: **Why was Saul punished in that he was ultimately led to commit the sins described above?**ⁿ Because at the very outset of his reign he inappropriately forwent his royal honor, as it is stated with regard to Saul’s inauguration: **“And some base fellows said: How can this man save us? So they disparaged him and brought him no present. But he made himself as if he did not hear”** (I Samuel 10:27). And it is stated immediately afterward: **“And Nahash the Ammonite marched up and encamped against Jabesh-gilead”** (I Samuel 11:1). The implication is that if Saul had forcefully assumed his throne, Nahash would not have dared to attack the people of Jabesh-gilead. In this way, his humility led to the crisis.

And Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yehotzadak: **Any Torah scholar**

NOTES

כִּבְּן שָׁנָה – Like a one-year-old, filthy with mud and excrement – שְׂמֵלֹכְלֶךְ בְּטִיט וּבְצוֹאָה: Rav Nahman’s comment is puzzling. Why should he suggest an interpretation that is so unflattering to Saul? Perhaps what he meant to say was that Saul, in his great humility, viewed himself as a soiled child, as expressed in the verse: “Like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child am I in my mind” (Psalms 131:2). Nevertheless, Rav Nahman was punished for stating this idea in a disrespectful manner (*Tosafot Yeshanim*).

קוֹפָה שֶׁל – A box full of creeping animals hanging behind him – שְׂרָצִים תְּלוּיָהּ לוֹ מֵאֲחֻרָיו: It is unwise to appoint an officer over the

community who assumes so much power that he comes to view his position as a right. Therefore, one who has a flawed past, if he has the requisite leadership qualities, is a preferable leader to one with no such past (*Me’iri*).

Why was Saul punished in that he was ultimately led to commit the sins described above – מַפְנֵי מָה נַעֲנֵשׁ שְׂאוֹל: This explanation follows Rashi’s commentary. Other commentaries explain the question in a more straightforward manner: Why was Saul punished in that he was faced with a war immediately upon assuming the crown (*Iyyun Ya’akov*)?