MISHNA They brought out the spoon and the coal pan to the High Priest so he may perform the service of the incense. He scoops his handfuls from the incense and places it into the spoon. The High Priest with large hands fills the spoon with incense in an amount corresponding to the large size of his hands, and the High Priest with small hands fills the spoon with incense in an amount corresponding to the small size of his hands. And this was the measure of the spoon, i.e., it was made to correspond to the size of his hands. He took the coal pan in his right hand and the spoon in his left hand.⁷

GEMARA The Gemara expresses surprise at the statement of the mishna. In an earlier mishna, the Tanna already taught that the High Priest must bring the coal pan: He takes a coal pan and ascends to the top of the altar and rakes and descends. Why does the Tanna mention the taking of the coal pan again? The Gemara explains: There the mishna deals with the coal pan of burning coals, and here the mishna is referring to the coal pan of incense, which he would later scoop out. As it was explicitly taught in a baraita: They brought out an empty spoon for him from the chamber of vessels, and a coal pan heaped with incense from the Chamber of the House of Avinas.

The mishna taught: He scoops his handfuls from the incense and places it into the spoon. The High Priest with large hands fills the spoon with incense corresponding to the large size of his hands, and the High Priest with small hands fills the spoon corresponding to the small size of his hands, and this was the measure of the spoon, according to the size of his hands. The Gemara asks: Why do I need a spoon on Yom Kippur? After all, the Merciful One states: “And he shall take a coal pan full of coals of fire from off the altar from before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small and bring it within the veil” (Leviticus 16:12). This verse suggests that the handfuls are brought by hand rather than in a vessel.

The Gemara answers: The High Priest uses a spoon because it is impossible to perform the service otherwise. The Gemara elaborates: As what should we do? Let him bring in the coal pan and then bring in the incense? The Merciful One states one act of bringing for the coals and the incense, and not two acts of bringing.

Instead, let him take the incense by his handfuls and place the coal pan on top of his two handfuls and enter, carrying it all in one go. This suggestion is also impractical, as when he arrives there, in the Holy of Holies, what should he do? How can the High Priest put down the coal pan where it is? Let him take the coal pan in his teeth and lower it. Now, before a king of flesh and blood one would not do so, as it is disrespectful. All the more so, one would not act in this manner before the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He.

The Gemara concludes: Therefore, it is impossible for the High Priest to behave in another way, and since it is impossible to act in any other manner, he acts⁸ as we find with regard to the sacrifices of the princes during the dedication of the Tabernacle. On that occasion, the princes brought spoons filled with incense: “One golden spoon of ten shekels full of incense” (Numbers 7:14).

NOTES

⁷ And since it is impossible, he acts – This consideration explains why it is permitted for the High Priest to carry the spoon in his left hand, despite the fact that in general, carrying items in one’s left hand during the Temple service invalidates the rite. Since there is no other way to carry the spoon, the Torah permits the High Priest to use his left hand here.
And even when the two of them are equal – אֵיןָ אֶנְעֶנָ פַּעַקָ שַׁוִּין

The Gemara explains: The service is performed in this manner for reasons of comfort, as this coal pan is greater in weight, since it holds the coals, and that spoon of incense weighs less. And even when the two of them are equal,6 when the spoon contains three kav of incense like the action of Rabbi Yishmael ben Kimhi, who could hold several kav in his exceptionally large hands, nevertheless, this coal pan is hot and must be held carefully in the right hand, and that spoon of incense is cold and is easily carried in the left.

Since the Gemara has mentioned Rabbi Yishmael ben Kimhi, it discusses him further. They said about Rabbi Yishmael ben Kimhi that his hands were so large that he would scoop up four kav, which he would hold by his handfuls, and say: All the women selected the best they could for their children, but the selection of my mother rose to the roof,4 i.e., my mother chose the best. Rabbi Yishmael ben Kimhi is referring to himself, as he matured to a great height and stature. Some say he was referring to his mother’s selection of flour, in accordance with the statement of Rabba bar Yonatan. As Rabba bar Yonatan said that Rabbi Yehiel said: Flour is beneficial and healthy for the sick. Since his mother ate this flour when she was pregnant with him, her son grew heartily.

