the rejoicing that takes place on Purim is practiced only in its designated time, the fourteenth of Adar.

§ Rav said: One may read the Megilla in its proper time, i.e., on the fourteenth of Adar, even privately. However, when it is read not at its proper time, e.g., when the villages advance their reading to the day of assembly, it must be read with a quorum of ten, because the enactment allowing the Megilla to be read before its proper time was only made for a community. Rav Asi disagreed and said: Both at its proper time and not at its proper time, the Megilla must be read with a quorum of ten. The Gemara relates that there was an incident where Rav had to read the Megilla on Purim, and he was concerned for this opinion of Rav Asi and gathered ten men even though he was reading the Megilla in its proper time, on the fourteenth of Adar.

The Gemara asks: And did Rav actually say this, that when the Megilla is read not at its proper time, it can only be read with a quorum of ten? Didn’t Rav Yehuda, son of Rav Shmuel bar Shielat, say in the name of Rav: If Purim occurs on Shabbat, Shabbat eve is the proper time for reading the Megilla? The Gemara expresses surprise with regard to the wording of Rav’s statement: Is Shabbat eve the proper time for reading the Megilla? Isn’t Shabbat itself its proper time? Rather, is it not true that this is what he said, i.e., that this is the way his statement should be understood: Reading the Megilla not at its proper time is like reading it at its proper time; just as at its proper time, it can be read even privately, so too, not at its proper time, it can be read even privately.

The Gemara rejects this argument: Rav’s statement was not made with regard to reading the Megilla with a quorum of ten. Rather, what is the meaning of Rav’s statement that Shabbat eve is the proper time? It was meant to exclude the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, who said: Since the readings in the large towns were already deferred from their usual date and the Megilla was not read on the fourteenth, they are deferred to the day of assembly. This statement of Rav teaches us that Shabbat eve is the proper time for these towns to read the Megilla, as stated in the mishna.

MISHNA What is considered a large city, where the Megilla is read on the fourteenth of Adar? Any city in which there are ten idlers. However, if there are fewer than that, it is considered a village, even if it has many inhabitants.

HALAKHA The Megilla is read in its time even in private, in accordance with the opinion of Rav, who was the teacher of Rav Asi. Rabbi Yohanan concurs with Rav’s opinion. One should seek out a quorum of ten to read the Megilla ab initio, in accordance with the custom of Rav himself, but if it is not possible to read it with ten men, it is read privately.

What is considered a large city? A city that does not have ten regular idlers in the synagogue has the halacha of a village. During the period when the reading of the Megilla for villagers was advanced to the day of assembly, it was advanced in these places as well (Rambam Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Megilla 1:8).

NOTES

Not at its proper time – דֶּרֶךְ אֵין: Rashi explains this as referring to the villages that advance their reading to the day of assembly. Some find this explanation difficult, because in the time of Rav the villages no longer advanced the time of reading the Megilla. Consequently, they explain that it is discussing a scenario when Purim occurred on Shabbat, and therefore the reading was advanced to Friday (Rashi; Ran). The gemara explain that this is referring to a situation where one advanced the reading due to unavoidable circumstances, such as one who is traveling in a convey. This individual is permitted to read before the appointed time like the villages, on the condition that he reads it in a group of ten people (see Rabbi Zerahya HaLevi).

Isn’t Shabbat itself its proper time? Some explain that when there aren’t ten regular idlers in the synagogue, the people come to the public prayer service only on Monday and Thursday to hear the Torah reading, and therefore the Megilla is read then as well (Ritva).
The Ninth of Av is postponed – מְאַחֲרִין. The Ninth of Av, and the other fast days in particular, were postponed until after Shabbat, except for the Fast of Esther, which cannot be postponed and is advanced to Thursday (Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 550:10).

The Festival peace-offering is postponed – מַקְדִּימִין. The Festival peace-offering and the burnt-offering of appearance do not overde Shabbat. If the Festival occurs on Shabbat, the sacrifice is deferred until after Shabbat (Rambam Sefer Korbanot, Hilkhot Hayyiga 1:8).

The commandment of assembly (ḥakhel) is postponed – מַקְדִּימִין: If the day of assembly falls on Shabbat, it is postponed until after Shabbat (Rambam Sefer Korbanot, Hilkhot Hayyiga 1:9).