And some say this reference to selection is a euphemism for semen, in accordance with a statement of Rabbi Abbahu, as Rabbi Abbahu raised a contradiction between two verses. It is written: “For You have girded me [vatazreni] with strength for battle” (it Samuel 22:40), and it is written in a parallel verse: “Who girds me [hamazreni] with strength” (Psalms 18:33). What is the difference between these two expressions? David said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe: You selected me [zerazeni] with the best drop of semen that my mother absorbed, with which, You fashioned me [zeratzini] within her. This accounts for the variant forms of this expression.

The Gemara continues to discuss Rabbi Yishmael ben Kimhi. They said about Rabbi Yishmael ben Kimhi: Once he was talking to a certain Arab7 in the market on Yom Kippur, and a drop of saliva sprayed8 from the Arab’s mouth onto the clothes of Rabbi Yishmael, who was the High Priest at the time. This spittle rendered him ritual impure by rabbinic law, like the ritual impurity of a zav, preventing him from serving in the Temple. And his brother Yosef entered and served as High Priest on that day in his stead. And, consequently, their mother saw two of her sons serving as High Priests on a single day.
The Sages taught: "His handfuls" (Leviticus 2:2). I might have thought it should be overflowing from the handful, and therefore the verse states: "His handful" (Leviticus 6:8), which indicates a precise amount. If the halakha is based solely on the phrase "his handful," I might have thought the priest may pinch a small amount even with just his fingertips, not with his entire finger. Therefore, the verse states: "His handfuls" (Leviticus 2:2), meaning as people usually take a handful, i.e., with their whole hand. How should he perform this service? He scoops by closing his three fingers over the palm of his hand, and takes a handful from the flour of the meal-offering.

The Sages taught: "And he shall take up from it his handful, of the fine flour of the meal-offering, and of its oil" (Leviticus 6:8). This verse teaches that he should not measure an amount for the handful of a meal-offering with a utensil, but he should separate it directly by hand. A dilemma was raised before the Sages: What is the halakha as to whether the High Priest may measure an amount for the handful of incense? Must the incense also be scooped by hand?

The Gemara explains the two sides of the dilemma: Perhaps there, in the case of the handful of a meal-offering, it is different, as it is written "in his handful," which indicates that he must use his hand rather than a vessel. However here, where it is not written: In his hands, but "and his hands full" of sweet incense beaten small (Leviticus 16:12), perhaps this teaches that the handfuls of incense need not be taken directly by hand, and the High Priest may use a vessel to scoop out the required amount. Or perhaps this halakha is derived by means of a verbal analogy between "full" and "full," from "his handful," which is stated regarding the meal-offering. If this verbal analogy is accepted, the High Priest may likewise scoop the incense only by hand.

The Gemara suggests: Come and hear an answer from the mishna: And this was the measure of the spoon. What, is it not correct to infer from the mishna that although the required measure is a handful, the High Priest is not obligated to scoop with his hand, and if he wanted to measure a different amount, he may measure the incense with a vessel? The Gemara rejects this contention: No, this is what the mishna said; this is what it means: And so too, the High Priest would return and scoop the incense inside the Holy of Holies in precisely the same manner.

The Gemara asks: If so, I can learn from this that the High Priest scoops the incense, and again scoops. That is, after scooping once, the High Priest repeats the action and scoops again in the Holy of Holies. This issue is subject to a dispute in the Gemara below.

The Gemara rejects this claim: No; perhaps the mishna indeed means that if he wanted to measure a different amount, he may measure the incense with a vessel. The language of the mishna does not conclusively prove which interpretation is correct, and it is possible that the Gemara's previous inference from the mishna is accurate. Consequently, the issue of whether or not the High Priest scoops incense a second time in the Holy of Holies cannot be considered resolved. Alternatively, the mishna may mean that the High Priest must take neither less nor more, and therefore this statement has no bearing on the dispute with regard to his scooping.

Kimḥit had seven sons — קימִית הָא: apparently, the brothers were not all the sons of a single man, which is why only the mother was praised and not the father (Maharsha).

Many did so and did not succeed — קְמִיצָה הוֹﬠִילוּ: In the version of this episode that appears in the Jerusalem Talmud, the Sages informed Kimḥit that she deserved to be rewarded with successful sons due to her modesty. In the Gemara here, however, the Sages note that her modesty could not have been the sole cause of the family's greatness. Since other modest women do not all merit this achievement, other factors must have been involved in Kimḥit's mother's particular case (see Me'il).
And in a case of a meal-offering prepared in a pan and with regard to a meal-offering prepared in a deep container, when the flour was fried before being scooped and was therefore hard, the priest smooths with his thumb any flour that was overflowing above his handful, and with his little finger he smooths the flour that was pushing out below. And this precise taking of a handful of a meal-offering is the most difficult sacrificial rite in the Temple. The Gemara asks: This one is the hardest rite, and no other? But there is pinching, which is also considered extremely difficult, and there is taking the handful of incense, another complex rite. Rather, this taking of a handful of a meal-offering is one of the most difficult rites in the Temple.

Rabbi Yoḥanan said that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Uza’s raised a dilemma: What is the halakha with regard to the flour that remains between the fingers of his handfuls? Is this flour considered to be part of his handful, or is it considered part of the remainder of the meal-offering? The Gemara elaborates: Rav Pappā said that with regard to the flour that is on the inside, toward the hand, do not raise the dilemma, as it is certainly part of the handful. Likewise, with regard to the flour that is on the outside, do not raise the dilemma, as it is certainly part of the remainder of the flour, like the rest of the meal-offering.

Rather, let the dilemma be raised with regard to the flour between the inside and the outside. What is the status of this flour? Rav Yoḥanan said: Yehoshua ben Uza’s then resolved his own dilemma: The flour that is between is doubtful, and should be treated as questionable in status.

The Gemara asks: How does one perform the Temple service in this doubtful case? Rabbi Hanina said: The priest first burns the handful by itself, and then he burns the flour that was between. For if you say that he should first burn the flour that was between, perhaps they are remainders, and they are therefore considered like remainders that became reduced between taking the handful and burning, as the priest has taken flour from the remainders of the meal-offering. And the Master said: With regard to remainders that became reduced between taking the handful and the burning, one may not burn the handful on their account.

The Gemara asks: If so, that there is uncertainty as to whether or not this flour is considered part of the remainder of the meal-offering, now too, if the priest burns the in-between flour after burning the handful, one should apply here the principle: Whatever is partly burned in the fire of the altar is subject to the prohibition do not burn. This principle states that if part of an item is burned on the altar, one who burns any other part of it, which is not designated for burning, has violated a prohibition. In this case, if the in-between flour is considered part of the remainder of the meal-offering, the priest who burns it transgresses that prohibition.

Rav Yehuda, son of Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi, said that the priest does not burn the flour as part of the meal-offering but burns it for the purpose of wood. In other words, he does not burn the flour as part of an offering but merely as fuel for the altar, which is permitted in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer. As it was taught in a baraita that Rabbi Eliezer says: “But they shall not come up for a sweet savor on the altar” (Leviticus 2:12). This verse indicates that you may not bring up leaven and honey as a ‘sweet savor,’ an offering. However, you may bring upleaven and honey and other materials for the purpose of wood.
The Gemara asks: It works out well according to the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer, but according to the opinion of the Rabbis, who reject Rabbi Eliezer’s halakha, what can be said? Rav Mari said: The solution is that fat priests take the handfulls of meal-offerings, as their fleshy fingers press against everything between them, and therefore no flour remains between the fingers. The Gemara states: Now that you have arrived at this conclusion, according to Rabbi Eliezer as well, it is appropriate that fat priests should take the handfulls ab initio, to avoid a situation of doubt.

§ Bein habeinayim, pashat, umazhat, ufzel, velishvet, bahafnat, habeinayim: This is a mnemonic for the ensuing questions posed by Rav Pappa. Rav Pappa raised a dilemma: What is the halakha with regard to the in-between incense of his handfulls? The Gemara asks: What is his dilemma? If he derives the verbal analogy between “full” and “full” from his handfulls there, the case of the meal-offering handfull, this case is the same as that one, and therefore the incense between his fingers is invalid. If Rav Pappa does not accept this verbal analogy, what is the basis of his dilemma?