When did they say that it is advanced – fireEvent מִגְזֵי. When the reading of the Megilla was advanced to the day of assembly, it was advanced only for the residents of villages who would go to the city on the day of assembly. However, if they would not go into the city on those days, they would read the Megilla on the in its proper time, on the fourteenth of Adar. This ruling is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda, who comes only to explain the opinion of the Sages in the mishna (Rambam Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Kiddush Ha’odesh 12).

Months to make up years – מַקְדִּימִין: A year is only considered a year when calculated by the number of whole months. Even though the solar year has eleven more days than the lunar year, solitary days are not added; rather, we wait until there is a full month’s difference between the calendars and add it in an intercalated year (Rambam Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Kiddush Ha’odesh 12).

The Ninth of Av is postponed – מְאַחֲרִין וְלֹא קְהֵל. The commandment of assembly is postponed – מַקְדִּימִין וְלֹא קְהֵל: If the Festival peace-offering is postponed, the commandment of assembly is postponed along with it.

The mishna continues: Even though the Sages said that one advances the time for reading the Megilla and one does not postpone the reading, one is permitted to eulogize and fast on these days, as they are not actually Purim; nevertheless, gifts for the poor are distributed on this day. Rabbi Yehuda said: When is the Megilla read on the day of assembly, before the fourteenth of Adar? In a place where the villagers generally enter town on Monday and Thursday. However, in a place where they do not generally enter town on Monday and Thursday, one may read the Megilla only in its designated time, the fourteenth of Adar.

GEMARA

We learned in the mishna that a large city is one that has ten idlers. It was taught in a baraita: The ten idlers that are mentioned here are ten idlers that are in the synagogue, i.e., men who do not have professional responsibilities other than to sit in the synagogue and attend to communal religious needs. The presence of ten such men establishes a location as a prominent city.

We learned in the mishna: It was with regard to these times for reading the Megilla that the Sages said that one advances the reading of the Megilla and one does not postpone it. The Gemara asks: What is the reason for this? Rabbi Abba said that Shmuel said: The verse states: “The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all who joined themselves to them, and it shall not pass, that they should keep these two days” (Esther 9:17), which indicates that the designated time must not pass without the reading of the Megilla.

Having mentioned a teaching of Rabbi Abba in the name of Shmuel, the Gemara cites another of his statements: And Rabbi Abba said that Shmuel said: From where is it derived that one does not count days to make up years, i.e., a year is considered to be comprised of either twelve or thirteen lunar months, and not 365 days?

As it is stated: “Of the months of the year” (Exodus 12:2), which indicates that you count months to make up years, but you do not count days to make up years.

NOTES

It was with regard to these times for reading the Megilla that the Sages said that one advances the reading of the Megilla before the fourteenth of Adar and one does not postpone the reading to after its proper time. However, with regard to the time when families of priests donate wood for the fire on the altar, which were times those families would treat as Festivals; as well as the fast of the Ninth of Av, the Festival peace-offering that was brought on the Festivals, and the commandment of assembly [ḥakhel] of the entire Jewish people in the Temple courtyard on Sukkot in the year following the Sabbath year, to hear the king read the book of Deuteronomy; one postpones their observance until after Shabbat and does not advance their observance to before Shabbat.

When the reading of the Megilla was advanced to the day of assembly, it was advanced only for the residents of villages who would go to the city on the day of assembly. However, if they would not go into the city on those days, they would read the Megilla on its proper time, on the fourteenth of Adar. This ruling is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda, who comes only to explain the opinion of the Sages in the mishna (Rambam Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Kiddush Ha’odesh 12).

The time when families of priests donate wood – מַקְדִּימִין וְלֹא קְהֵל. It is explained in tractate Tractate Targum 28a that in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, certain families volunteered to bring the wood offering on set days of the year, since there was a lack of funds in the Temple. Although after a while there was no longer a financial need for this, these families maintained the practice of donating wood and rejoicing on these days. As for the reason why the bringing of the wood is not advanced, some explain that the donation of wood is viewed as a vow that has a specific time that it is supposed to be fulfilled, and therefore donating wood before the appropriate time would not be a fulfillment of the vow (Rashi, Rambam). The Ran and Rashi’s commentary that appears with the Rif suggest that if this time were advanced it would interfere with the dates that were set for others to bring the wood offering.