The Gemara explains that Rav Pappa raised the dilemma as follows: When the verse states: “And his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil” (Leviticus 16:12), does it mean that we merely require him to bring his handfulls, and that is fulfilled here, as in practice the High Priest brought full handfulls? Or perhaps we require that he must fulfill the following two commands in a similar manner: “And he shall take… and he shall bring” (Leviticus 16:12)? In other words, just as he must have the intention to take the flour, so too, he must intend to bring all of it. And that requirement is not fulfilled here, as he did not intend to bring the extra flour between his fingers. No answer was found for this question, and the Gemara concludes: Let it stand unresolved.

Rav Pappa said: It is obvious to me that the act of his handfulls of a meal-offering should be performed ab initio in the manner that people usually take a handfull, with their fingertips pointed downward. However, Rav Pappa raised a dilemma: What is the halakha if he took a handfull with his fingertips, i.e., if he first put his palm into the vessel and filled his palm with flour by extending his fingers and drawing them in? Does this invalidate the taking of the handfull or not?

Furthermore, what is the halakha if he took the handfull with the back of his hand placed downward in the vessel, and with his fingers collected the flour upward into his palm? Lastly, what is the halakha if he took the flour from the sides, by passing the back of his hand to and fro over the flour in the vessel with his fingers spread apart, so that the flour collects in his palm? As no answers were found for these dilemmas, the Gemara states: Let it stand unresolved.

Likewise, Rav Pappa said: It is obvious to me that when the Torah states: “His hands full” (Leviticus 16:12), it means in the manner that people usually fill their hands, by placing the backs of their hands into the vessel and bringing their hands together. However, Rav Pappa raised a dilemma: What is the halakha if the High Priest scooped a handfull with his fingertips? Again, what is the halakha if he took a handfull from downward to upward? What is the halakha if he took a handfull from the side? And what is the halakha if he scooped a handfull with this hand and with this hand and brought them together? These questions are not answered either, and the Gemara states: Let it stand unresolved.

§ Another dilemma was raised by

HALAKHA

He took a handfull with his fingertips —мяת אינר קמא אינר חפיות— if a priest takes a handfull of the meal-offering with his fingertips or from the sides, it should not be burned ab initio, but if it was burned, the offering is valid, as this dilemma was left unresolved (Rambam Sefer Avoda, Hilkhot Halkorbanot 13:13 and Kesef Mishne there).

Scooped a handfull with his fingertips —мяת אינר קמא הפשיטא חפיות— If the High Priest takes a handfull with his fingertips or from the sides, or from downward to upward, or if he takes a handfull with each hand separately and subsequently brings them together, the incense should not be burned ab initio; but if it was burned, it is valid (Rambam Sefer Avoda, Hilkhot Avodat Yom Kippurim 5:28).

NOTES

That fat priests take the handfulls —мяת אינר ט.SelectedItem: The Rambam does not cite this conclusion at all. In his view, once the Gemara states that handfulls are taken in the usual manner, there is no longer any concern about the flour that remains between one’s fingers. The Torah did not require greater care with regard to this handfull than any other, and therefore the in-between flour is not part of the handfull (Me’iri; see Sokh Yitzhak).

Bein habeinayim, pashat, etc. – מיני מבין העינים פשת etc.: This mnemonic is referring to the dilemmas posed by Rav Pappa, most of which are left unresolved. The mnemonic is corrupted here and is incomplete in various manuscripts.

What is the halakha if he took from the sides —мяת אינר מיני ערא etc.: The Me’iri explains this case slightly differently: The priest places his hand on the side in the flour, so that the flour on the edges of the vessel enters his hand. Rashi on Menohot explains similarly.

Another dilemma raises:

He took a handfull with his fingertips —мяת אינר קמא חפיות— if a priest takes a handfull of the meal-offering with his fingertips or from the sides, it should not be burned ab initio, but if it was burned, the offering is valid, as this dilemma was left unresolved (Rambam Sefer Avoda, Hilkhah Halkorbanot 13:13 and Kesef Mishne there).

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