The commandment of assembly [ḥakhel] – מַקְדִּימִין. The mitzva of ḥakhel is detailed in the Torah (Deuteronomy 31:10–13). This practice took place on the day after the first festival day of Sukkot; some say it took place at the conclusion of the last festival day of Sukkot (Rashi; Jerusalem Talmud). They would build a stage of wood in the courtyard, and the king would stand upon it and read from the book of Deuteronomy to the entire nation.

Gifts for the poor are distributed on this day – מַקְדִּימִין וְלֹא קְהֵל. From the language of the Rambam it is clear that he understands this phrase to mean that on the day of reading the Megilla, one may bring gifts for the poor and thereby fulfill his obligation. Conversely, some explain that his intention is that on that day one is exempt from giving gifts to the poor (Meiri; see Ran).
The Gemara adds: And the Sages of Caesarea said in the name of Rabbi Abba: From where is it derived that one does not calculate hours to reckon the months? A lunar cycle takes approximately twenty-nine and a half days, but a calendar month is considered to be twenty-nine or thirty full days and not precisely a lunar cycle. As it is stated: “Until a month of days” (Numbers 11:20), which indicates that you calculate days to reckon the months, but you do not calculate hours to reckon the months.

We learned in the mishna: However, with regard to the time when families of priests donate wood for the fire on the altar, the fast of the Ninth of Av, the Festival peace-offering, and the commandment of assembly [hakkel], one postpones their observance until after Shabbat and does not advance their observance to before Shabbat. The Gemara explains the reason for this hakkaḥ with respect to each item mentioned in the mishna. The fast of the Ninth of Av is not advanced because one does not advance calamity; since the Ninth of Av is a tragic time, its observance is postponed as long as possible. The Festival peace-offering and the commandment of assembly [hakkel] are not advanced because the time of their obligation has not yet arrived, and it is impossible to fulfill mitzvot before the designated time has arrived.

It was taught in a baraita: One postpones the Festival peace-offering and the entire time period of the Festival peace-offering. The Gemara attempts to clarify this statement: Granted that when the baraita says that the Festival peace-offering is postponed, it means that if a Festival occurs on Shabbat, when the Festival peace-offering cannot be sacrificed, one postpones it until after Shabbat and sacrifices the offering on the intermediate days of the Festival. However, what is the meaning of the phrase: The time period of the Festival peace-offering?

Rav Oshaya said: This is what the baraita is saying: One postpones the Festival peace-offering if the Festival occurs on Shabbat, and one postpones the burnt-offering of appearance even due to the Festival itself. Despite the fact that a Festival day is the time for sacrificing a Festival peace-offering, the burnt-offering of appearance may not be sacrificed until after the Festival day.

The Gemara adds: Whose opinion is reflected in the mishna according to Rav Oshaya’s explanation? It is the opinion of Beit Shammai, as we learned in a mishna (Beitzá 19a) that Beit Shammai say: One may bring peace-offerings on a Festival day to be sacrificed in the Temple. Most portions of a peace-offering are eaten by the priests and the individual who brought the offering. Consequently, its slaughter is considered food preparation, which is permitted on a Festival day. And one may not place his hands on the head of the offering, as that includes leaving with all one’s might upon the animal, which is prohibited on a Festival.

However, burnt-offerings may not be brought at all on the Festival. Since they are not eaten, their slaughter is not considered food preparation, and it therefore constitutes a prohibited labor on the Festival. Beit Hillel disagree and say: One may bring both peace-offerings and burnt-offerings on a Festival day, and one may even place his hands on them.

Rava said that the baraita should be understood as follows: One postpones the Festival peace-offering for the entire time period of the Festival peace-offering, i.e., for the entire duration of the Festival. However, it may not be postponed for longer than this. As we learned in a mishna (Hagigá 9a): One who did not offer the Festival peace-offering on the first Festival day of the festival of Sukkot may offer the Festival peace-offering for the duration of the entire pilgrimage Festival, including the intermediate days and the last day of the Festival. If the pilgrimage Festival has passed and he did not yet bring the Festival peace-offering, he is not obligated to pay restitution for it. The obligation is no longer in force, and he therefore is not liable to bring another offering as compensation.
Compensation on Shavuot – צִפּוֹרִי. One who has not brought the offerings of the Festival on Shavuot, may bring them on any of the six days after Shavuot (Rambam Sefer Kerbonot, Hilkhot Haggiga 17).

BACKGROUND

Tzippori – צִפּוֹרִי. Tzippori was a large town in the Upper Galilee and the perennial rival of Tiberias for recognition as the religious capital of Galilee. During the Second Temple period it enjoyed special status among the towns of the Galilee due to its large and learned Jewish community. Among the tannaim who lived there were Rabbi Yohanan ben Nuri, Rabbi Halafta, and his famous son Rabbi Yosef. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi moved to Tzippori toward the end of his life, and it was the seat of the Sanhedrin for about a generation. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi’s leading disciples lived in Tzippori: Rabbi Yishmael, son of Rabbi Yosef; Rabbi Gamliel, son of Rabbi, who was later appointed Nasi; his brother, Rabbi Shimron; Rabbi Hanina bar Hama, later head of the Tzippori yeshiva; and Rabbi Yannai. Even after the Sanhedrin moved to Tiberias, Torah scholars continued to live in Tzippori, among them the important amora'im of Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Hanina of Tzippori and Rabbi Mana.

HAHALKA

Compensation on Shavuot – צִפּוֹרִי. One who has not brought the offerings of the Festival on Shavuot, may bring them on any of the six days after Shavuot (Rambam Sefer Kerbonot, Hilkhot Haggiga 17).


Rabbi Elazar said that Rabbi Ḥanina said: Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi did several unusual things. He planted a sapling on Purim, and was not concerned about performing labor and thereby possibly denigrating the day.

And he bathed at the time when the wagons [κέρονα] were traveling through Tzippori, i.e., on the market day, when the public would know about it, on the seventeenth of Tammuz, to show that bathing is permitted on that day. And he sought to abolish the fast of the Ninth of Av.

Rabbi Abba bar Zavda said to Rabbi Elazar: My teacher, the incident did not occur in this fashion. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi never sought to abolish the fast of the Ninth of Av. Rather, it was a year when the Ninth of Av occurred on Shabbat, and they postponed it until after Shabbat. And Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said about that case. Since it has already been deferred from its usual time, let it be altogether deferred this year. And the Rabbis did not agree with him. Rabbi Elazar read the verse about Rabbi Abba bar Zavda: “Two are better than one” (Ecclesiastes 4:9), meaning, it is good that you were here to provide an accurate report about that incident.

Bathed…on the seventeenth of Tammuz – בֶּטֶחֶם אֶל כֵּן בֵּשָׂמַּה. The Rashba writes that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi’s behavior was in accordance with the principle set forth in tractate Rosh Hashana (18b), where it states that in times of peace, one need not observe the fast days of the seventeenth of Tammuz, the Fast of Gedalia, and the tenth of Tevet; in times when there are evil decrees against the Jewish people, these fasts are obligatory; and in times which are neither peaceful nor times of evil decree, these fasts are optional. During the time of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, these fasts were optional, yet the Jewish people had accepted upon itself the obligation to fast. Nonetheless, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was of the opinion that this voluntary acceptance applied only to actually fasting, but not to other prohibitions of fast days, e.g., bathing. There are those who add that according to the comment of Rabbi Abba bar Zavda, that the Ninth of Av occurred on Shabbat, if the incident of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi bathing on the seventeenth of Tammuz took place in the same year, it would mean that the seventeenth of Tammuz also occurred on Shabbat and was postponed to Sunday. Perhaps Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was of the opinion that in such circumstances, the entire fast should not be observed (Rav Yakov Emden).

To abolish the fast of the Ninth of Av – בֵּשָׂמַּה אֶל כֵּן. ToSafot explain that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi didn’t seek to abolish the fast completely, but rather to abolish its severity and make it equivalent to the other fasts. The Riva expounds upon this idea and explains that according to the original enactment of the fast days by the prophets, there is no difference between the Ninth of Av and other fast days. Consequently, although the Sages did not want to make fasting on the Ninth of Av optional during times when there are no evil decrees against the Jewish people, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi sought to equate it to the other fast days with regard to other prohibitions, e.g., bathing and wearing leather shoes (Riva).
The Gemara asks: And how could Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi plant a sapling on Purim? Didn’t Rav Yosef teach with regard to the verse: “Therefore the Jews, who dwell in the walled towns, make the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day [yom tov]” (Esther 9:19), that the term “gladness” teaches that it is prohibited to eulogize on Purim; “feasting” teaches that it is prohibited to fast; and the term “good day” [yom tov] teaches that it is prohibited to perform labor, just as on a Festival, which is also referred to as a yom tov? Rather, what happened was as follows: Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was in a place that observed Purim on the fourteenth, and when he planted the sapling, he planted it on the fifteenth.

The Gemara asks: Is that so? Wasn’t Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi in Tiberias, and Tiberias was surrounded by a wall since the days of Joshua, son of Nun. Consequently, he was obligated to observe Purim on the fifteenth. Rather, say just the opposite: Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi lived in a place that observed Purim on the fourteenth, and when he planted the sapling, he planted it on the fourteenth.

The Gemara asks: Wasn’t it obvious to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi that the city of Tiberias was surrounded by a wall since the days of Joshua, son of Nun? Didn’t Hezekiah read the Megilla in Tiberias both on the fourteenth and on the fifteenth of Adar, because he was uncertain if it had been surrounded by a wall since the days of Joshua, son of Nun, or not? The Gemara answers: Hezekiah was indeed uncertain about the matter, whereas it was obvious to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi that Tiberias had been surrounded by a wall in the time of Joshua.

The Gemara asks further: And when it was obvious to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi that the Megilla should be read in Tiberias on the fifteenth, was it permitted to plant there on the fourteenth? Isn’t it written in Megillat Ta’anit that the fourteenth day and the fifteenth day of Adar are the days of Purim, and one is not permitted to eulogize on them?4

And Rava said: This statement is necessary only to prohibit those who observe Purim on this day to eulogize on that day, and those who observe Purim on that day to eulogize on this day. Since the two days are mentioned in the Bible, it was only necessary to mention them in Megillat Ta’anit in order to indicate that the prohibition against eulogizing applies to both days. Presumably, the same should apply to the prohibition against performing labor. Consequently, how could Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi plant a sapling on the fourteenth of Adar? The Gemara answers: That applies only to eulogies and fasting. However, labor is prohibited for only one day, either the fourteenth or the fifteenth, and no more.

The Gemara asks: Is that so? Didn’t Rav see a certain man planting flax on Purim, and cursed him, and the man’s flax never grew. The Gemara answers: There, the man was obligated to observe Purim on that day that he planted the flax. Therefore, it was certainly prohibited to perform labor.

Rabba, son of Rava, said a different answer to the question: Even if you say that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi planted the sapling on his own day of Purim, i.e., on the day that the Megilla was read in his location, it was still permitted to plant the sapling. This is because the Jewish people accepted upon themselves the prohibitions against eulogizing and fasting on Purim, but they did not accept upon themselves the prohibition against performing labor.9
The prohibition against performing labor on Purim – אֱלֻי הַנּוֹטֵﬠ וַאֲחֵרִים

According to halakha, it is permitted to perform labor on Purim, in accordance with the statement of Rabbi, son of Rava. However, in a place where the custom is not to perform labor, it is prohibited. In our times it is customary not to perform labor (Rama), and one who does perform labor will not achieve productive results (see Rambam and Magen Avraham). However, this custom was not extended to all forms of labor. Festive building and planting is permitted. Additionally, it is permitted to do any work for the sake of performing a mitzva, e.g., writing words of Torah or other matters that involve a mitzva, or something that does not need a lot of consideration (Magen Avraham).

In the version of the Arukh, it is permitted to do any work for the sake of performing a mitzva. In Damascus (Kaf HaChametz), it was certain: “That when something is permitted according to the opinion of the custom, it is permitted either in the custom or in the opinion of the custom.” In other cases, it is permitted to perform labor, it is prohibited. In our times it is customary not to perform labor (Rama), and one who does perform labor will not achieve productive results (see Rambam and Magen Avraham). However, this custom was not extended to all forms of labor. Festive building and planting is permitted. Additionally, it is permitted to do any work for the sake of performing a mitzva, e.g., writing words of Torah or other matters that involve a mitzva, or something that does not need a lot of consideration (Magen Avraham). In order to fill the needs of Purim, even full-fledged labor is permitted (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 656:1).

If these have passed and the prayers have not been answered – בָּהֶן עַד הַיְינוּ גָּדוֹל. When the Sages decree facts for rain and thirteen fasts pass and yet the prayers have not been answered and rain has not fallen, it is incumbent upon the people to reduce their business transactions that are for the purpose of happiness (Magen Avraham), as well as festival building and planting. Similarly, betrothals and other feasts are minimized, as are weddings, unless the mitzva is to be fruitful and multiply and has not yet been fulfilled (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 575:7).

Uncertainties with regard to walled cities – אֵלּוּ מַכְוָא וְאֶחָדָם. With regard to any city in which there is uncertainty as to whether it was surrounded by a wall from the days of Joshua, the custom is like that of Hezekiah in Tiberias, and the Megilla is read on both the fourteenth and the fifteenth, both at night and during the day, and the festivities and the gifts for the poor are observed on both (Magen Avraham). However, the blessing is recited only on the fourteenth, and likewise kiddush and the Kaddish HaSeder are not recited after the reading of the Megilla on the night of the fifteenth, and the Torah is not read during that day (Kaf HaHaim). There were also cities outside of Eretz Yisrael that followed this protocol for dealing with uncertainty. However, in the more northern European cities there is no need for concern that they may have been walled in the time of Joshua (Magen Avraham). The custom in Baghdad was to read on both days. In the ancient cities in Eretz Yisrael, e.g., Hebron, Safed, the custom was to read on both days, and in Tiberias it certainly should be read on both days. This is also the custom in Damascus (Kaf HaHaim, Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 578a).

Garden [avunmek] – הַנוֹטֵﬠ וְאֲחֵרִים. In the version of the Arukh and in the best textual witnesses the reading is αὐθανάκεια, which is apparently related to the Middle Persian xwamak, meaning a lavish building. The γροῖνος note the usage of the Aramaic word to indicate a pavilion built by kings in a garden.

This can be proven from the fact that initially, when Mordecai and Esther proposed the celebration of Purim, it is written: “A day of gladness and feasting and a good day [yom tov]” (Esther 9:19), and at the end, when it the celebration of Purim was accepted by the Jewish people, it is written: “That they should make themselves days of gladness” (Esther 9:22), whereas the term good day [yom tov], which alludes to a day when it is prohibited to perform labor, is not written. The people never accepted upon themselves the prohibition against performing labor on Purim as if it were a Festival, and therefore the prohibition never took effect.

The Gemara asks: If labor is permitted on Purim, what is the reason that Rav cursed that man who planted the flax? The Gemara answers: It was a case of matters that are permitted by halakha, but others were accustomed to treat them as a prohibition, in which case one may not permit these actions in their presence, lest they come to treat other prohibitions lightly. In the place where that man planted his flax, it was customary to abstain from labor on Purim. However, in Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi’s place, it was not the custom to abstain from labor on Purim, and therefore it was permitted for him to plant the sapling even in public.

And if you wish, say an alternative answer: Actually, it was the custom to abstain from labor on Purim in Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi’s place, and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi engaged in a joyful act of planting, for pleasure rather than for financial benefit. As we learned in a mishna with regard to public fasts: If these fasts for rain have passed and the community’s prayers have still not been answered, and the drought continues, one decreases his business activities, as well as construction, planting, betrothals, and marriages.

And it was taught in a baraita about this mishna: When the Sages said that construction must be decreased on public fasts, they were not referring to the construction of homes for people who have nowhere to live, but to joyful construction. Similarly, when they said that planting must be decreased, they were not referring to planting food crops, but to joyful planting. What is meant by joyful construction? This is referring to one who builds a wedding chamber for his son. It was customary to build a special house where the wedding would take place, and at times the couple would also live there. What is meant by joyful planting? This is referring to one who plants trees for shade and pleasure such as one might find in a royal garden [avunmek].

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi engaged in joyful planting on Purim, in keeping with the joyous nature of the day.

Garden [avunmek] – הַנוֹטֵﬠ וְאֲחֵרִים. In the version of the Arukh and in the best textual witnesses the reading is αὐθανάκεια, which is apparently related to the Middle Persian xwamak, meaning a lavish building. The γροῖνος note the usage of the Aramaic word to indicate a pavilion built by kings in a garden.

Matters that are permitted but others were accustomed to treat them as a prohibition – אֱלֻי הַנּוֹטֵﬠ וְאֲחֵרִים. It is a principle in halakha that when something is permitted according to halakha, yet people render it prohibited for themselves, one is not allowed to rule that it is permitted or to treat it as permitted in their location. This is the basis for many prohibitions due to custom. However, this principle is limited to scenarios where those who take the prohibition upon themselves know that the action is permitted by halakha, and not to cases where they adopt the prohibition due to an error in understanding the law.

Hezekiah was uncertain – הַנּוֹטֵﬠ וְאֲחֵרִים. The Sages discuss Hezekiah’s uncertainty, mainly due to what can be deduced from here with regard to other places where there is uncertainty as to whether a city was surrounded by a wall. It is possible to understand from Hezekiah’s actions that whenever there is uncertainty as to whether a particular city was surrounded by a wall from the days of Joshua, the Megilla should be read there on both days. However, this conclusion would contradict the principles normally used to resolve uncertainty. These principles state that in cases such as this, the majority is followed, and similarly that with regard to an uncertainty concerning rabbinic laws, the halakha is lenient. Therefore, the γροῖνος explain that a distinction must be made between the case of Tiberias and other cities whose status is uncertain. With regard to Tiberias, Hezekiah was certain that the city itself existed in the days of Joshua and his uncertainty was whether it was surrounded by a wall. However, with regard to other cities, where the uncertainty is whether the city existed at all during the days of Joshua, there is certainly no reason to be strict. The Ramban writes that when Hezekiah read on two days due to uncertainty, he acted only out of a righteous custom.
Hazor – הָרָזָא: Hazor was a small city in Babylonia, south of the city of Nehardea. This was a very old settlement, and apparently the Jews that resided there belonged to the exiled tribe of Binyamin. In Hazor there was a famous synagogue which was described as a place where the divine spirit rests. A few Sages are known to have lived in that city.

Tiberias – תִּבְרְיָא: Herod Antipas founded the city of Tiberias in the year 18 CE and named it after the Roman emperor Tiberias. The city was initially built on the ruins of a previous settlement. The Sages deliberated with regard to the status of the graves that were located in Tiberias, which apparently prevented priests from settling there. As stated in the Gemara here, according to most opinions the city was founded on the ruins of the settlement Rakkath.

Ginosar – גִּנֹשָּׂר: Ginosar is the name of a beautiful valley that stretches along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, north of Tiberias. Josephus describes the area as follows: Its nature is wonderful as well as its beauty; its soil is so fruitful that all sorts of trees can grow upon it, and the inhabitants accordingly plant all sorts of trees there. For the temper of the air is so well mixed that it agrees very well with those several sorts, particularly walnuts, which require the coldest air, and flourish there in vast plenty. There are palm trees also, which grow best in hot air; fig trees also and olives grow near them, which yet require an air that is more temperate. It supplies men with the principal fruits, with grapes and figs continually during ten months of the year and the rest of the fruits as they become ripe together through the whole year; for besides the good temperature of the air, it is also watered from a most fertile fountain (Wars of the Jews, Book IV, 108).

The Gemara asks: If so, why was he uncertain? The sea is certainly not a wall. As it is taught in a baraita with regard to the sale of houses in walled cities, the phrase: “Which has a wall?” (Leviticus 25:30), indicates that the city has a bona fide wall and not merely a wall of roofs. If a city is completely encircled by attached houses but there is no separate wall, it is not considered a walled city. The next verse, which is referring to cities that have no wall “round about them” (Leviticus 25:31), excludes Tiberias from being considered a walled city, as the sea is its wall on one side and it is not fully encircled by a physical wall. Consequently, Tiberias is not considered a walled city.

The Gemara relates that Rav Asi read the Megilla in the city of Hazor in Babylonia on both the fourteenth and the fifteenth of Adar, because he was uncertain if it had been surrounded by a wall since the days of Joshua, son of Nun, or not. Hazor was an ancient city, and it was possible that it had been surrounded by a wall in the time of Joshua. Some say a different version of this report, according to which there was no uncertainty. Rav Asi said: This city of Hazor of the house of Benjamin was walled since the days of Joshua, son of Nun.

Incidental to the previous discussion concerning Tiberias, the Gemara relates that Rabbi Yohanan said: When I was a child I said something that I later asked the Elders about,